



HMCPST INSPECTION OF VICTIM AND WITNESS PERFORMANCE IN GWENT AND SOUTH WALES

Good outcomes but improvements in victim and witness care could be made say Inspectors

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPST) have found CPS Cymru-Wales performance concerning victim and witnesses in Gwent and South Wales is good and looked at the effectiveness of partnership working, CPS processes, systems and quality checks to identify good practice.

HM Chief Inspector, Michael Fuller QPM, said:

"Ensuring victims and witnesses have effective processes to support them are critical because victims and witnesses are essential to the delivery of justice. Without them, offenders cannot be prosecuted or the innocent acquitted.

"We found that that there was a strong commitment to supporting victims and witnesses and this was evidenced in some good performance and outcomes. However there still remains a need for improvement in several aspects. Of particular concern is the need for CPS managers to engage more effectively and consistently with witness care unit."

Summary of findings:

- Performance outcomes including conviction rates and witness attendance rates are better than the national average. Letters sent to victims are of a satisfactory standard and are written by the lawyer directly involved in the case resulting in a more comprehensive explanation.
- There is a clear commitment by the CPS to inter-agency arrangements aimed at improving the experience of victims and witnesses. Innovative examples of partnership working were found including the use of live links into court for victims and witnesses living in remote areas.
- Applications for special measures, such as court video links, were often being made late which can be a cause of anxiety for victims and witnesses.
- The use of witness summons is higher than the national average indicating that the use of summons may be disproportionate. Concerns were made that the default position of the Area was to summons any witnesses who indicated they would not or would be reluctant to attend court, rather than apply CPS policy to each individual case.
- Meeting with victims or their families in appropriate cases was made in only half of the applicable cases examined which is of concern.
- Victim personal statements (VPS), allowing the victim to express how the crime has affected them, needs to be better monitored.
- The relationship and visibility of CPS managers with witness care units is weak. There are recurring issues of concern that should be addressed through effective communication channels.

Inspectors identified five key recommendations for improvement and one area of good practice.

ends

Notes to editors

1. Media enquiries: 020 7271 2484 or russell.hayes@attorneygeneral.gsi.gov.uk
2. The full report can be found at www.hmcpsi.gov.uk
3. The CPS word for its regional divisions is spelt Area, with a capital 'A'
4. The inspection undertook field visits to various CPS/WCU offices within South Wales and Gwent. We conducted interviews with a wide range of staff, police and Victim Support.
5. We examined 60 letters sent out to victims in compliance with the direct communication with victims (DCV) scheme and looked at the timeliness and processes around the DCV system. A further 20 applicable files were examined where the CPS should have met with the victim or bereaved family members.
6. We examined 50 case files from South Wales which were part of our annual casework examination programme (ACEP) for 2013.
7. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate is an independent statutory body established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into force on 1 October 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.