

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **CPS WILTSHIRE**

*An Area Building on Solid Foundations*

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

Inspectors identified a number of positive points, as well as some areas where it was felt that there was still room for some improvement.

The standard of casework in the Area was good, both in terms of the judgement of prosecutors in progressing cases, and also in preparing for trials in the magistrates' and Crown Courts. There are some recent signs that the timeliness of case preparation may be slipping. The Area and its criminal justice partners need to address growing delays in fixing trial dates in the magistrates' courts.

The CPS's compliance with the prosecution's obligations of the disclosure of unused material to the defence is very sound.

The senior management in the Area are outward-looking and seek to engage with the community and media. Staff are being encouraged to participate further in community engagement.

In conjunction with its partners in the criminal justice system, the Area has achieved or met all its Public Service Agreement national targets:

- \* success in increasing the number of offenders brought to justice by +11.6% for the year ending May 2004 against the baseline established in 2001-02, double the national target of 5%. This has settled to +2.7% in the year to August 2004.
- \* the rates of ineffective trials (those which do not proceed on the day fixed for a contested hearing) in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court are significantly better than the national averages.
- \* public confidence in criminal justice issues is higher than the national average in the British Crime Survey 2002-03 at 47.7% compared to 40% nationally, but this has fallen slightly to 46% over the last year.
- \* persistent young offenders are being brought to justice in an average of 51 days from arrest to sentence against the national target of 71 days.

Victims and witnesses at court generally receive a good level of service and the CPS and police are working together to establish a Witness Care Unit to improve upon the service level throughout the life of a case. Prosecutors are receptive to the needs of victims and witnesses at court, but this needs to be more consistent in the Crown Court, and the provision of information to victims when cases are dropped or substantially reduced needs to be much more consistent.

The overall standard of advocacy is generally good in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court.

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

*“The pleasing features of this Report are the good standard of casework overall and the Area’s success in tackling ineffective trials. These need to be*

*complimented by work with the Area's criminal justice partners to reduce the delays which are starting to occur in some cases. The citizens of Wiltshire can be assured that they are being served by an efficient and effective prosecution service."*

**Other main findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- \* The Area plays a full and active role in the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board and partnerships at the strategic level are sound, but clearer communication between criminal justice agencies would benefit all. The success of the pre-charge advice scheme (under which the police and CPS work more closely together, and the CPS will take the decision to charge in all the more serious cases once the scheme changes to a statutory basis) proved a major challenge and the scheme is to be re-launched. A more effective partnership needs to be developed to ensure the successful implementation of the shadow and the subsequent statutory charging scheme, including the effective joint management of the quality of files from the police.
- \* Staff training is linked to business priorities, and staff development and performance appraisal are taken seriously. There is a climate of staff openness and involvement within the Area.
- \* The Area's handling of cases involving youth offenders generally is a strength.
- \* The quality of letters written to victims where a case has been dropped or charge substantially reduced is high, but only a low proportion of the relevant cases are identified and letters actually sent and some of these are late. Consideration of, and applications for, Special Measures to enhance the quality of the evidence of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses needs to be more timely.
- \* The structure of the Area and its deployment of staff effectively deliver its business and this is regularly reviewed.

- \* The Area has developed an ethos of strong budgetary management and there is a strong culture of providing value for money, albeit competing demands on available resources are causing problems in keeping within budget, and further efficiencies need to be sought.

An Executive Summary of the Report is also available.

### **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. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Wiltshire was a full one. The Area was previously reported on in September 2002.
3. The Area serves the area covered by Wiltshire Constabulary. It has one office based at Chippenham where the Area Headquarters (Secretariat), the Criminal Justice Unit and the Trial Unit are based. The Area covers four magistrates' courts and its cases go to four Crown Court venues.
4. At the time of the inspection CPS Wiltshire employed the equivalent of 48.5 full time staff (this figure includes a number of part-time staff).
5. In the year ending September 2004, the Area handled approximately 12,239 cases in the magistrates' courts, 711 in the Crown Court, and advice was given to the police before charge in a further 2,431 cases, equivalent to 16.6% of the Area's total caseload.
6. Before visiting the Area between 1 - 5 November 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 110 cases drawn from both 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. The team was assisted during the on-site by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.

7. CPS National Initiatives

(i) Charging Scheme (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, that the CPS will determine the decision to charge offenders in the more serious cases. Shadow charging arrangements are in place in CPS Areas; the statutory scheme will have a phased roll-out, firstly across priority Areas and subsequently all 42.

(ii) Effective Trial Management Programme

This initiative, involving all criminal justice agencies working together, aims to reduce the number of ineffective trials by improving case preparation and progression from the point of charge through to the conclusion of a case.

(iii) No Witness: No Justice

This is a project to improve witness care: to give them 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 will be introduced into all CPS Areas by December 2005.

8. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

9. For further information, please contact Deborah Peters (telephone 01904 545488; e-mail: Deborah.Peters@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Michael Fogg (telephone 020 7210 1143, mobile: 07901 846346 email: Michael.Fogg@cps.gsi.gov.uk) at HMCPSI.