

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS NORTH WALES

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its Report on the Inspection of CPS North Wales.

The Area - with its criminal justice partners - has performed well in relation to the Public Service Agreement targets (set by the Government for the criminal justice system) of bringing more offenders to justice, reducing the rate of ineffective trials, and raising public confidence in the criminal justice system. This effective collaborative working has also led to persistent young offenders being dealt with from arrest to sentence in 54 days, well within the Government target of 71 days. The Area has also piloted and implemented all three major initiatives (pre-charge advice to police, effective trial management and No Witness No Justice) to which the CPS is committed nationally, and has co-located its administration with the police throughout the Area. Whilst taking on these challenges, it has maintained performance well.

With the benefit of a stable and experienced staff at all levels, key performance results are generally better than the national average. The quality of decision-making, advocacy and preparation of Crown Court cases is good, although its handling of the duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence needs to be better.

Internally, it has some work to do on the structure of the Area, training, communications, equality and diversity plans, and on its performance management.

After a period of change to its senior management, permanent appointments have now been made and the Chief Crown Prosecutor and Area Business Manager are now in a position to review the Area's performance and operations and take the Area forward on a sound basis.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, said:

“The Report identifies many positive achievements on the part of CPS North Wales. It is to the credit of managers and staff alike that they have continued to deliver such a good level of service at a time when changes in the CPS nationally, and the wider criminal justice system, have created additional pressures for all.”

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * Decision-making is good and both the discontinuance rate in the magistrates' courts, and the rate of cases which do not proceed in the Crown Court, are low. Generally, cases are ready to proceed at the first hearing. However, some aspects of service delivery in the magistrates' courts - in relation to review and occasional missing files - need to be addressed. Continuing review is good and cases for summary trial are well prepared.
- * The work on Crown Court cases is generally good. Area specialists deal well with sensitive cases (racial incidents, homophobic crime, domestic violence, child abuse, rape and fatal road traffic offences).
- * The overall quality of advocacy in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court is good, although the presence of CPS Higher Court Advocates in the Crown Court is now limited because of other pressures on them.

- * The service provided to witnesses is satisfactory, but needs further work to achieve the minimum requirements of the No Witness No Justice project. At each CPS office the police and Area staff work as a team to provide a single point of contact and assess victims' needs.
- * There is some scope for better and more timely identification of witnesses' needs in order to seek Special Measures, and also for better phasing of witnesses at court to reduce their waiting time.
- * Ineffective trial rates (i.e. cases listed for a contested hearing which do not go ahead on the date set) are commendably low. In the Crown Court in the period from April – July 2004, the ineffective trial rate was 12.7% compared with 17.2% nationally. The figures for April - December 2003 for the magistrates' courts show that the ineffective trial rate was 18.1% compared to the national average of 29.3%. The Area, together with its criminal justice partners, has also exceeded the target for bringing offenders to justice. All these good figures may well be helped by the implementation of the three pilots, which ensure that the charges are correct, case management is improved, and witnesses are better cared for. Proper evaluation of these projects will assist in identifying the way forward for all agencies.
- * The Area's managers recognise the need to collect and analyse appropriately focused performance information in order to identify and drive forward improvements.
- * The structure of the Area and the deployment of its staff have resulted in a possible imbalance between Crown Court and magistrates' courts work. Effective communication has been a weakness in the past and this is now being addressed.
- * The Area has been somewhat exposed over financial matters with a variety of systems used to monitor and control the budget and a lack of confidence in the Area's casework statistics upon which the budget is based. More widespread financial awareness among managers should help to achieve greater value for money.

- * The Area needs to ensure project and change management skills are in place to successfully build on the initiatives it has implemented.

An Executive Summary of the Report is attached.

Notes to Editors:

1. In November 2002 HMCPSTI commenced its second programme of Area inspections since the restructuring of the CPS in response to the “Review of the CPS” (the Glidewell Review) published in 1998. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may be either full or intermediate depending on circumstances.
2. The Area was previously reported on in March 2002. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS North Wales was a full rather than intermediate one.
3. CPS North Wales has two offices, at Wrexham and Colwyn Bay. It covers ten magistrates’ courts and four Crown Court centres. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates’ courts and Crown Court work.
4. CPS North Wales employs the equivalent of 67.1 full-time staff (this figure includes a number of part-time staff).
5. In the year to March 2004, the Area handled approximately 15,590 cases in the magistrates’ courts, 930 in the Crown Court, and gave advice to the police before charge in a further 5,646.
6. Before visiting the Area from 28 June – 8 July 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 134 cases drawn from all units. They interviewed CPS staff at all levels from each unit and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made of advocates - including CPS prosecutors, agents and counsel - at magistrates’ courts, the Youth Court and the Crown Court. The team was also assisted during the on-site phases by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. CPS National Initiatives:
 - (i) Charging Scheme (pre-charge advice to police)

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 took forward the recommendations of Lord Justice Auld in his Review of the Criminal Courts, that the CPS will determine the decision to charge offenders in the more serious cases. Shadow charging arrangements are in place in CPS Areas; the statutory scheme will have a phased roll-out, firstly across priority Areas and subsequently all 42.

(ii) Effective Trial Management Programme

This initiative, involving all the criminal justice agencies working together, aims to reduce the number of ineffective trials by improving case preparation and progression from the point of charge through to the conclusion of a case.

(iii) No Witness: No Justice

This is a project to improve witness care: to give them support and the information that they need from the inception of an incident through to the conclusion of a criminal prosecution. It is a partnership of the CPS and the Association of Chief Police Officers and also involves Victim Support and the Witness Service. Jointly staffed Witness Care Units will be introduced into all CPS Areas by December 2005.

8. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
9. For further information, please contact Deborah Peters at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488; email: Deborah.Peters@cps.gsi.gov.uk).