

## HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS West Mercia

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

<b>Critical aspects</b>	<b>Assessment level</b>		
	<b>OPA 2005</b>	<b>OPA 2007</b>	<b>Direction of travel</b>
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Improved<sup>1</sup></b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Leadership	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
<b>Overall critical assessment level</b>		<b>GOOD</b>	
Progressing cases at court	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Disclosure	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Custody time limits	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Improved<sup>1</sup></b>
Delivering change	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Managing resources	Fair	<b>Good</b>	<b>Improved</b>
Managing performance to improve	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Improved<sup>1</sup></b>
Securing community confidence	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</b>	Fair	<b>GOOD</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Although the assessment of this aspect remains unchanged there has been significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the band.

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.

CPS West Mercia's overall performance has improved significantly since the last OPA: improving in nine aspects, including three critical, and remaining stable in the other four.

This is reflected in an overall assessment of 'Good' as opposed to 'Fair' in 2005. There has been improvement in a number of aspects of casework delivery, including the provision of pre-charge advice, handling of sensitive cases and hate crimes, and compliance with the prosecution's duty of disclosure in respect of unused material.

In 2006-07 the Area had a higher proportion of successful outcomes (convictions) in the Crown Court than found nationally. Performance in the magistrates' courts was very close to the national average, although there was a need to reduce the number of discharged committals (cases intended to be committed to the Crown Court which fail because the prosecution is not in a position to proceed on the day).

Inspectors found that the Area had addressed a number of performance issues and this was bringing about improvement in the quality of pre-charge decisions and analysis of unsuccessful outcomes.

Monitoring of compliance with the prosecution's duty of disclosure was particularly good. However, there is some way to go before the target for the forfeiture of criminals' assets is met.

The proportion of effective trials (contested cases which proceed on the day fixed for trial) is better than that found nationally in the magistrates' courts, although it needs to improve in respect of Crown Court cases.

The time taken to process persistent young offenders improved throughout 2006-07 and the criminal justice area was meeting the national target of 71 days from arrest to sentence by mid-2007. The CPS works well with its criminal justice partners to drive up performance.

In the first part of 2006-07 the Area was failing by some way to meet its targets for the Direct Communication with Victims scheme, under which the CPS writes to a victim explaining the reasons for a charge being dropped or substantially changed. However a successful change programme was implemented, which resulted in the target being met fully by the end of the year.

Whilst there was some community engagement activity, overall this needed to be developed with a clear focus on actions which assist the Area's core business.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

*"Managers and staff have worked hard over the last two years to improve performance in key aspects of the Area's work. Our assessment that this is now a 'Good' Area reflects that work. Some of the benefits of this work are still to be realised fully, in particular an increase in the seizure of criminal assets. Nonetheless I am confident that the Area will strive to strengthen further the quality of its service to, and engagement with, the communities of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire."*

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.

The report is now available to journalists from the embargoed press copies page on the Inspectorate's website ([www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml](http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml)) and can be accessed using these details:

USERNAME: MEDIA  
PASSWORD: pic5#Lon

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 West Mercia serves the area covered by the West Mercia Constabulary. Its main office is based at Droitwich. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 124.9 full-time equivalent staff and handled 23,290 cases before the magistrates' courts and 2,334 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 6,230 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS West Mercia are part of a block of nine reports published today. HMCPSI has already published two tranches relating to 22 Areas, and will publish one further tranche of reports covering the remaining Areas.