

Press Release

Embargoed until 00:01 Hrs
Monday 8 October 2007



HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Cumbria

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Cumbria (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 Cumbria 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	Fair	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	Good	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Fair	Fair	Declined ¹
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair	Fair	Stable
Leadership	Fair	Good	Improved
Overall Critical Assessment Level		FAIR	
Progressing cases at court	Fair	Fair	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	Good	Improved
Disclosure	Good	Good	Stable
Custody time limits	Fair	Good	Improved
Delivering change	Fair	Good	Improved
Managing resources	Poor	Fair	Improved
Managing performance to improve	Poor	Good	Improved
Securing community confidence	Fair	Fair	Stable
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	POOR	FAIR	

¹ Although the assessment for this aspect remains unchanged there has been significant decline within the range of performance covered by the band.

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.

Following the last OPA in 2005, CPS Cumbria was rated as 'Poor'. A new Chief Crown Prosecutor, appointed in November 2005, initiated a number of early improvements which led to a more positive Area inspection report a year later. That initial progress has continued and Cumbria has, overall, improved in a number of respects.

Casework performance is generally good, particularly magistrates' courts cases, where the conviction rate has risen, although there has been some decline in the proportion of successful outcomes achieved in the Crown Court. Arrangements for statutory charging² are now embedded and prosecutors are more proactive in their approach to reviewing cases.

The Area has developed a clearer sense of purpose. Financial management has been tightened and the use made of in-house Higher Court Advocates has resulted in savings which have allowed additional lawyers to be recruited. Senior managers work well with their criminal justice partners and have successfully implemented a number of joint projects, including Conditional Cautioning and the opening of a specialist domestic violence court in Carlisle. The implementation of the Criminal Justice: Simple, Speedy, Summary initiative, in the west of the county, has brought significant improvements in the way cases are progressed. The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence continues to be well within the Government's target.

Senior managers are committed to community engagement and, although public confidence in the criminal justice system in Cumbria has declined, levels remain higher than those nationally. The Area successfully piloted the holding of pre-trial interviews with witnesses but there is still a need to work with partners to ensure the needs of victims and witnesses are fully met throughout the prosecution process.

High sickness levels remain a problem. Staff morale continues to improve and the more positive approach will help Cumbria with future challenges.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"The Area has made considerable steps forward since the last OPA and continues to do so. It has successfully implemented a number of new initiatives. There is a more positive approach from senior managers and staff at all levels which will help the Area in the challenges it still faces in bringing about further performance improvements."

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.

² 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.

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

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

Notes to Editors

- 1 HMCPPI 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 HMCPPI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPPI 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 Cumbria serves the area covered by the Cumbria Constabulary. Its main office is based at Carlisle. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 65.1 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 12,946 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,117 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 2,826 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Cumbria are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPPI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.