

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS NORFOLK

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Norfolk.

CPS Norfolk has historically been a stable and well-performing Area. Inspectors found that this has continued and that all staff are contributing to deliver a high quality of service to the local community. The standard of casework demonstrated in the file sample mirrored or exceeded that revealed in national performance outcomes.

Particularly commendable was the strong element of case ownership and responsibility in the magistrates' courts work which was reflected in the quality of initial review (the consideration and analysis of cases), and continuing review. Cases are well prepared and there was very good overall compliance with the prosecution obligation of disclosure at the primary stage. In certain categories of cases however, secondary disclosure requires reinvigoration by all parties involved, and the CPS should be taking the initiative. The quality of instructions to counsel also requires attention.

Inspectors considered the quality of advocacy and witness care to be very good, to the credit of lawyers and caseworkers. The Areas staff are well regarded locally for their professionalism, commitment and standard of performance. Administrative staff are enthusiastic and keen to improve performance.

There has been less progress in Norfolk towards the reforms recommended by the Review of the CPS (the Glidewell Review) than in some other Areas. Although there are firm plans for the police and CPS to share premises, there will be no integration of staff. Whilst current systems work well, the Area needs to clarify and communicate its strategy for the future.

More focused performance management is needed. Staff need to be sure what is being measured and why. Inspectors found some examples of inaccurate or incomplete information. Joint performance management with the police is working well and the Area is drawing appropriate lessons from adverse cases.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“The most notable feature of this report is the consistency of the quality of the work of CPS Norfolk. The credit for that goes to managers and staff alike. I also welcome the Area’s obvious commitment to the important principle of continuous improvement.”

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * Decisions and steps taken as part of the initial and continuing review of cases, including legal reasoning, were well documented on files in the vast majority of cases;
- * File ownership and a ‘duty lawyer’ system ensure that cases are ready to proceed both in the magistrates’ and Crown Court. Pre-trial reviews and plea and directions hearings were effective and directions complied with. However, the Area needs to introduce systematic pre-trial checks in the magistrates’ court and a system for chasing late committal files in relation to Crown Court work;
- * The Area handled sensitive cases effectively and when necessary robustly. The Area’s firm handling of domestic violence cases is enhancing the standing of the CPS with members of other criminal justice agencies and the wider community;

- * The handling of primary disclosure to the defence has improved considerably since the last inspection. However, the handling of secondary disclosure in the Crown Court is not always thorough and needs attention;
- * Case presentation in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court is of a very good standard. Low agent usage and case ownership and responsibility in the magistrates' court have contributed to this. The Area's caseworkers are experienced and competent and deliver a very good service to the courts, witnesses and counsel. The deployment of Higher Court Advocates (lawyers authorised to handle a wide range of cases in the Crown Court) has increased but could be developed further;
- * The Area has made substantial efforts to engage more closely with victims and witnesses and has a good working relationship with the Witness Service. However, they need to liaise more closely when dealing with sensitive and vulnerable witnesses in the magistrates' court;
- * The Area's performance against national targets is good but there is a lack of understanding as to the value of some of the data being collected, and its analysis was of variable quality. Joint performance work with the police was very good;
- * The Area has appropriate controls and systems to ensure it stays within budget and is able to appreciate its financial position. It has been allocated a significant increase in budget next year and planning was underway to utilise this funding;
- * There are very positive relationships between all criminal justice agencies, and on the few occasions problems arise they are discussed in an open, effective and constructive manner;
- * The Area is in the early stages of engaging with the community to improve public confidence. Further steps have been identified to help raise its profile.

Responding to the report, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Peter Tidey, said:

“The report is a fair reflection of the quality of our casework and identifies areas for improvement. It is particularly pleasing that the Inspectorate has identified the professionalism and efforts of all the staff and the public of Norfolk should be reassured by the high casework standards and our commitment to improvement. I will now be considering with my management team how further structural changes may assist to enhance performance.”

The Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the 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 Norfolk was an intermediate rather than a full inspection.
3. CPS Norfolk has an office in Norwich. The office covers six magistrates' courts and one Crown Court centre.
4. CPS Norfolk employs the equivalent of 73.2 full time staff.
5. In the year to December 2002 the Area handled 18,798 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 1,454 defendants in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 1,307 cases.
6. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 70 cases. The team visited the Area for one week in March 2003. 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.
7. 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.
8. For further information, please contact either Heather Minshull at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1166; e-mail: Heather.Minshull@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Julia Ward at CPS Norfolk (tel: 01603-693009; e-mail: Julia.Ward@cps.gsi.gov.uk).