

Press Notice

Embargoed until 00:01 14 March 2006



CPS Avon and Somerset

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSi) has today published its Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) of CPS Avon and Somerset.

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in fourteen aspects of work, five of which are categorised as critical. Each of the aspects 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 Avon and Somerset was **Fair**.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the fourteen aspects:

Critical Aspects	Assessment
Pre-charge decision-making	Good
Ensuring successful outcomes	Good
Leadership	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair
Managing resources	Poor
Other Defining Aspects	
Managing magistrates' courts cases	Good
Managing Crown Court cases	Good
Handling sensitive cases and hate crimes	Good
Custody time limits	Poor
Disclosure	Good
Presenting and progressing cases at court	Good
Delivering change	Fair
Managing performance to improve	Fair
Securing community confidence	Good

The critical aspects are those which have a particularly significant impact on the overall performance of a CPS Area. They are weighted differently from the other aspects in determining the overall performance of an Area.

The quality and timeliness of casework is improving following the implementation of the Effective Trial Management Programme by the Area and its criminal justice partners. In the magistrates' courts, the rate of ineffective trials (i.e. cases listed for a contested hearing which do not proceed on the day fixed but are postponed) was lower than the national average. In the Crown Court, cases are also dealt with satisfactorily and the

quality of casework is monitored although the rate of ineffective trials in the Crown Court was higher than the national average.

Statutory charging was implemented in July 2004 and, although not all the expected benefits have been realised, the overall picture is positive. However, there have been some problems over the accuracy of recording systems. There are indications that monitoring procedures for cases subject to a custody time limit are improving following a series of failures.

The Area's performance management system is being developed and the quality of some data could be improved. Similarly, budgetary and financial planning could be better informed in some respects, with priority given to the achievement of value for money. The establishment of witness care units has improved witness care generally, although timeliness in sending letters to victims informing them of decisions to drop or materially alter charges can be substantially improved.

Staff engage widely with the local community and managers are seeking to improve systems for evaluating the business benefits of their activity.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

“Most aspects of casework handled by CPS Avon and Somerset are good and there is active collaboration with criminal justice partners to achieve improvement. It is encouraging to see a strong commitment from all staff to engage with the community. The Area faces a number of management challenges and needs to strengthen further its approach to resource and performance management and improve data quality.”

The report is now available to journalists on an embargoed basis by visiting the Inspectorate's website (www.hmcpai.gov.uk) which contains an embargoed section for the media. It may be accessed by using the following details:

- Username: MEDIA
- Password: OPAS2

For further information, please contact HMCPAI Communications Section, on 020 7210 1143. If the query relates to the CPS, contact Tony Muir, Communications Officer, on 0117 930 2811.

Notes to Editors

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPISI) was established as an independent statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, on 1 October 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

The Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) report is based on assessments and judgments that have been made by HMCPISI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPISI assessments, and by assessment under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise included visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a seven month period between June and December 2005.

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 aspects, 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. The inspectorate will use this information to determine where best to focus its resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the CPS Areas, and CPS HQ, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

CPS Avon and Somerset serves the area covered by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Its main office is based at Bristol. In the year ended March 2005 the Area employed 161.9 full time equivalent staff, and handled 43,969 cases, which included 11,064 (25.2%) where advice was given to the police before charge.

This press release and the report in relation to CPS Avon and Somerset should be read in conjunction with HMCPISI's national press release and the summative report which provides an overall performance assessment in relation to all 42 CPS Areas. These are also available on HMCPISI's website in the embargoed sections. Twenty-two of the reports were published in December 2005 to avoid an unacceptably long lapse between assessment and publication. Those relating to the remaining twenty Areas are published today.