

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS North Wales

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS North Wales (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The Area is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings.

The overall performance assessment of CPS North Wales was Good.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

Critical aspects	Assessment level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	Good	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Excellent	Improved
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair	Fair	Stable
Leadership	Fair	Excellent	Improved
Overall critical assessment level		Good	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Fair	Declined
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
Disclosure	Good	Good	Stable
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Stable
Delivering change	Fair	Good	Improved
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Good	Improved
Securing community confidence	Fair	Good	Improved
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Fair	GOOD	

Some aspects have been categorised as critical; this is due to the significant impact that they have on the overall performance of a CPS Area and the service it delivers to the public.

Having demonstrated improvement in six aspects of performance, and a decline in only one, the overall rating for CPS North Wales has improved significantly from 'Fair' to 'Good' since the last OPA in 2005.

The proportion of cases that end in conviction is better than the national average in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court. Performance continues to improve despite the pressure of a 25% increase in Crown Court work since the last OPA. This success is largely due to sound decision-making and the proactive case management demonstrated by prosecutors and administrative staff, who work with managers as an effective team.

Handling of sensitive cases and those involving hate crimes is also better than the national performance. The improvement in outcomes is primarily due to improvements in the handling of domestic violence cases. Substantial progress has also been made in engaging with minority groups such as the local lesbian, gay and bi-sexual community, and this too is expected to have a beneficial impact on outcomes in relation to hate crime.

Cases are processed at a good rate and trials are usually ready to go ahead on time, although the Area has identified a problem in relation to the timeliness of cases involving persistent young offenders. Senior managers have worked with the police and Courts Service to improve systems for joint case handling. This has led to improvement, but more still needs to be done to strengthen the timely preparation of cases for committal to the Crown Court. Further joint work is also required to improve the frequency and quality of Direct Communication with Victims letters, and witness liaison generally.

Overall, senior managers have shown themselves to be effective leaders and this has helped ensure success in a number of recent internal projects which are intended to help improve the service provided to the community. In particular, statutory charging has been effectively implemented under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge in relation to more serious and contested cases.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"The managers and staff of CPS North Wales have worked hard to deliver improved performance, and this is reflected in the overall rating of 'Good'. I am pleased to see a positive approach to joint problem solving, which should help sustain improvement in future."

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

This Press Release should be read in conjunction with the Report itself (which contains an integral summary) and is available on our website at www.hmcpai.gov.uk.

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

Notes to Editors

HMCPST was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

The OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPST using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPST findings and by measurement under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise will include visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period, between June-December 2007. Each Area is rated 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'.

The Inspectorate uses an assessment model which is designed to give pre-eminence to the ratings for 'critical' aspects of work as drivers for the final overall performance level. Assessments for the critical aspects are overlaid by ratings in relation to the other defining ones, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.

This exercise is not a full inspection and differs from traditional inspection activity. While it is designed to set out comprehensively the positive aspects of performance and those requiring improvement, it intentionally avoids being a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning performance. However, it is designed to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed.

CPS North Wales serves the area covered by the North Wales Constabulary. Its main office is based at Wrexham. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 69.9 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 14,961 cases before the magistrates' courts and 906 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 4,412 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS North Wales are part of a block of ten reports published today. HMCPST will publish two further tranches of reports covering the remaining 20 Areas.