

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS WEST YORKSHIRE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its Report on the inspection of CPS West Yorkshire.

CPS West Yorkshire has been at the forefront in successfully implementing the many national initiatives generated by modernisation programmes, both within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. Inspectors found that the Area was performing well overall and was well managed, with particularly sound management systems and extensive performance monitoring which allow a pro-active approach to continuous improvement.

The overall quality of casework decision-making was good. Inspectors were impressed by the Area's contribution to the reduction in the level of ineffective trials (cases listed for a contested hearing which do not go ahead on the date set), which is better than the national average in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court. Persistent young offenders were also dealt with expeditiously. These aspects of performance are creditable, as large metropolitan areas are often more prone to delay in these respects.

Inspectors were concerned by two aspects of performance. In the magistrates' courts, cases were not progressing as they should and there was a lack of readiness for pre-trial reviews and the trials themselves.

Resources have been directed to the charging scheme, in which pre-charge advice is provided face-to-face to the police, and in assuring the quality of Crown Court casework. The Area has taken steps to address the problem through a programme for restructure and reorganisation, to be completed in the autumn of this year. The second concern relates to a discontinuance rate (19.6%) which has been consistently higher than the national average (12.2%). This requires continuing detailed analysis and joint performance work with the police to address the causes.

CPS West Yorkshire has strong partnerships within the criminal justice system and is making progress both in increasing the number of offences brought to justice and in raising public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Internally, great emphasis is put on personal development and the Area is also pro-active in dealing with equality and diversity issues.

Externally, victims and witnesses are treated with proper consideration and receive a good level of support, in particular from prosecuting counsel in the Crown Court. CPS West Yorkshire is outward looking and has demonstrated a commitment to community engagement, including minority ethnic groups and organisations. It also has involvement with local universities and schools, and has provided extensive work placements and mentoring.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, said:

“The Report identified many positive successes on the part of CPS West Yorkshire. It is to the credit of managers and staff alike that they have continued to build on past achievements at a time when changes in the CPS nationally, and the wider criminal justice system, have created additional pressures for all. I am confident that those concerns which we have raised will be addressed quickly and effectively by local managers”

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * Most of the Area casework measures were equal to, or better than, the results in the cycle-to-date.

- * The Area's overall undertaking of the prosecution's duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence was slightly better than the average in our inspection cycle-to-date, but improvements can be made, in particular in relation to sensitive material in the magistrates' courts.
- * The number of committals discharged because the prosecution is not ready is not high, but readiness is an issue that needs to be tackled in conjunction with the police.
- * The overall standard of prosecution advocacy needs to be improved, as it has been affected by the strategic decision of the Area Management Board to fully deploy the Area's most experienced advocates on casework destined for the Crown Court, and in the provision of pre-charge advice to the police.
- * The quality of response to complaints is a strength, with prompt, detailed replies being provided.
- * The Area has robust systems of financial management.
- * The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence stood at 65 days at the time of the inspection, compared to the Government target of 71 days.
- * The Area is committed to playing a key role to achieve the aims set for the criminal justice system.

Responding to the Report, Chief Crown Prosecutor Neil Franklin, said:

"I welcome the many positive findings of this Report which quite rightly recognises the excellent work being done in West Yorkshire by staff at all levels.

I'm particularly pleased that West Yorkshire's contribution to, and involvement in, national initiatives has been recognised.

Whilst we acknowledge that there is need for improvement in some areas, plans to address these difficulties are already in place and we are confident that these will soon yield positive results."

An Executive Summary of the Report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of inspections of the reorganised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may be either full or intermediate depending on circumstances.
2. The inspection of CPS West Yorkshire was a full one.
3. CPS West Yorkshire has three offices based in Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates' courts and Crown Court work. The Area operates from five units co-located with the police in Bradford North, Bradford South, Wakefield, Halifax and Huddersfield, all dealing with magistrates' courts work.
4. The Area was previously reported on in July 2001.
5. The Area covers magistrates' courts at Batley and Dewsbury, Bingley, Bradford, Calderdale, Huddersfield, Keighley, Leeds, Pontefract and Wakefield, and the Crown Court sitting at Leeds and Bradford.
6. CPS West Yorkshire employs the equivalent of 279.1 full time staff (this figure includes a number of part-time staff).
7. In the year ending December 2003, the Area handled approximately 70,405 cases in the magistrates' courts and 5,404 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police before charge in a further 17,734 cases, which was 20.1% of the Area's caseload.
8. Before visiting the Area for two weeks during February and March 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 402 cases drawn from all units. Inspectors interviewed CPS staff of all levels from each unit and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies, criminal law practitioners and community-based groups in the Area. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts, youth courts and in the Crown Court. These included CPS lawyers, designated caseworkers, agents and counsel. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses by the CPS.
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 CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
10. For further information, please contact either Amanda Gough at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545493; e-mail: amanda.gough@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Trudy Green, Communications Manager at CPS West Yorkshire (tel: 0113 290 2844, e-mail trudy.green@cps.gsi.gov.uk).