

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **Prosecutions in Suffolk**

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

Inspectors found that CPS Suffolk delivers a service that is solid and sound in almost all respects; and that in many respects the Area is performing well. The Area performance against CPS targets compared favourably to national averages in most respects.

The quality of initial review (the consideration and analysis of cases), review at the summary trial stage, and committal review is a particular strength of CPS Suffolk, and reflects the quality of casework decision-making. There remains a need for better recording of the reasoning behind casework decisions. Cases generally proceed on the right charges, but inspectors found a need for indictments to be checked more carefully before being sent to the Crown Court.

Serious and sensitive casework is handled well, although inspectors had some concerns about the application of the prosecution disclosure regime to sensitive unused material (i.e. evidence and information in the possession of the Crown which it does not rely on as part of its case). There was a significant improvement in the quality of decision-making in relation to the primary disclosure of unused material, although there was a lack of evidence to indicate that sensitive unused material had been considered by reviewing lawyers.

The standard of witness care was good and prosecutors were alert to those cases where special measures for the protection of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses could be invoked. However, improvements are required in the operation of the Direct Communication with Victims (DCV) scheme.

Relationships with other agencies were generally positive. Communication is considered to be a strength, and most staff were happy with training and development opportunities. Significant effort had been made to engage with the community.

Inspectors identified three aspects of concern; the ability of the Area to cope with the level of anticipated major initiatives under the current management structure; some important outstanding issues relating to co-location with the police; and an indication of some staff concerns about internal relationships. Senior managers have responded positively. However, further action may still be required.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“There is a considerable amount in the achievement of CPS Suffolk about which staff and managers alike can justly feel proud. The public can be confident that it has an efficient and effective prosecution service. I hope that the Area will address the concerns raised in this report and build on it to achieve an even better performance.”

**Specific findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- \* The Area has a very high “cracked<sup>1</sup>” trial rate in the magistrates’ courts and local initiatives to improve the effectiveness of pre-trial reviews and the high rate of bind overs on the day of trial need to be maintained.
- \* Overall the quality and timeliness of the Area’s casework was good, in particular the standard of committal preparation. The timeliness of the service of committal papers is significantly above the national average. However, the quality of indictments needs

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<sup>1</sup> Cases prepared for trial that result in acceptance of a plea on the day fixed – causing a waste of prosecution and court time as well as potential inconvenience to witnesses.

improving. Whilst it is accepted that indictments may have to be amended to reflect developments in the case, in a number of cases careless mistakes were made.

- \* File records relating to initial review and pre-trial review need to be more legible and detailed.
- \* The standard of instructions to counsel was also in need of improvement.
- \* At the time of the inspection there some were backlogs in summary trial preparation. The Area operates an effective system of file ownership and is good at complying with orders made at pleas and directions hearings.
- \* Area performance in respect of the disclosure of unused material had improved from the last inspection although decisions in relation to the handling of sensitive material needed to be evidenced.
- \* The Area had significant involvement in the setting up of the Suffolk Multi-Agency Forum against Racial Harassment, one of the functions of which is to undertake, where appropriate, a peer review of the handling of racist incident cases across the relevant agencies. This was an innovative development, and reflected the general involvement of the Area in issues of race equality.
- \* The standard of advocacy in the Area is good.
- \* The standard of witness care by in-house prosecutors and caseworkers at court was good. There was good consultation with witnesses about the acceptability of pleas, and prosecutors sought to explain the reasons why cases had to be adjourned.
- \* The operation of the Direct Communication with Victims scheme is not fully effective. Although timeliness is good, inspectors were not satisfied that letters were being sent in all relevant cases. The quality of some letters could be improved.

- \* A high percentage of staff were happy with communication from managers, and most feedback on training was also positive. However some staff perceived that they were not treated appropriately. Senior managers had responded positively to this perception. However, further action may still be required to improve the situation.
- \* Appropriate controls and systems were in place to ensure that the Area stayed within budget, and there was compliance with CPS guidelines on financial management.
- \* The Area has split into functional Trial and Criminal Justice Units. Co-location with police was imminent however there were still a number of important outstanding issues relating to co-location, which required urgent attention.
- \* Partnerships with other agencies are well developed and relationships are cordial, although there is work to be done in making some of the inter-agency groups more effective, primarily with police and the magistrates' courts.

The Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Responding to the report, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Chris Yule, said:

“I am very pleased with the findings of the Inspectorate. The staff of the CPS in Suffolk have undergone a sustained period of change as we implemented the recommendations of the Glidewell report to move to much closer working and co-location with the Police. We will shortly be introducing a new computer based Case Management System that will improve the quality of our work in several key areas, and the closer working relationship with Suffolk Constabulary is already beginning to bear fruit.

“A strengthening of the management structure is planned for the coming financial year. This report demonstrates that as we enter a new era of working with the new Criminal Justice Board for Suffolk, the CPS in Suffolk will provide a solid foundation from which to improve our service to the local community.”

## Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the reorganised 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 either be full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Suffolk was an intermediate rather than a full inspection.
3. CPS Suffolk has an office in Ipswich. The office covers five magistrates' courts and two Crown Court centres.
4. CPS Suffolk employs the equivalent of 65.10 full time staff.
5. In the year to 30 September 2002 the Area handled 13,643 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 937 defendants in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 841 cases.
6. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 94 cases. The team visited the Area for one week in January 2003. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
8. For further information, please contact either Jane Gould at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1165; e-mail [Jane.gould@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.gould@cps.gsi.gov.uk)) or Brian Barlett at CPS Suffolk (tel: 01473 282154).