

## Press Notice

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Tuesday 19 December 2006



### AREA EFFECTIVENESS REPORT ON CPS DEVON AND CORNWALL.

*The Area has a clear vision of where it is going and performance is improving.*

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Devon and Cornwall (the Area).

The Area has made significant improvements since the HMCPsi Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) in July 2005 when it was assessed as poor. Inspectors found that the Area had taken positive action to address key aspects of performance, in particular which had pulled it down in the OPA process; and that its direction of travel is now one of improvement.

The main findings were:

- Case decision-making, the handling of most Crown Court casework and sensitive cases and hate crimes are good and other aspects of casework have improved. Nevertheless, new initiatives and the change programme are impacting on time available for staff to deliver key aspects of casework to the appropriate standard.
- The Area's performance in securing successful outcomes is good, although the effectiveness at the key intermediate stages need to be improved significantly, in particular the timeliness of summary trial and committal preparation as well as the quality of instructions to counsel.
- The Area's migration to statutory charging, with advice being provided at four out of seven charging centres was a considerable achievement. However, the proportion of cases where face-to-face pre charge advice is given could be increased. Lawyers need to be more proactive at the charging stage and the quality of action plans could be improved.
- The Area performance against high level targets is good. Four of the six expected benefits from statutory charging were being realised and the successful outcome rate in the magistrates' courts was better than found nationally. The effective trial rate in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court was particularly good. The level of Crown Court successful outcomes and the Area persistent young offender processing rate (which had been very good) were satisfactory but had declined.
- In leadership and management terms the Area has a clear vision of where it is going, planned through a highly structured change programme. There is a robust governance structure and a clear commitment to corporacy at a senior management level.
- Systems to improve resource and budget management have been developed and there is a comprehensive performance management regime and clear accountability at unit level.

- The geographical size and rurality of Devon and Cornwall means that the travelling times between CPS offices, and to court centres, is such that it is important that downtime at court is used effectively. New video-links at each CPS office will reduce the need to travel to meetings but inadequate facilities and no IT links for CPS staff at magistrates' court centres means that prosecutors are not able to update and review cases, communicate by secure e-mail and make more effective use of any court downtime.
- Area strengths included the new performance regime, the governance arrangements of the change programme and a new comprehensive and inclusive learning and development plan for staff.

The Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said

*“I am pleased to find that managers and staff within the Area have worked hard to improve those aspects of performance which gave the inspectorate concern at the time of the overall performance assessment last year. Equally, the Area is performing well against its key targets, but in order to maintain this it must address the underlying issues we have identified over some aspects of casework handling. The Area is improving, and if managers and staff can sustain this progress, it will ensure that the people of Devon and Cornwall can once again be confident that they have an effective and efficient prosecution service.”*

The full text of the report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPS Inspectorate (telephone 020 7210 1197) and is also available online at [www.hmcp.si.gov.uk](http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk).

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. HMCPSI undertook overall performance assessments (OPAs) of all CPS Areas in 2005 and fourteen aspects of CPS work were assessed in each Area. Areas were rated as EXCELLENT, GOOD, FAIR or POOR and aspects for improvement were highlighted in each Area. In 2005 CPS Devon and Cornwall was assessed as POOR and 39 aspects for improvement were identified.
2. HMCPSI is now conducting two types of Area inspection. A full inspection considers each aspect of Area performance within the inspection framework. A risk based inspection considers in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on HMCPSI's Overall Performance Assessment and other key data.
3. HMCPSI's inspection of CPS Devon and Cornwall was carried out at the same time as a joint inspection by the criminal justice inspectorates of Devon and Cornwall criminal justice area. This enabled us to draw on a wider range of evidence than would usually be obtained.
4. CPS Devon and Cornwall serves the area covered by the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. It has four offices, Exeter (two offices), Plymouth and Truro. The Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is based at Exeter.

5. Area business is divided on functional lines between Magistrates' Court Units (MCU) and Crown Court Units (CCU). There is one MCU and CCU at each office, except that at which the Secretariat is based.

6. The three offices resource face-to-face charging advice at four (Cambourne, Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay) of the seven police charging centres.

7. At the time of the inspection in September 2006, the Area employed the equivalent of 123.3 full-time staff.

8. 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 the CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.

An Executive Summary of the report accompanies this Press Notice. For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 348.

Embargoed copies of the Summary, this Press Release, and the full Report are available on the website at: [www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml](http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml). User ID is MEDIA and the Password is pressReports.

Promoting Improvement in Criminal Justice

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