

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **“GETTING ON THE RIGHT TRACK”**

*A Review of Crown Prosecution Service Handling  
of  
British Transport Police Casework*

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report “Getting on the Right Track” which follows its thematic review of the Crown Prosecution Services handling British Transport Police casework.

The review was undertaken because of concern that the structures of the CPS and BTP are so different that these cases might not always receive the care and attention that they deserve. Inspectors found that, although there was no general issue about the quality of decision-making, there were at each stage of the casework process issues arising as to timeliness, content and quality of files and arrangements for liaison in relation to matters such as discontinuance. The convoluted arrangements for communication between the organisations could have adverse implications for victims and witnesses involved in BTP cases. There is a lack of comprehensive or cohesive mechanisms to deal with such issues.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, said:

“We realise that the very different structures both geographical and administrative, of the CPS and British Transport Police have been major reasons and impediments to successful communication and casework handling between the two agencies. There are some effective local initiatives to overcome the difficulties. What is needed now is a national drive to create a sound communication and liaison structure to tackle the issues that both sides recognise exist.”

Main findings of the inspectorate included:

- \* that despite the strong drive towards joined up working and partnerships across the criminal justice agencies, British Transport Police have not been incorporated into these arrangements at national or local levels and its interests are not represented by other agencies;
- \* a lack of communication or structure at national level between the CPS and British Transport Police. This impacts both on the strategic criminal justice system partnerships as well as liaison at local levels;
- \* that the majority of cases emanating from British Transport Police fell within the low to medium level of seriousness. However, the nature of the offending is precisely the sort that causes anxiety to the public and can undermine confidence in the CJS if not dealt with firmly and effectively;
- \* local liaison to achieve that is add hoc, with varying standards and effectiveness with no one having a overview to the overall quality;
- \* a lack of national engagement with BTP on the introduction of the shadow charging scheme but steps are now being taken to establish a more formal arrangement in London and an initial minute has been issued to CCPs. There has been a presumption that BTP officers will use those charging centres already established with local police forces but more guidance will be needed;

- \* no evidence to suggest that BTP cases are handled any differently from those of regional police forces and there was no general issue about the quality of decision making. Equally the service offered by individual officers is not overall different from that provided by regional officers. However, at each stage of the casework process issues arise as to timeliness, content and quality. The concern is the lack of comprehensive or cohesive mechanisms, such as joint performance management, to deal with these issues;
- \* a drive within the CJS to improve the standard of care given to victims and witnesses. The issue of timely warning of witnesses and accurate routing of witness requirement notices is important, particularly where they may be widely dispersed, as occurs with BTP cases. Accurate and timely information on the progress of a case, particularly where a case is dropped or charges substantially altered, also needs to be provided to BTP. Victims will often approach the officer in the case in the first instance and public confidence is undermined when the officer is unable to give accurate information;
- \* that there has been no joint training between the agencies as there has with other police forces e.g. on the handling of unused material, even on the recent introduction of new joint operational instructions. There is a need to identify and deal with training issues. Such would have wider communication benefits for both agencies;

Other findings by the Inspectorate included the need for:

- \* identification of the causes and rectification of problems caused by misrouting and delay in transfer systems for casefiles between the agencies;
- \* effective and expedited communication about file content and presentation;
- \* effective consultation on cases proposed to be discontinued and accurate, timely notification of cases dropped at court, with the reasons;
- \* consideration of joint training on the revised joint operational instructions for handling unused material;

- \* proper mechanisms to be put in place with BTP to address the various file preparation and quality issues that exist at each stage of file submission;
- \* timely provision of witnesses' availability for court together with early notification of witnesses required to attend;
- \* CPS, as part of an overall closer engagement strategy, to consider with the BTP the issues that would benefit from joint training, and how it might be implemented.

A copy of the executive summary of the report is attached to this press release.

### **Notes to Editors**

- 1 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service decided to undertake this review of how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) deals with cases originating from the British Transport Police (BTP), following consultation with the Director of Public Prosecutions, and with the agreement of the Law Officers.
- 2 The inspection took place between August and October 2003. The inspection team examined the relationship between the agencies and effectiveness of case handling practices and in particular at:
  - \* The administrative and management structures of BTP and CPS;
  - \* Identification, routing and tracking of files;
  - \* Liaison and contact arrangements;
  - \* Effect of national initiatives both in casework and communication terms;
  - \* Standards of service delivery;
  - \* Performance management;
  - \* Victim and witness issues; and
  - \* Training issues
- 3 Inspectors used the following approach:
  - \* Questionnaires to each of the 42 CPS Areas;
  - \* Interviews with the heads of the BTP AJUs (including Bristol);
  - \* On site visits to eight CPS Areas providing a representative cross section including interviews with CPS staff in those Areas;
  - \* On site examination of BTP files;
  - \* Interviews with staff from CPS headquarters; and
  - \* Advocacy observation at Horseferry Magistrates' Court, which deals with cases from London, including London Underground

- 4 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. For further information please contact Annette Vaughan at HMCPS Inspectorate (Tel: 020 7210 1171; e-mail: [Annette.vaughan@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Annette.vaughan@cps.gsi.gov.uk)).