

# Press Release

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## HMCPsi overall performance assessment of CPS Bedfordshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Bedfordshire (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The Area is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings.

The overall performance assessment of CPS Bedfordshire was FAIR.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

CRITICAL ASPECTS	Assessment Level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of Travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Poor	Good	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	Fair	Improved <sup>1</sup>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Fair	Stable <sup>2</sup>
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Fair	Declined
Leadership	Fair	Fair	Improved <sup>1</sup>
<b>Overall Critical Assessment Level</b>		<b>FAIR</b>	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	Fair	Stable
Disclosure	Fair	Fair	Stable
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Stable
Delivering change	Fair	Fair	Improved <sup>1</sup>
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Good	Improved
Securing community confidence	Poor	Fair	Improved
<b>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>POOR</b>	<b>FAIR</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Although the assessment for this aspect remains unchanged there has been significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the band.

<sup>2</sup> The management of cases in the Crown Court remains good, but the consideration of outcomes in this OPA has reduced the assessment to 'Fair'.

Some aspects have been categorised as critical; this is due to the significant impact that they have on the overall performance of a CPS Area and the service it delivers to the public.

Since the last OPA, CPS Bedfordshire's overall rating has improved. It has improved in six aspects, two of which are critical, and remained stable in six. Performance has declined in only one aspect, but this was a critical one.

The Area has made significant progress in realising the benefits of statutory charging<sup>3</sup> since the last OPA, with a commitment to providing a high level of face-to-face consultations with the police. The quality of decision-making is generally good and the overall successful outcomes rate has improved, particularly in the magistrates' courts, although for 2006-07 it remained below the national average.

Sensitive cases and hate crimes are dealt with appropriately and the rate of unsuccessful outcomes for hate crimes has improved significantly, although it remains higher than (i.e. not as good as) the national average.

The Area has worked hard, together with the police, to improve its performance in relation to compliance with the prosecution's duty of disclosure in relation to unused material. Although procedures have been tightened up, there is still room for substantial improvement.

The effective trial rate in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court was better than the national average in 2006-07. The number of adjournments per case in the magistrates' courts is slightly higher than the national average. There is good case progression in the Crown Court.

The speed with which persistent young offenders are dealt with has fluctuated and there is a need for the Area to take further steps with the other criminal justice agencies to improve timeliness between arrest and sentence.

CPS Bedfordshire has taken steps to develop a community engagement strategy, and there has been an improvement in public confidence in the ability of the local criminal justice agencies in bringing offenders to justice. There are positive perceptions held by victims and witnesses who have had contact with the criminal justice system in the courts. However, letters are not always sent to victims when proceedings are dropped or the charge changed substantially, although those that are sent are timely.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

*"CPS Bedfordshire has worked hard to improve its performance. The Area has made good progress in relation to statutory charging and has improved its casework results. It has also made progress in engaging with the community, but needs to improve its service to victims and witnesses by ensuring that letters are sent to victims in all appropriate cases."*

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<sup>3</sup> A statutory scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge (previously a police responsibility) in all except minor cases.

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

This Press Release should be read in conjunction with the Report itself (which contains an integral summary).

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

### **Notes to Editors**

- 1 HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
- 2 The OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPSI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPSI findings and by measurement under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise will include visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period, between June-December 2007. Each Area is rated 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'.
- 3 The Inspectorate uses an assessment model which is designed to give pre-eminence to the ratings for 'critical' aspects of work as drivers for the final overall performance level. Assessments for the critical aspects are overlaid by ratings in relation to the other defining ones, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.
- 4 This exercise is not a full inspection and differs from traditional inspection activity. While it is designed to set out comprehensively the positive aspects of performance and those requiring improvement, it intentionally avoids being a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning performance. However, it is designed to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed.
- 5 CPS Bedfordshire serves the area covered by the Bedfordshire Police. Its main office is based at Luton. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 61.9 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 9,631 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,220 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 2,730 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Bedfordshire are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.