

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS NORTH YORKSHIRE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS North Yorkshire.

Most aspects of the work of the Area are good, in particular the overall quality of casework decision-making. Most of the recommendations and suggestions made at the time of the last inspection have been achieved wholly or in part. However, the inspectors did find that improvements are still needed in some casework processes.

Inspectors did have some concerns in relation to the management of resources. CPS North Yorkshire consistently has difficulties in operating within its budget and is predicting an overspend for the current year, notwithstanding a substantial increase in its provision since the previous inspection in 2001. Inspectors also identified a need for more systematic and continuous planning of human resources; further work needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of the units and staff deployment.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“This is a mostly positive report as regards the casework responsibilities of CPS North Yorkshire. It is to the credit of the Area that they have achieved this against the background of extensive change. However, it is important if that quality is to be maintained that the issues identified by inspectors in relation to financial and human resources are addressed to give a more stable operating environment.”

Other findings of the inspectors included:

- * Sensitive cases (eg. rape, domestic violence, child abuse and racially aggravated crime) were in the main dealt with well, although some improvement was needed to ensure greater consistency in the handling of racially aggravated offences;
- * The overall quality of CPS advocacy is good with all the advocates observed being assessed as competent or better;
- * The Area has had difficulty in achieving proper compliance with the prosecution obligation to disclose unused material and had been working prior to the inspection on improving its performance. The very positive results of the file examination in relation to both primary and secondary disclosure confirmed that performance is improving;
- * The operation and management of the custody time limits systems needs to be reviewed;
- * There is a need for improvement in the quality of instructions to counsel;
- * Since the last inspection, a combined Criminal Justice Unit and Trial Unit has been co-located with the police at Scarborough police station. Whilst this has brought some benefits, inspectors found that the working practices had not been fully integrated between the CPS and the police administrative support unit. Some problems were also attributable to the use of a single shared file;

- * CPS North Yorkshire enjoys good relationships with other criminal justice agencies and has taken a leading role in the Local Criminal Justice Board where the Chief Crown Prosecutor is the Chair; there is a good working relationship between the CPS and the Witness Service and lawyers and caseworkers both provide good support to witnesses at court. However, aspects of the CPS “direct communication with victims” scheme require improvement, in particular the quality of some letters;
- * Area managers are committed to a policy of open communication with staff and inspectors found there was an effective dialogue, which gave staff the opportunity to contribute to the plans and future work of the Area.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Robert Turnbull, said:

“This is a positive report, which highlights the good quality of the work of the CPS staff in North Yorkshire. The quality of casework decision-making is good as is the quality of case presentation, the service provided to victims and witnesses attending court and the level of effective co-operation with other Criminal Justice partners.

“All this has been achieved against a background of extensive change as the Area has been re structuring and taking on improved IT support in order to meet the challenges of the future.

“We have accepted the recommendation made by the inspectors to improve some of our internal processes to ensure that we continue to offer high quality services to the people of North Yorkshire.”

The Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Notes to Editors:

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the CPS. 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 inspection of North Yorkshire was a full one.
3. CPS North Yorkshire has its main office in York and a co-located unit with the police in Scarborough. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates' court and Crown Court work.
4. The Area was previously reported on in November 2001.
5. The Area covers the York, Selby, Harrogate, Skipton, Northallerton, Richmond, Scarborough, Pickering and Whitby magistrates' courts and York, Leeds and Teesside Crown Courts.
6. CPS North Yorkshire employs the equivalent of 61.2 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
7. In the year ending June 2003 the Area dealt with 15,378 cases in the magistrates' courts and 1,848 cases in the Crown Court. It gave advice to the police before charge in a further 2,191 cases during the same period.
8. Before visiting the Area the team of inspectors examined a total of 125 cases drawn from all units in the Area. The team visited the Area for two weeks during September 2003. Inspectors interviewed all levels of staff from each unit and also spoke with representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made on advocates at magistrates' courts and Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team were assisted during the on-site phases by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
9. 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 the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
10. For further information, please contact either Joe Sanders at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545493; mobile: 07813 923633; e-mail: Joe.Sanders@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Liam Carroll at CPS North Yorkshire (tel: 01904 731765; e-mail: Liam.Carroll@cps.gsi.gov.uk).