

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS West Yorkshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS West Yorkshire (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 Yorkshire 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	Good	Fair	Declined
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	Fair	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Fair	Good	Improved
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Fair	Declined
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
Overall critical assessment level		FAIR	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
Disclosure	Good	Poor	Declined
Custody time limits	Good	Fair	Declined
Delivering change	Excellent	Good	Declined
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Good	Good	Stable
Securing community confidence	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
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.

The assessments for CPS West Yorkshire are mixed with the overall assessment moving from 'Good' in 2005 to 'Fair'. Some aspects of work have continued to meet the high standards previously reported; some aspects of legal work have shown some decline; and areas such as pre-charge decision-making and the service to victims and witnesses are strengthening, but not to the extent expected.

Key findings include:

- Although the conviction rate in magistrates' courts cases improved over that of previous years, the discontinuance rate remained amongst the highest in the country in 2006-07. However, the rate has improved in 2007-08 and is now close to the national average. There are links between the 2006-07 results and the quality of pre-charge decisions, which the Area recognised as weak in early 2006. Processes and systems for delivering pre-charge decisions also had weaknesses.
- Progress in respect of Crown Court cases was better. The conviction rate in the Crown Court has improved from 79.7% to 83.2% in 2006-07 which is substantially above the national average.
- There was a strong focus on serious and complex casework in 2006-07 and this was reflected in the improved results in the Crown Court. Positive work continues to be undertaken in the handling of sensitive casework, including hate crimes. CPS West Yorkshire continues to be at the forefront of developing community engagement, with some innovative activity in 2006-07.
- Significant progress was made against the Area's advocacy strategy with in-house staff conducting a greater proportion of cases both in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court.
- Financial controls were satisfactory.
- There is a strong performance culture, although there is still opportunity to strengthen the analysis of information to identify the most effective remedial actions and deliver improved outcomes.
- Relationships with the other criminal justice agencies are generally strong at strategic level, but more variable among operational staff – particularly with representatives of the magistrates' courts.
- The Area has worked hard with partners to implement the national Criminal Justice: Simple, Speedy, Summary initiative in early 2007-08.
- There is an urgent need to improve performance in respect of the prosecution's duty of disclosure. Particular care needs to be taken to ensure that all appropriate material, including that which might assist the defence, is disclosed in a timely manner.
- More also needs to be done to improve the level of victim and witness care; only limited progress was made in 2006-07. Activity is underway in 2007-08 to try and improve compliance with the Victims' Code.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"There is much in this report which reflects well on CPS West Yorkshire, in particular the high rate of convictions achieved and its excellent handling of sensitive cases and hate crime. The weaknesses identified are capable of being addressed and I am aware of steps already taken. Despite its set-back in the overall rating, CPS West Yorkshire is well-placed to achieve improved ratings and results in future assessments."

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) 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 Yorkshire serves the area covered by the West Yorkshire Police. Its main office is based at Leeds. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 292.8 full-time equivalent staff and handled 47,034 cases before the magistrates' courts and 4,680 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 7,897 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to West Yorkshire are part of a series of reports. HMCPSI will publish a further tranche covering the remaining Areas in March 2008.