

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Wiltshire

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

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

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 our last OPA performance in CPS Wiltshire has remained stable in five aspects but declined in eight.

In 2006, CPS Wiltshire changed its structure to two combined units each covering both magistrates' courts and Crown Court cases. One unit covers all cases in Swindon and the other the rest of the county. Whilst this has potentially put the Area in a better position to deliver key national CPS priorities, performance has been slower to recover from the restructuring period than managers anticipated. However, there was some indication of improvement towards the end of 2006-07.

Statutory charging, whereby crown prosecutors have taken over the responsibility from police for the decision to charge in more serious or contested cases and provide face-to-face advice to police officers, is now well established across the Area and the quality of decision-making is generally good. The level of magistrates' courts cases that are discontinued is a cause for concern requiring more focused attention. Good work has been done to reduce the number of cases that result in no further action, although the level of these is still above the national average.

The proportion of magistrates' courts cases resulting in a conviction is improving and in 2006-07 was better than the national average, although the timeliness of case preparation and progression need to be improved. The level of ineffective trials (cases fixed for trial which do not proceed on the day and are adjourned to another date) continues to rise and is above the national average.

The Crown Court conviction rate has improved since our last OPA but is still not as good as the national average. The Area is working well to ensure trials are effective, both its effective and ineffective trial rates being better than national averages. The target for the number of asset recovery orders made under the Proceeds of Crime Act was met, but not the target for the value of confiscation orders.

Performance with other criminal justice partners in the timeliness of dealing with persistent young offenders in Wiltshire declined significantly in 2006-07, but the most recent data indicates signs of improvement in the time between arrest and sentence.

Performance in hate crimes outcomes is generally improving and in 2006-07 was better than the national average, with generally high standards of decision-making in such cases and good systems in place to ensure the effective handling of high profile cases of local concern.

Witness care is generally good, but there is scope for improvement in the Direct Communication with Victims scheme, whereby the CPS writes to a victim when charges are dropped or changed substantially.

Manager and staff involvement with the local community gained momentum during the year with engagement taking place with a diverse range of local groups. The level of public confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice agencies in bringing offenders to justice in Wiltshire remains consistently above the national average.

In common with other CPS Areas, Wiltshire has undergone a high degree of change in recent times. Senior managers have worked hard to set out and communicate a clear vision and direction for the Area. Continued work is needed with both staff and criminal justice partners to bring this about.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"Despite some fall-off in some aspects of performance CPS Wiltshire is now potentially in a better position to deliver key national CPS priorities. The continued increase in the rate of magistrates' courts convictions and in hate crime outcomes provide encouraging signs of CPS Wiltshire's capacity to improve."

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) and is available on our website at www.hmcp.si.gov.uk.

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

Notes to Editors

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.

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’.

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 Wiltshire serves the area covered by the Wiltshire Constabulary. Its office is based at Chippenham. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 53.3 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 11,938 cases before the magistrates’ courts and 874 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 2,405 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Wiltshire are part of a block of ten reports published today. HMCPSI will publish two further tranches of reports covering the remaining 20 Areas.