

Inspection of the Counter Terrorism Division of CPS Headquarters

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCP*SI*) has today published its report on the inspection of the Counter Terrorism Division (CTD) of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Headquarters. The majority of CTD's work relates to terrorist offences but it also handles all cases of inciting racial or religious hatred, war crimes, genocide, prosecutions under the Official Secrets Acts and hijacking.

The key findings of the inspection were that:

- The quality of decision-making is very good. Cases are prepared for court and managed to a high standard and well presented in court by experienced advocates. The division received praise for the arrangements made to enable families of victims and survivors of the London bombings of 7 July 2005 to view the trial by remote television link.
- CTD is highly regarded within the CPS and by its external criminal justice partners, including those representing foreign jurisdictions.

Other findings include:

- Lawyers are involved in the preliminary stages of cases providing early investigative advice to the police and intelligence agencies. The records of review decisions are clear and detailed.
- There is a strong culture of case 'ownership' encouraged and supported by senior managers. Lawyers undertake all initial and most intermediate court hearings in their cases and have assisted leading counsel to prosecute trials.
- Cases are prepared and managed to a high standard. Court orders and directions are complied with on time and cases are ready to proceed on the trial date.
- The electronic presentation of evidence through computer related images has proved beneficial in simplifying issues and reducing the length of trials.
- Communications with victims and their families and meetings to explain decisions are appropriately sensitive. Witness care at court is dealt with by the police to a large extent although the division's lawyers identify witness needs at an early stage and substantial efforts are made to assist them to give their evidence, often overcoming significant obstacles, particularly in respect of those from foreign jurisdictions.
- The importance of CTD's work ensures that it is adequately funded and resources are effectively managed and accounted for.
- Cases are generally large and complex, although overall numbers are small. The division's electronic case management system does not fully meet its requirements and its use for recording casework information is limited. CTD senior managers are informed of progress in individual cases on a monthly basis. Case conferences are held after every trial to learn lessons.
- Staff approach their work in a dedicated and professional manner, working long hours where necessary.

- Senior managers provide effective leadership. They are highly regarded by staff, CPS colleagues and external partners at national and international level for their work and for the training and assistance provided to foreign jurisdictions.
- Community engagement is focussed where needed and activity is diverse and frequent.

Inspectors identified five strengths in the division's performance and two aspects of good practice. Managers are ready to address the four recommendations and one aspect for improvement made in the report to strengthen performance further.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

"This is one of the most positive reports that HMCPSI has produced. Overall, Counter Terrorism Division undertakes its role to an exceptionally high standard. It is particularly reassuring given the crucial role that Counter Terrorism Division has in ensuring national security. Effective leadership and dedicated staff have combined well to produce high quality casework and case presentation together with appropriate sensitive treatment of victims and witnesses."

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself and the executive summary which is integral to it and also available separately.

Notes to editors

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.

This inspection included detailed scrutiny of finalised case files and some current cases were observed at court.

CTD was set up in 2005 as one of three separate divisions (along with Special Crime and Organised Crime) within Central Casework, which replaced the Casework Directorate. There is a Head of Division for each of the three, who report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The divisions provide centres of excellence and deal with those complex, serious and sensitive cases that for operational or resource reasons are better dealt with by CPS Headquarters rather than by individual areas.

Cases are usually referred to CTD directly by investigators or, in some cases, by CPS areas under referral guidelines. A large number are referred at a very early stage, well before any question of charging arises. The division has handled the prosecutions arising from the London bombings of 7 July 2005 and provided advice in relation to the killing of Alexander Litvinenko.