

Press Release

Embargoed until 00:01 Hrs

Tuesday 19 January 2010



Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its performance assessment of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) London, Tower Hamlets borough.

This is one of a planned series of borough performance assessments of the units in CPS London. Reports on nine have been published today and those on a further ten boroughs, the traffic unit and an overarching report on CPS London as a whole will be published in March.

The overall performance assessment of Tower Hamlets was **POOR**.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the ten aspects:

Aspect	Score	Assessment
Pre-charge advice and decisions	2	Fair
Decision-making, preparation and progression in magistrates' court cases	0	Poor
Decision-making, preparation and progression in Crown Court cases	0	Poor
The prosecution of cases at court	2	Fair
Serious violent and sexual offences, and hate crimes	2	Fair
Disclosure	0	Poor
Custody time limits	2	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	0	Poor
Managing performance to improve	2	Fair
Managing resources	Not scored	
Management and partnership working	3	Good
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	13	POOR

The quality of pre-charge decision-making stage is sound. However inspectors found that the borough needs to improve a number of aspects of its work including the preparation of contested magistrates' court cases and the level of successful outcomes in cases involving violence against women.

The proportion of magistrates' court cases that resulted in a successful outcome in the 12 months to June 2009 (84.5%) was lower than that for CPS London overall and nationally. The proportion of successful cases in the Crown Court (73.7%) was higher than that for London overall (72.7%) but lower than found nationally (80.6%).

Problems relating to co-location with the police and the implementation of an integrated prosecution team have taken time to resolve and for the potential benefits to be achieved. Tower Hamlets has also felt the effect of considerable staff turnover since this change and while implementing national initiatives. There are encouraging developments in certain aspects of performance for example the introduction, with partners, of the Special Domestic Violence Court.

Inspectors recognised that the borough operates in a difficult environment with high levels of some serious crime and problems concerning the willingness of victims and witnesses to attend court. However aspects of handling casework in the magistrates' court and Crown Court, dealing with disclosure of unused material to the defence and the service to victims and witnesses were weak.

Nevertheless local managers have a good grasp of what needs to be delivered and the borough's contribution to joint working with other criminal justice partners, in particular the police, is effective.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

"This assessment of poor overall performance reflects the extent to which the borough has been hampered in its casework by the difficult circumstances in which it works. It has a challenging caseload involving many of the most serious crimes. The borough has also had to implement a number of national initiatives with increasing resource constraints. There are now positive signs of improvement in some important aspects. It is essential that performance improvements are sustained and that the borough enjoys a period of stability at managerial level. It is encouraging that there are good working relationships with partners in the criminal justice system locally".

This press release should be read in conjunction with the executive summary which is attached.

The full report is now available from the embargoed section of the inspectorate's website (www.hmcpsi.gov.uk) using the following details:

- Username: MEDIA99
- Password: LBPAJan10

For further information please contact Anisha Visram, HMCPSI's media contact, on 020 7210 1187/07901 856 348.

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 pilot performance assessment of Croydon borough, published in May 2009, was the first of a planned series of performance assessments of the individual borough units in CPS London.
- 3 There are 33 geographical units based on London boroughs and the cities of London and Westminster. CPS London also has a dedicated traffic unit and a complex casework centre which handles serious and complex cases and those at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey). CPS London provides advice to police and charging decisions through a telephone service, CPS London Direct, or where a face-to-face meeting is needed through the local borough units. The units are gathered into six districts based on Crown Court centres.
- 4 The assessment process provides a benchmark for the performance of the boroughs in ten key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being excellent, good, fair or poor. The unit is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings. The process also evaluates the management of resources at borough level.
- 5 The scoring mechanism is described in annex C of the report. This provides some limiters that apply in addition to the total of points scored. This is because of the significant impact that some aspects will have on the delivery of the borough's core business, or because of the impact of a number of poor aspects.

- 6 The assessment included examination of finalised case files; interviews with representatives of partner criminal justice agencies and the judiciary; discussions with borough staff; observations at the office; and observations at the magistrates' court and Crown Court.
- 7 The findings from the assessments undertaken will be drawn together in a pan-CPS London report. As well as providing an overall picture of the area, this will address the issues that have emerged as the assessments have progressed. Some of these were of serious concern and need to be tackled urgently at a senior management level.
- 8 HMCPSI's original intention had been to assess all 33 boroughs in order to reflect the variations in performance which were expected across an area as diverse as CPS London, and this approach was endorsed by the area's senior managers. In the event findings from the early assessments showed a relatively narrow range of performance and consistency in the themes emerging and the aspects for improvement. London's senior management team confirmed that the boroughs which had been assessed were fairly representative of the area as a whole and that to undertake further assessments would be unlikely to add significantly to our findings. The inspectorate therefore decided to confine the exercise to 20 boroughs (including the pilot assessment of Croydon), drawn from five of the six districts, together with the traffic unit.