

Press Release

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HMCPsi overall performance assessment of CPS Cambridgeshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Cambridgeshire (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 Cambridgeshire was GOOD.

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 | Good | Fair | Declined |
| Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts | Good | Good | Stable |
| Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court | Good | Good | Stable |
| The service to victims and witnesses | Good | Fair | Declined |
| Leadership | Good | Good | Stable |
| Overall Critical Assessment Level | | GOOD | |
| Progressing cases at court | Good | Good | Stable |
| Sensitive cases and hate crime | Fair | Good | Improved |
| Disclosure | Good | Good | Stable |
| Custody time limits | Fair | Fair | Stable |
| Delivering change | Good | Good | Stable |
| Managing resources | Good | Good | Stable |
| Managing performance to improve | Fair | Fair | Stable |
| Securing community confidence | Fair | Fair | Stable |
| OVERALL ASSESSMENT | GOOD | GOOD | |

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 conducted in 2005 one aspect has improved, two have declined and all others have remained stable. Cambridgeshire has the capacity to improve if it can build upon the strengths its restructure is proving to have; become consistent and robust in respect of its case quality assurance; build capacity into securing community confidence; overhaul the direction of Area and partnership plans by addressing the No Witness No Justice minimum requirements; and ensure the custody time limit procedures comply with its own comprehensive policy.

The main findings of the report are:

- The proportion of successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts has improved since the last OPA and is ahead of national performance. This is mainly due to a substantial reduction in the proportion of magistrates' courts discontinuances.
- The proportion of successful outcomes in the Crown Court has fallen since the last OPA, although it appears to be recovering from a dip in 2005-06. The Area performs relatively well on timeliness.
- The proportion of sensitive and hate crime cases that result in an unsuccessful outcome has been reduced. These cases are conducted by lawyers, caseworkers and advocates of appropriate experience. Child protection issues are taken seriously and there is a good track record in dealing with high profile child abuse cases.
- There is a comprehensive custody time limit policy that incorporates national policy and some elements of good practice. The Area champion has an ongoing training programme. However our 'reality check' of files revealed that the policy was not always adhered to.
- Whilst it is clear the Area is committed to improving the service to victims and witnesses, overall this has deteriorated. The No Witness No Justice project needs to be formally reviewed so that the Area has a better understanding of whether it is meeting the minimum standards required.
- The Area has felt unable to engage with the community in a proactive way; its focus has been to improve operational and performance issues. Some worthwhile activity has been conducted on an ad-hoc basis rather than by a co-ordinated approach. This passive approach means that Cambridgeshire is unable to identify, target or measure effective community engagement and therefore is less able to demonstrate service improvements through consultation.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"The Area has restructured into combined units with the aim of improving casework by ensuring continuity of handling. While the achievements for 2006-07 have been mixed the Area is sound in most aspects and it is likely that its restructure will improve overall performance."

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 Cambridgeshire serves the area covered by the Cambridgeshire Constabulary. Its main office is based at Huntingdon. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 64.7 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 11,603 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,403 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 3,057 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Cambridgeshire are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.