

PRESS RELEASE

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HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Warwickshire

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

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

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, seven aspects have improved, one has declined and all others have remained stable. The overall picture is one of much improvement with a focus on outcomes and managing performance to improve. The Area has the capacity to improve even further if it can; build upon the strengths of a combined criminal justice centre; consult with staff about implementing a more constructive meeting structure that is more effective in encouraging views and ideas; and developing a more refined community engagement strategy.

The Area has the highest number of successful outcomes in the country for both magistrates' courts and Crown Court cases. It operates a cradle-to-grave file 'ownership' policy which ensures a high level of continuity. Cases are well reviewed and case preparation timely.

There are sound systems in place for progressing cases and ensuring that they are prosecuted by advocates of appropriate experience. The cracked and ineffective trial rates (ie the proportion of contested cases which do not proceed on the day fixed for trial) in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court remain consistently good.

Champions and specialists have been appointed for all categories of sensitive cases. Champions are proactive in delivering training, performance management, and liaison with community groups in relation to their assigned topic. Successful outcomes in hate crimes are excellent.

There is clear commitment to victims and witnesses with the Area contributing to an innovative Victim Information Partnership through which all multi-agency activity is directed to support victims and witnesses. The operation of the Direct Communication with Victims scheme (under which the CPS writes to victims offering explanations when cases are discontinued or the charges substantially reduced) is amongst the best nationally.

The Area Business Plan is aligned with the main initiatives and CPS national priorities, and a Risk Register is in place. There is clear evidence of commitment to planning and working with partners in joint initiatives and shared targets. There is a CPS representative on all major criminal justice change programmes.

There are effective systems in place to monitor budgets, and non ring-fenced administration spend has been consistently good to excellent since 2004. The budget is effectively managed and there is evidence that resource allocation is regularly reviewed and forecast planning for future needs is conducted. The average sickness absence is the lowest nationally and has improved since 2005-06.

It is clear that the Area possesses a performance-focussed culture from the top down. Despite its small size it produces sophisticated data that is regularly reviewed at Area Management Team and other team meetings and is used to improve performance. There is also considerable evidence of criminal justice system partners working together to improve performance and the formation of the Southern Justice Centre Group is an innovative project aimed at creating synergy between agencies.

The Area considers that performing well in their core business best promotes community confidence in CPS work and the wider criminal justice system. Its efforts in respect of community engagement tend to be focussed through collaborative efforts with other criminal justice agencies.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"It is pleasing to see an Area which already had a good benchmark from the 2005 overall performance assessment continue to improve. The Area have put performance management high on the agenda which has helped it to achieve some of the best results nationally."

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.hmcpsi.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 Warwickshire serves the area covered by the Warwickshire Constabulary. Its main office is based at Leamington Spa. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 37.9 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 7,412 cases before the magistrates’ courts and 580 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 2,028 cases which did not result in proceedings.

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