

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS South Yorkshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS South Yorkshire (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 South Yorkshire was Excellent.

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	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Good	Stable
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Good	Stable
Leadership	Excellent	Good	Declined
Overall critical assessment level		GOOD	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Excellent	Improved
Disclosure	Good	Fair	Declined
Custody time limits	Good	Fair	Declined
Delivering change	Good	Excellent	Improved
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Good	Good	Stable
Securing community confidence	Good	Excellent	Improved
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Excellent	EXCELLENT	

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.

In 2006-07 the proportion of successful outcomes (cases ending in conviction) in the Crown Court and magistrates' courts was ahead of target and the national average, while still improving. Importantly, the proportion of successful outcomes in sensitive and hate crime cases also increased ahead of the national target and performance. With its partners, the Area has exceeded the targets set for the number of offences brought to justice and the prompt resolution of cases involving persistent young offenders. It is also delivering a good service to victims and witnesses.

The quality of legal decision-making is high in the charging stations, where arrangements for joint working are continuously reviewed and improved. The quality of post-charge legal work and case preparation is also generally good, although reviews are not always timely or well documented, which can lead to delay. There is a joint approach between the CPS and other criminal justice agencies towards analysing the reasons for any cases being dropped by the prosecution, but further joint work is needed to reduce the high level of cases (substantially more than the national average in 2006-07) discharged at the committal stage because the prosecution was not ready and the court refused an adjournment, or no application was made in anticipation of refusal.

Overall, the Area's integrated approach to leadership, performance management and change management lies behind its creditable performance. It has worked hard to maintain high standards and performance and change management systems are in place to ensure that improvement continues. However, it needs to focus more on some narrower aspects of casework such as discharged committals, disclosure and custody time limits to ensure that weaker performance in these aspects does not undermine the continuing improvement elsewhere.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"The managers and staff of CPS South Yorkshire have worked hard to maintain the overall excellent levels of efficiency and effectiveness noted at the time of the last OPA. It is pleasing that the proportion of cases that end in conviction has continued to rise as a direct result of good quality legal decision-making and joint working. However, I am concerned by the level of cases discharged at the committal stage, which does need to be reduced."

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.

The report is now available to journalists from the embargoed press copies page on the Inspectorate's website (www.hmcpsi.gov.uk/press/press.shtml) and can be accessed using these details:

USERNAME: MEDIA
PASSWORD: pic5#Lon

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 South Yorkshire serves the area covered by the South Yorkshire Police. Its main office is based at Sheffield. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 155.3 full-time equivalent staff and handled 25,142 cases before the magistrates' courts and 2,520 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 5,759 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS South Yorkshire are part of a block of nine reports published today. HMCPST has already published two tranches relating to 22 Areas, and will publish one further tranche of reports covering the remaining Areas.