

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

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CPS HUMBERSIDE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Humberside. The team of inspectors found that there had been an improvement in Area performance in several aspects of casework since the last inspection in 1998, and that the Area had also successfully improved performance against national timeliness targets. Overall the standard of decision making was good, independent and fair. However there was concern about the timing and quality of ongoing review in some cases. The Area has a lower rate of adverse cases than the national average and there are systems in place to ensure that caseworkers and lawyers learn lessons from them.

The Area has a good understanding of its own abilities and performance, however it does need to develop and reinforce a corporate identity and should take steps to involve staff in this initiative. There are many experienced staff in the Area, which is reflected in the standard of a advocacy at court. The inspectors commended the Area on the practice of establishing a communications officer at each office to respond to telephone requests by the police for advice.

Stephen Wooler, Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“Since the national reorganisation of the CPS in 1999, CPS Humberside has established a sound basis for local delivery of a high quality prosecution service. Much has already been achieved and the inspection team found

improvement in several aspects of casework since the last inspection. They were pleased by the arrangements being put in place to raise further, and monitor the quality of work. I hope this report and its proposals will support and continue that process.”

The inspectors found that, despite the improvements noted, the Area has recognised the need to raise further, and monitor the quality of work, and the professionalism with which it is undertaken. To do this the Area intends to look at ways of measuring quality and developing Area standards within agreed timescales.

The Area has also recognised the need to meet the CPS commitment to equality and diversity but is struggling with how best to demonstrate this, and how to develop and maintain an approach that is seen by staff to be relevant to their work.

At the time of the inspection the Area had not fully re-organised into Criminal Justice Units and Trials Units as recommended in the Review of the CPS (the Glidewell Report). Implementation has been affected by a number of local issues, in particular plans for organisational changes within Humberside police, accommodation issues and planned changes in the structure of the magistrates’ court in the East Riding.

The Area has conducted reviews of disclosure, custody time limits and performance indicators in order to improve performance. The Area is highlighting professionalism and quality as its theme for the current year.

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- Cases involving youth justice and persistent young offenders have been a problem in the Area. In the year 2000 the period from arrest to disposal was 100 days and the outcome for the quarter ending March 2001 was 99 days. There was frustration at the lack of progress in reducing the overall figures but a significant effort is now being made by all agencies by working together to improve this area of performance.

- The Area advice rate is higher than the national average, 4.1% of overall caseload against 3.5%. The advice given to police pre-charge was found to be generally sound and accurate, however the timeliness of provision needs to be improved considerably.
- Effective systems need to be put in place to ensure that custody time limits are calculated and monitored as recommended by Management Audit Services.
- Specialist lawyers are allocated to child abuse cases and inspectors noted some valuable work in relation to this sensitive area. There were, however, no specialists in relation to domestic violence and no systems in place for identifying these cases.
- Effective systems need to be put in place to ensure that all correspondence is linked to files and that responses are made within acceptable time scales. Casework systems are in place, however they are not monitored as effectively as they could be.
- The Area has had difficulties meeting the targets for staff appraisal reports with only 33% being completed by the end of May. The sickness rate has been comparatively high at 14.7 days in 1999/2000, but was reduced to 11.7 days during 2000/2001 following training in performance management.

Responding to the report Chief Crown Prosecutor, Mr Robert Marshall, said:

“The report is very encouraging. I am particularly pleased that it recognises the progress we have made since the last inspection and confirms that our decision making is good, independent and fair. Staff at all levels have worked very hard and deserve credit for our improved performance. Inevitably the report does identify a number of areas in which we can improve further. We have accepted all the report's recommendations and have already started work on implementing them.”

Notes to Editors:

1. This is the latest report of Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the cycle of inspections based on the 42 Area structure adopted by the CPS on April 1 1999. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each Area led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy.
2. CPS Humberside as an Area comprises of one Branch with headquarters in Hull and a sub-office in Grimsby. The Area covers magistrates' courts at Bainton, Wilton and Holme Beacon, Beverley, Dickering and North Holderness, Epworth and Goole, Grimsby and Cleethorpes, Kingston-upon-Hull, Scunthorpe, Brigg and Barton, South and Middle Holderness and South Hunsley Beacon and Howdenshire. There are two Crown Courts, one at Hull and one at Grimsby.
3. CPS Humberside employs the equivalent of 78.6 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
4. In the year ending March 2001 the area handled approximately 21,792 cases in the magistrates' courts and 1,168 crown court cases were handled during the same period. Casework figures suggest that the Area has a low proportion of cases involving more serious offences compared with the national picture. Advice was given to the police before charge in a further 941 cases.
5. Before visiting the area the team of inspectors examined a total of 224 cases drawn from each office. The team visited the area for a total of 2 weeks during May and June. The inspectors interviewed staff of all levels from each of the offices. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made on 24 advocates at magistrates and crown courts, these included CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was also assisted during the on-site phases by a lay inspector who looked at the public interest side of casework decisions, the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses. They were also assisted by an HM Assistant Inspector of Constabulary, who is a specialist in race and diversity issues.
6. 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.
7. For further information, please contact either Jan Wilson at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488), the HMCPSI Combined Administrative Unit (tel: 020 7210 1197), or Caron Skidmore at CPS Humberside (tel: 01482 621000).