

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS WEST MERCIA

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

Inspectors found that the Area has improved a number of aspects of its performance since the last inspection report (published in July 2000) and was committed to the principle of continuous improvement in all aspects of its work. Generally, the quality of casework decision-making was good. The Area has taken some positive steps and initiatives to improve public confidence in the CPS, and in its treatment of victims and witnesses.

However, some aspects of casework handling required improvement. In particular, magistrates' court cases were not always reviewed effectively or properly prepared for trial. This has contributed to a relatively high rate of contested cases not being able to go ahead on the day fixed for trial.

The Area management team has worked hard to maintain a high standard of performance management. It monitors performance quite regularly and produces relevant management information. The Area now needs to make fuller use of this and develop the analysis and sharing of information with its criminal justice system partners as part of a systematic basis to drive up performance across the whole of the criminal justice system. The Area benefits from a clear planning structure and overall provides good quality service to the courts and court users.

More work needs to be undertaken in relation to engaging with all sections of the community. The Area would also benefit from reviewing some aspects of its management of people, including in relation to internal communication issues.

The Area has consistently bettered the Government's 71-day target for dealing with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence (a target shared with all other criminal justice agencies), through successful collaboration with those other agencies.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“The managers and staff must take the credit for what has been achieved. Overall performance is sound and the Area strives continuously to improve its performance.”

Other findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * generally, the quality of decision-making is sound, particularly in relation to the initial review of cases, although performance in relation to the review and preparation of cases coming to trial in the magistrates' courts needs to be addressed as improvement is needed;
- * Area performance in relation to compliance with the prosecution's duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence has improved, but better performance is still needed particularly in relation to secondary disclosure;
- * although the quality of instructions to counsel in Crown Court cases has improved since the last inspection, a significant proportion are not satisfactory and there is a need for further improvement; there has also been an improvement in the timeliness of service of committal papers and of instructions to counsel;
- * the standard of CPS advocates in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court is satisfactory, but there is concern over the quality of some agents in the magistrates' courts; the Area needs to ensure that advocacy of all prosecution advocates are effectively monitored;

- * the Area generally provides good quality service to the courts and court users, but the standard of service can sometimes be compromised by a lack of proper review or preparation on the part of prosecutors;
- * partnerships with other criminal justice system agencies are relatively well developed; constructive partnership work has led to positive outcomes on court listing practices as well as the introduction of new arrangements to reduce ineffective trials;
- * the Area has fully implemented the ‘Direct Communication with Victims’ initiative, and responsibility for communication with victims has been passed to prosecutors;
- * some significant steps have been taken to achieve engagement with the community, but engagement with minority ethnic groups requires more attention; there is still more work to be done, in partnership, to promote race equality across the Area as required by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Area will wish to build upon its contact with relevant groups in order to achieve this;
- * the Area demonstrates a responsible attitude to its budget, and has effective processes for monitoring and controlling expenditure;
- * complaints from the public are generally dealt with fully but there is room for more effective analysis and improved timeliness as part of the process of continuous improvement.

Responding to the report, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Jim England, said:

“At a time when expectations placed on criminal justice agencies rightly emphasise the need to work more effectively together, I am encouraged by all aspects of this report. Work has already started to address the recommendations made within it. I am very proud of the efforts of everyone at CPS West Mercia in contributing to our improved 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 West Mercia was an intermediate inspection.
3. CPS West Mercia has offices in Droitwich, Worcestershire, and Shrewsbury, Shropshire. The Area covers ten magistrates' courts and three Crown Court centres.
4. CPS West Mercia employs the equivalent of 105.7 full time staff.
5. In the year 2002 the Area handled 28,686 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 2,079 defendants in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 856 cases.
6. The team of inspectors examined a total of 115 cases. The team visited the Area for two weeks in February and 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 the 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 Sonia Sanson at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1180; e-mail Sonia.sanson@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Sadie O'Hara at CPS West Mercia (tel: 01905 825005).