

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **CPS STAFFORDSHIRE**

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

The Area has maintained and in some respects improved upon the high level of casework performance in many respects since the last inspection. The quality of decision-making continues to be very good and there was evidence of continuing review on many of the files. The handling of unused material and compliance with statutory duties of disclosure was consistently good across the Area. Summary trial preparation is thorough and Crown Court work well managed.

Victims and witnesses in the Area are treated with proper consideration and receive a good level of support. Inspectors were impressed by the Area's development of a further version of the Direct Communication with Victims scheme, where victims of certain serious offences receive written notification at key stages on the progression of the case. CPS Staffordshire is actively involved with the community and is committed to broadening the knowledge of the public on the work of the CPS.

The Area and its criminal justice partners are working well together to deliver Local Criminal Justice Board targets to increase the number of offences brought to justice and in dealing quickly with persistent young offenders well within the government target of 71 days from arrest to sentence (55 days for the period December 03 – February 04).

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

“This is a positive report for which credit goes to managers and staff alike.”

**Other main findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- \* Pre-charge advice to police is well reasoned and presented. A shadow scheme for the CPS to provide pre-charge advice routinely and make a decision upon charging is in place, but not yet comprehensively across the county. This is in preparation of statutory change which will shift responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge from the police to the CPS.
- \* Sensitive cases (i.e. those involving offences such as rape, domestic violence, child abuse on racially aggravated crime) are handled well.
- \* All of the CPS advocates and agents observed by inspectors were competent though quality was variable, and more systematic and formal monitoring is required. Caseworker support to counsel and witnesses in the Crown Court is good.
- \* The cracked trial rate (cases which are fixed for trial, but conclude on the day without a contested trial) in the magistrates’ courts (38.9%) and in the Crown Court (39.2%) are more than the national average. However there is a tendency for the defence to plead guilty to the full offences at trial.
- \* Positive action has been taken to reduce the number of ineffective trials (cases which are fixed for trial, but are adjourned to another date) in the Crown Court, achieving a rate of 19.5% (above the baseline figure) against a target of 21%. Progress has been slow in the magistrates’ court achieving a rate of 22.7% against a target of 19%. Nevertheless, performance is better than the national average in both courts.
- \* The Area collects key performance data on a range of casework related measures but would benefit from a more structured approach to performance information to improve the effectiveness of the Area.

- \* The Area has managed its financial resources well.
- \* The Area has not succeeded in achieving co-location of CPS and police staff in the manner recommended by the Glidewell Review of the CPS. However it is looking to co-locate victim and witness care staff with the police when funding is available and other considerations permit.
- \* The CCP has a clear vision of the future of criminal justice in Staffordshire, and a structural review is currently being undertaken to address the CPS national initiatives and resources available in an effort to underpin that vision. Within this inspectors recommend that the Area undertake an independent review of the current culture of the organisation paying particular attention to staff involvement and recognition.
- \* The Area received an Equality and Diversity commendation for work undertaken to judicially review a case involving a racist football chant and raised awareness in the community of the willingness of the CPS to take such matters seriously.

Responding to the report Chief Crown Prosecutor, Harry Ireland, said:

“I am heartened to see that an independent inspection of our work recognises that the efforts of our staff have contributed much to improving standards of our work generally, and bringing more offenders to justice and enhancing the service provided to victims and witnesses in particular. There is still much to do and the report with its recommendations will be used to contribute to our ongoing work to develop and improve our service to the local criminal justice services as well as the public of Staffordshire. I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to our success to date and the Inspectors for their efforts in evaluating our work.”

An Executive Summary of the report is attached.

## Notes to Editors:

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections since the restructuring of the CPS in response to the “Review of the CPS” published in 1998 (the Glidewell Review). 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. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Staffordshire was a full inspection rather than an intermediate one.
3. CPS Staffordshire has two offices, at Stafford and Newcastle under Lyme. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates’ courts and Crown Court work.
4. The Area was previously reported on in September 2001.
5. The Area covers 6 magistrates’ courts and 2 Crown Courts.
6. CPS Staffordshire employs the equivalent of 123.2 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
7. In the year to March 2003 the Area handled approximately 25,716 cases in the magistrates’ courts and 2,308 cases in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police before charge in a further 1,218 cases.
8. Before visiting the Area the team of inspectors examined a total of 177 cases drawn from all units. The team visited the Area from the 26<sup>th</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> May 2004. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels from each unit. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made on advocates at magistrates’ courts and Crown Courts, including CPS prosecutors, agents and counsel. 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.
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 Deborah Peters at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488; e-mail: [deborah.peters@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.peters@cps.gsi.gov.uk)) or Michelle Moston at CPS Staffordshire (tel: 01785 272 204; e-mail: [michelle.moston@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.moston@cps.gsi.gov.uk)).