

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS DYFED POWYS

Prosecutors Impress Inspectors

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its Report on the inspection of CPS Dyfed Powys.

The inspection team found good standards of casework decision-making and impressive joint work with partners in the criminal justice system, which has contributed to greater numbers of offenders being brought to justice, and reductions in the rate of ineffective trials (cases listed for a contested hearing which do not proceed as such on the day fixed) in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court.

The Area is one of the smallest CPS areas in terms of caseload and staff, but one of the biggest geographically. This brings with it particular challenges, both in terms of its court work, and in responding to the many national initiatives generated by modernisation programmes within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole.

In the light of this, inspectors were impressed by the success of the Area in implementing the various new initiatives, whilst maintaining or improving its casework performance in most respects, and helping to deliver a very good performance in relation to the Local Criminal Justice Board targets for narrowing the justice gap and increasing public confidence. The Dyfed Powys criminal justice area is amongst the best performing areas in relation to rates of ineffective trials and the arrest to sentence time for persistent young offenders. Credit for this goes both to all CPS staff and to the very effective degree of joint working with the Area's criminal justice partners.

Further work will need to be done with police in achieving greater co-location of CPS and police staff, and expanding the scope for providing face-to-face advice to police in the charging scheme, whereby the CPS in the future will take over the statutory responsibility for charging decisions. Inspectors also recommended the greater use of designated caseworkers in the magistrates' courts in order to achieve greater value for money, which will necessitate good liaison with the courts over listing practices.

The Area works well with the Crown Court, even though all its cases are handled at court centres located in other CPS Areas. The low level of ineffective trials achieved, together with a very speedy throughput, are creditworthy. However, inspectors noticed some cost to this in terms of preparation of Crown Court cases, in particular in relation to the standard of undertaking the duty of disclosure of unused material to the defence.

Internally, the Area has experienced staff who provide good standards of service in court and have worked hard to provide higher standards of care to victims and witnesses.

CPS Dyfed Powys is becoming more outward looking, forging links with community groups and starting to reach out through participation in a range of events. Work has been done on equality and diversity issues, but needs to be given some greater impetus within the Area.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, said:

“The Report reflects an impressive performance by CPS Dyfed Powys. Although there are some things which could be improved, the overall picture is one of good quality casework and improving care towards victims and witnesses, as well as sound internal management. The people of Dyfed and Powys can be reassured that they are served by an effective prosecution service”.

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * Casework, including sensitive cases (ie, those involving rape, road traffic cases with fatalities, racially aggravated offences, domestic violence and homophobic crime), is handled confidently, efficiently and effectively, with the exception of the undertaking of the prosecution's duties of disclosure.

- * Lawyers need to address issues and foreseeable difficulties in cases positively and record reasons for decisions and action taken, in order to reduce duplication of work if different lawyers or agents handle trials.
- * Lawyers need to raise their skill level in the use of IT to make full use of the new integrated case management system.
- * The standard of advocacy and presentation at court has traditionally been high. This has been maintained, but the Area needs to expand the use of designated caseworkers and continue with its careful training and selection of agents. The Area will also want to make greater use of its Higher Court Advocates in the Crown Court, when feasible.
- * The Area has responded well to rebalancing the criminal justice system in favour of victims and witnesses. Witness care is generally good and the Area takes extra steps to contact all witnesses in indictable only cases (the most serious categories of case).
- * The Area is overspending its budget and this needs to be addressed.

Responding to the Report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Simon Rowlands, said:

“The outcome of the inspection is extremely encouraging, it is very pleasing that HM Chief Inspector refers to the “impressive performance by Dyfed Powys” which is a reflection of the commitment and the professionalism of all my Colleagues in this Area. CPS Dyfed Powys will continue to work hard to maintain and improve the high standard of its service to the community and criminal justice partners.”

The Executive Summary of the Report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second cycle of Area inspections of the CPS following its restructuring in 1999 as a result of the Glidewell Review. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may either be full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Dyfed Powys was an intermediate one and did not include any observations of advocacy in the Crown Court, and only limited observations in the magistrates' courts. The Area was last reported on in March 2002.
3. Area business is divided along functional lines: there are three Criminal Justice Units (CJUs) for Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Cerdigion, and Newtown, which handle all cases in the magistrates' courts in Powys. There is a Trial Unit at Carmarthen which deals with cases in the Crown Court in Dyfed and another Trial Unit for Crown Court cases in Powys. This second TU is based at Newtown and is a joint unit with the local CJU.
4. At the time of the inspection in March 2004, Dyfed Powys employed the equivalent of 54.9 full time staff.
5. In the year to December 2003, the Area handled 14,069 cases in the magistrates' courts and 800 cases in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 1,294 cases, which was 8.4% of its caseload.
6. Before visiting the Area between 29 March and 2 April 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 114 case files. Inspectors interviewed CPS staff at all levels and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Limited observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
8. For further information, please contact either Graham Thompson at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1154; e-mail: Graham.Thompson@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Jeff Thomas, Area Business Manager at CPS Dyfed Powys (tel: 01267 242109; e-mail: Jeff.Thomas2@cps.gsi.gov.uk).