

Press Release

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HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Suffolk

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

CRITICAL ASPECTS	Assessment Level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of Travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Good	Fair	Declined
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Excellent	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Fair	Declined
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Good	Stable
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
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	Good	Stable
Delivering change	Good	Excellent	Improved
Managing resources	Good	Fair	Declined
Managing performance to improve	Good	Good	Stable
Securing community confidence	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	EXCELLENT	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.

Since the last OPA when CPS Suffolk's performance was consistently good across all aspects, it has now become more mixed. Three aspects have improved from Good to Excellent, but four aspects - two of which are critical - are now judged as Fair that were previously Good. This has meant that the overall assessment has declined from Excellent to Good.

The proportion of unsuccessful outcomes in the magistrates' courts has improved and overall the rate is excellent. A high proportion of jury acquittals has had an adverse impact on performance in Crown Court cases. Overall, Inspectors found that cases were well prepared and progressed, although there is room for improvement in the handling of unused material in the magistrates' courts.

Statutory charging¹ is now embedded in the Area and some of the expected benefits are being realised, with performance in respect of magistrates' courts cases being significantly better than Crown Court cases.

Sensitive and hate crimes are dealt with well and the relatively low rate of unsuccessful outcomes is excellent. There is a high level of commitment to meeting the needs of victims and witnesses and the service provided is good. The Area has maintained a proactive community engagement strategy and has ensured active participation in a diverse range of community events.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"CPS Suffolk has maintained its performance in a number of aspects and have worked hard to achieve four excellent ratings. I am confident that the Area has the capacity to focus on stabilising those aspects of performance which have declined in order to move forward."

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).

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

¹ A statutory scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge (previously a police responsibility) in all except minor cases.

Notes to Editors

- 1 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.
- 2 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'.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 CPS Suffolk serves the area covered by the Suffolk Police. Its main office is based at Ipswich. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 68.6 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 11,099 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,215 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 3,765 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Suffolk are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.