

**HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Dorset**

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Dorset (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 Dorset 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:

<b>Critical aspects</b>	<b>Assessment level</b>		
	<b>OPA 2005</b>	<b>OPA 2007</b>	<b>Direction of travel</b>
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates’ courts	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Leadership	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
<b>Overall critical assessment level</b>		<b>Fair</b>	
Progressing cases at court	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Disclosure	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Custody time limits	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Delivering change	Good	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Declined</b>
Managing resources	Good	<b>Good</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Managing performance to improve	Fair	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Stable</b>
Securing community confidence	Excellent	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</b>	Good	<b>FAIR</b>	

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 Dorset's overall rating has declined with seven aspects remaining stable and six declining. The problematic areas mainly relate to casework weaknesses and some of the supporting systems and processes. The Area is now putting a greater emphasis on early monitoring of casework which, together with a planned restructuring, should enable it to improve performance.

There are weaknesses in the quality of decision-making at the pre-charge stage, leading to a high rate of cases being discontinued in the magistrates' courts. Decision-making after charge is satisfactory, although the overall successful outcomes rate in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court has deteriorated, and in 2006-07 was below the national average.

Performance in relation to undertaking the duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence is less satisfactory than at the 2005 assessment, and there is limited recording of decisions and actions that have been taken by the prosecutor.

The proportion of effective trials (ie contested cases which proceed on the day fixed for trial) is better than the national average, and performance in the Crown Court is excellent. The overall progress of cases in the magistrates' courts is not good, with more adjournments per case than found nationally and a need to hold more case management hearings than agreed with the courts. The progress of cases is better in the Crown Court, although compliance with court orders is not always prompt.

The speed with which persistent young offenders are dealt with has declined and the Area needs to continue to work with the other criminal justice agencies to improve timeliness between arrest and sentence.

Sensitive cases and hate crimes are dealt with well and the rate of successful outcomes for hate crimes is above the national average.

The service to victims and witnesses has declined and the Area does not always send letters to victims when proceedings are dropped or the charge changed substantially.

Senior managers are committed to engaging with the whole community and there has been an improvement in public confidence in the ability of the local criminal justice agencies in bringing offenders to justice. The work undertaken by CPS Dorset to publish details of racially aggravated prosecutions has seen the number of prosecutions double as more victims and witnesses have felt able to come forward to report racist incidents.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

*"CPS Dorset will need to tackle those aspects of its work which have deteriorated since our 2005 assessment. Some of the decline in casework handling may be tied into weaknesses in supporting systems and processes, which the Area is addressing through restructuring and earlier monitoring of casework. The Area's commitment to engaging with the community is commendable, but it needs to improve its service to victims and witnesses by ensuring that letters are sent to victims in all appropriate 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) and is available on our website at [www.hmcpsi.gov.uk](http://www.hmcpsi.gov.uk).

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

### **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.

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'.

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.

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.

CPS Dorset serves the area covered by the Dorset Police. Its main office is based at Bournemouth. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 59.4 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 11,723 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,204 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 3,801 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Dorset are part of a block of ten reports published today. HMCPSI will publish two further tranches of reports covering the remaining 20 Areas.