

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **CPS CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Cambridgeshire. The inspection coincided with some heavy demands on the Service, arising out of the Soham murder case and a major drugs operation. Despite these demands, there has been significant improvement in the quality of its Crown Court casework since the last report in November 2000. Other criminal justice system partners regard it as well able to handle the most serious casework.

Whilst the Inspectors understood the priority given to Crown Court work it appeared to have come in part at the expense of work in the magistrates' courts. There has been progress on important issues such as co-location of CPS and police staff (which has brought tangible benefits in the form of better police file quality, better understanding between the two organisations and more accurate charging). These benefits are not yet however being translated into consistently good results in the lower court. Performance management has recently been strengthened to address this but there is still some way to go. A culture change is required in the Criminal Justice Units which handle magistrate's court work, to get away from a production-line approach and to make case ownership a reality.

The demands of the serious casework had combined with some shortfalls in staffing to create significant pressure. Inspectors noted that many staff had shown a committed and flexible approach in order to meet these demands.

There is a solid foundation in relationships with other agencies with an all round commitment to improve. The CPS and police have worked well together to overcome the inevitable disruption in establishing the co-located units. Despite the challenges, there was a degree of optimism that co-location, improved staffing levels and the formation of the Local Criminal Justice Board would bring further progress in 2003.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“The pleasing features of this report are the good standard of the Crown Court casework and the progress made in progressing the co-location of police and CPS staff who will handle magistrates’ courts work. I hope that the latter will enable our concerns about the more routine work in the magistrates courts to be addressed. It is important that there should be a uniformly good standard.”

**Specific findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- The quality of Crown Court case preparation is good. Serious and sensitive matters in the magistrates’ and youth court are also well handled. Many of the more routine cases progress through the magistrates’ courts without timely initial or adequate continuing review, a problem associated with an excessive use of agents in the courts and general lack of file ownership. These problems are resulting in a high rate of acquittals and cases being dismissed at the close of the prosecution case. Inspectors considered that many adverse outcomes were foreseeable and more could have been done to avoid them.
- Inspectors found effective systems in Crown Court cases to record the progress of decisions concerning disclosure of unused material however in magistrates’ court cases there were some inconsistencies of approach.
- The overall standard of advocacy in the Crown Court is good; counsel appearing were of appropriate seniority and HCAs were being effectively deployed. However too many court sessions in the magistrates courts are being covered by agents whose performance can be more variable.

- The Area has achieved a significantly lower number of ineffective (adjourned) trials than the national figure. However the figure for cracked trials (where cases are fixed for trial and either acceptable late pleas occur or the prosecution is discontinued) is slightly worse.
- The time taken for progressing PYOs (Persistent Young Offenders) from charge to sentence is improving although the Area has still not achieved the national target of 71 days. The Area has a Case Progression Officer for these cases and has taken the lead among other CJS agencies in Cambridgeshire in addressing the issue.
- The quality of witness care is good, and staff do all they can to assist witnesses at court. However, the Area, in liaison with the police, needs to do more to identify vulnerable witnesses at an early stage and be more pro-active in involving the Witness Service or Victim Support in their care to ensure they come to court and give the best evidence they can.
- Whilst some progress has been made in implementing an effective performance management system the appointment of a dedicated performance manager (based in the CPS premises) as part of the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) should prove beneficial.
- Many aspects of people management are handled well and this was reflected in the findings of the staff survey. The Area has clearly had a challenging year as a result of staff on maternity leave and substantial demands arising from a large drugs operation and the Soham murder case. Many staff have shown a committed and flexible approach to the additional work needed as a result.
- A clear direction and vision for the future is now needed. The Area has achieved a considerable amount of progress in the handling of Crown Court casework. The situation is less positive in the management of magistrates' courts work, although the setting up of the co-located units has been a major success.

The Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Responding to the report, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Richard Crowley , said:

“I welcome the report and findings of the Inspectorate, particularly their recognition of the significant improvements achieved by staff since the time of the last inspection in report in 2000.

“The last two years have been a period of massive structural and organisational change as we have striven to reposition CPS Cambridgeshire to take account of the increasing demands on the criminal justice system.

“Like the Inspectors, my staff and I recognise that more needs to be done and that of course there remains room for improvement. We intend to meet that challenge.”

### **Notes to Editors**

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the reorganised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS 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 either be full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Cambridgeshire was an intermediate rather than a full inspection.
3. CPS Cambridge has divided its business along functional lines between magistrates’ courts and Crown Court work. It has offices in Huntingdon, and shares police accommodation in co-located magistrates’ court units at Cambridge and Peterborough.
4. The area covers magistrates’ courts at Huntingdon, Cambridge, Peterborough. Ely and Wisbech, and Crown Courts at Cambridge and Peterborough.
5. CPS Cambridgeshire employs the equivalent of 59.2 full time staff.
6. In the year to 31 March 2002 the Area handled 10,167 defendants in the magistrates’ courts and 1294 defendants in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 523 cases.

7. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 150 cases. The team visited the Area for two weeks in December 2002. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, 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.
8. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service 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 the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
9. For further information, please contact either Jane Gould at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1165; email [Jane.gould@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.gould@cps.gsi.gov.uk)) or Gill Bremner at CPS Cambridgeshire (tel: 01480 825204).