

## HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Sussex

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Sussex (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 Sussex 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:

<b>Critical aspects</b>	<b>Assessment level</b>		
	<b>OPA 2005</b>	<b>OPA 2007</b>	<b>Direction of travel</b>
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Leadership	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>Overall critical assessment level</b>		<b>GOOD</b>	
Progressing cases at court	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Disclosure	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved<sup>1</sup></b>
Custody time limits	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Delivering change	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Managing resources	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Managing performance to improve	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Securing community confidence	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</b>	Good	<b>GOOD</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Inspectors considered that there had been significant improvement in performance although the assessment remains 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.

The overall performance of CPS Sussex has remained stable since the last OPA, with improvement in four aspects offset by decline in three.

Conviction rates in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court have improved since the last assessment, but not to the same extent as across the CPS nationally. An increase in caseload in both the magistrates' courts and, particularly, the Crown Court has affected performance to some extent including some aspects of case preparation such as committals for trial. Even so, case review and preparation is generally sound and the prosecution's obligations in relation to unused material are dealt with particularly well.

Statutory charging, a scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge (previously a police responsibility) in all except minor cases, is now embedded although not all benefits are being realised.

Senior managers promote a corporate approach within the Area and staff at all levels are involved in developing Area plans. The manner in which designated caseworkers (non-lawyers with special training and authorised to conduct certain types of proceedings in the magistrates' courts) are utilised improved, although in-house court coverage is worse than the national average. Managers have maintained their commitment to managing performance and are proactive with their criminal justice partners in promoting new initiatives. The Area has adapted its casework quality assurance system to allow some self-assessment by the reviewing lawyer followed by discussion of issues raised with the Unit Head. There are some concerns about the effectiveness of this approach in practice.

CPS Sussex has now developed a strategy for engagement with the community, although there is still a need to improve its approach to ensure objectives in the strategy are met. Although public confidence in relation to the ability of the criminal justice system to bring offenders to justice declined in Sussex as it has nationally, the Area has improved in its service to victims of crime and witnesses.

The introduction of Witness Care Units in the intervening period has ensured that witnesses, including victims of crime, are kept informed of progress in their cases. The numbers and timeliness of letters sent to victims explaining why charges may have been dropped or reduced are both better than the national average.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

*"Although the overall assessment has not changed, CPS Sussex has achieved some significant improvements, particularly in respect of the service it provides to victims and witnesses. It has also improved its overall conviction rates despite increased caseloads. The Area continues to make progress and has laid the foundation for further improvements."*

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.hmcp.si.gov.uk](http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk).

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

### **Notes to Editors**

HMCPSI 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 HMCPSI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPSI 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 Sussex serves the area covered by the Sussex Police. Its main office is based at Brighton. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 138.2 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 22,713 cases before the magistrates' courts and 3,270 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 6,027 cases which did not result in proceedings.

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