

Press Notice

Follow-Up Report on CPS West Midlands

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01hrs
TUESDAY 14TH FEBRUARY 2006**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published the HMCPsi follow-up report on West Midlands CPS Area. This follows the full inspection report published in December 2004.

The **full inspection** in January 2004 found that casework was generally handled satisfactorily, including the many serious cases which it handles. The handling of cases involving persistent young offenders was particularly good. Even so, the Area discontinuance levels were higher than the national average. The number of committals which were discharged because the prosecution was not ready was reducing but were still at too high a level.

CPS West Midlands was moving towards full co-location with the police at a number of sites across the West Midlands, but the geographical groups of offices remained largely distinct entities with individual working practices. The Area found it difficult to recruit and retain lawyers, a factor which weighed heavily on it and affected its approach to a number of issues.

The **follow up visit** found that since the inspection, the Area has moved forward in several respects. Almost full co-location with the police has been achieved, and the statutory charging scheme (under which the CPS assume responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge – hitherto a matter for the police) is being delivered at 21 charging centres. Ten witness care units have been established with the police, and are proving effective in increasing the proportion of witnesses who attend court and, supported by effective trial management, reducing the number of trials that are ineffective because of witness problems.

Further restructuring (on a geographical rather than function basis) has occurred to allow more flexible deployment of staff, and the newly created Birmingham Central and Birmingham Outer sectors now deal with all stage of cases from the initial decision-making stage to disposal in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court. Recruitment processes have been revitalised resulting in a net increase in lawyer numbers. Overall the Area is displaying a more corporate approach to its work in a number of ways.

Good progress has been made in addressing some of the recommendations and identified aspects for improvement, but others still require attention. Satisfactory systems are in place to handle sensitive cases and hate crime, and work has been done to improve the way the CPS Area is managed. Improvement is still needed, however, in the way in which business is planned and performance monitored. The way staff are deployed still requires further work. Less progress has been made on recommendations relating to the prosecution's duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence.

The strengths identified in January particularly the good work of witness care units, the Area's support for the personal development of staff, and its commitment to equality and diversity principles, have been maintained.

Stephen Wooler said on publishing the follow-up report:

“CPS West Midlands has shown improvement since the last inspection and, in co-operation with its criminal justice partners, has delivered all the key initiatives designed to improve the way the criminal justice system operates. The Area has the potential to improve further. A systematic approach to planning its priorities and managing performance will help it to achieve a consistently good standard across all aspects of work.”

A full copy of the follow-up report is attached and is available on HMCPsi website at www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/reports/regional2.shtml. The earlier full inspection report also remains available on that website.

Notes to Editors

1. In 2002-04 HMCSI undertook its second programme of inspections of the reorganised CPS. All 42 Areas in England and Wales received a full or intermediate depending on circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS West Midlands was a full one.
3. CPS West Midlands serves the area covered by the West Midlands Police. It has four geographical sectors, with staff in nine locations: Birmingham (2 sites), Coventry, Solihull, Brierley Hill, Halesowen, Walsall, West Bromwich, and Wolverhampton. The Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) is David Blundell.
4. At the time of the follow up inspection CPS West Midlands employed the equivalent of 471.8 full time staff (this figure includes a number of part-time staff).
5. In the year ending March 2005 the Area handled approximately 79,250 cases spread between the magistrates' courts and Crown Court. During the same period, advice was given to the police in further 24,400 cases, which was around 23% of its caseload.
6. The recommendations made in the inspection report on CPS West Midlands related to Custody Time Limits, discharged committals, resource deployment, performance management and governance.
7. Follow up inspections are undertaken to assess the extent to which Areas have addressed recommendations and aspects for improvements, as well as monitoring strengths and casework performance.
8. The national initiatives referred to in the follow-up report are:
 - (i) Pre-charge decision-making (pre-charge advice to police). The Criminal Justice Act 2003 took forward the recommendations of Lord Justice Auld in his Review of the Criminal Courts, so that the CPS will determine the decision to charge offenders in the more serious cases. Shadow charging arrangements and the statutory scheme is having a phased roll out across priority Areas and subsequently all 42 Areas.
 - (ii) No Witness: No Justice. This is a project to improve witness care: through the establishment of witness care units. The aim is to give witnesses the support and the information that they need from the inception of an incident through to the conclusion of a criminal prosecution. It is a partnership of the CPS and the Association of Chief Police Officers and also involves Victim Support and the Witness Service. Jointly staffed Witness Care Units are being introduced into all Areas by December 2005.

- (iii) Direct communication with victims (DCV). This is part of the enhanced role of the CPS in relation to victims of crime. When a charge is to be discontinued or substantially reduced the CPS provides a written explanation to the victim of the reasons for this.
 - (iv) Public service agreement (PSA) targets. Objectives relating to reducing crime and the fear of crime were agreed by the Home Office, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the CPS. These shared targets relate to increasing the numbers of offenders brought to justice, reducing the rate of ineffective trials, dealing with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence within 71 days, and increasing public confidence in the effectiveness of criminal justice agencies in bringing offenders to justice.
9. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within the CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
10. For further information, please contact **Heather Minshull** on 020 7210 1166 or heather.minshull@cps.gsi.gov.uk at HMCPSI.