

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Gloucestershire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Gloucestershire (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 Gloucestershire 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	Fair	Fair	Improved¹
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Fair	Declined
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Good	Stable
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Fair	Declined
Leadership	Fair	Fair	Improved¹
Overall critical assessment level		FAIR	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Fair	Declined
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	Good	Improved
Disclosure	Good	Fair	Declined
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Declined²
Delivering change	Fair	Fair	Stable
Managing resources	Poor	Poor	Improved¹
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Stable
Securing community confidence	Good	Good	Stable
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Fair	FAIR	

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

2 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.

CPS Gloucestershire has made some progress since the last OPA. Performance has improved in four aspects (although three of these remain within the existing assessment band), including two critical, but declined in five (one within the existing band). Performance has remained stable in the four other aspects. This has been achieved against the background of significant changes and uncertainty in the senior management team, but now the Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) and Area Business Manager positions have been confirmed as permanent the Area is in a position to continue its gradually improving trend. This has given the senior management team a greater sense of confidence and optimism, and enabled the CCP to restate his vision and plans for Gloucestershire.

The overall conviction rates in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court have improved since the last OPA, although the rate in the magistrates' courts remains below the national average. Statutory charging has been effectively implemented and the Area has made good progress since taking over from the police responsibility for charging decisions in more serious and contested cases. Decision-making is generally good. However, a need for more robust assessments of witness reliability at the pre-charge stage leads to a proportion of cases being discontinued in both the magistrates' and the Crown Court. There is a relatively high level of pre-charge decisions to take no further action.

Sensitive cases (such as those involving rape, child abuse, racial aggravation and hate crimes) are handled well. The successful outcomes rate for hate crimes is increasing and was significantly higher than the national average in 2006-07.

Compliance with the duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence has declined since the previous OPA. Managers have not yet introduced the use of disclosure record sheets to record decisions and actions taken.

Cases are not always ready for court and they generally take longer to progress through the courts than the national average, but the waiting times for trials in the magistrates' courts have been reduced by determined efforts on the part of senior CPS and court staff. The proportion of ineffective trials (contested cases which do not proceed on the day fixed for trial) needs to improve, but the proportion of effective trials in the Crown Court in 2006-07 was better than nationally. Performance in processing cases involving persistent young offenders had declined but the criminal justice agencies achieved the target of 71 days from arrest to sentence in 2007, and improved significantly until flooding caused delays in case finalisation.

Senior CPS managers have shown a clear commitment to community engagement and the Area has worked with a wide range of community groups. The effectiveness of this needs to be assessed more formally but it has led to improvements in service delivery, for example the development of a Specialist Domestic Violence Court largely came about as a result of CPS involvement with local domestic violence groups.

The No Witness, No Justice initiative to improve the care and support of victims and witnesses has not fulfilled its early promise and, although some progress has been made, significant challenges still remain in relation to the Witness Care Unit. The Area sends letters to victims when proceedings are dropped or the charge changed substantially in a higher proportion of cases than nationally, although they are not always sent promptly.

