

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Inspectors urge CPS Gloucestershire to develop further its working relationship with other criminal justice agencies

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Gloucestershire. Its publication coincides with the publication of the report of a comprehensive joint inspection of Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Area by five inspectorates. (See paragraph 2 of Notes to Editors).

Inspectors found that the quality of decision-making is generally good but needs to be improved in respect of some cases which are discontinued. Most sensitive cases (those involving child abuse, rape, racially aggravated offences and domestic violence) were also well handled. But the Area needs to tighten up on several aspects of its casework handling and introduce more robust systems.

Overall management needs strengthening and there is a need to improve significantly the co-operation between the CPS and other criminal justice agencies.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“There has been some improvement in the performance of CPS Gloucestershire but not to the extent one would have hoped. It has the potential to achieve more. Staff and managers must work more cohesively. The establishment of the Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board presents an opportunity to create more effective working relationships with other criminal justice agencies”.

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * In relation to cases proceeding in the magistrates’ courts, the timeliness of trial preparation is good however the continuing review of these cases could be improved. The late receipt of the evidence and information from the police can hamper the review process.
- * The quality of advocacy is satisfactory, although some agents in the magistrates’ courts could be better prepared. Management action may be needed to strengthen the procedures for instructing agents to enable them to be prepared fully.
- * The performance of CPS Gloucestershire in the processing of persistent young offenders was particularly good. The average time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders is one of the best in the country.
- * Although file management in Crown Court cases was particularly good, there is a need to introduce robust systems for ensuing compliance with directions given by the Court, improve the quality of indictments, instructions to counsel and the timeliness of compliance with the prosecution obligation to disclose unused material to the defence.
- * The Area has been pro-active in developing its work in relation to cases of domestic violence.

- * There is a good working relationship with the Witness Service, although more work needs to be done to improve the provision of certain information. There is a need to improve the timeliness of letters sent out under the Direct Communications with Victims (DCV) scheme.
- * Whilst some progress has been made, overall performance management needs strengthening. There is a need to improve significantly the co-operation between the agencies, and the effectiveness of inter-agency work.
- * Senior managers need to improve staff morale and develop a greater degree of trust, respect and confidence if the Area is to move forward in line with senior management's vision.
- * The Area employs basic financial management and related controls. The management of prosecution costs is poor and a backlog in the payment of counsel's fees needs addressing.
- * CPS Gloucestershire and its criminal justice system partner agencies have developed detailed action plans in relation to their obligations, arising from the national objectives set by the Government for the criminal justice system and the targets adopted locally directed towards achieving these objectives.
- * The Area has adopted a cautious approach to implementing new initiatives. Although some staff recently moved to the police station in Gloucester to accommodate the charging pilot and to move closer to the Glidewell (see paragraph 8 of Notes to Editors) concept of joined up working between CPS and police, there is still more work to be done to fully achieve this goal.
- * The Area has developed good contacts with local minority groups and plays a significant part in addressing racist incidents in the community. The head of the Criminal Justice Unit chairs the Gloucester Racist Incident Group. Additionally the Area has a constructive relationship with the local Racial Equality Council. The Area has recently appointed an Equality and Communication Officer, part of whose remit will be to develop relationships with the local lesbian and gay community.

Chief Crown Prosecutor for CPS Gloucestershire, Withiel Cole said in response to the report:

“I was pleased to see that the Inspectorate found the quality of decision making and the timeliness of summary trial preparation was good and especially encouraged by the recognition given to the way sensitive cases and Youth work was handled. I appreciate however that although the number of recommendations is relatively small they highlight further important work which must be done and I have already taken steps to address the issues the Inspectorate raise.”

The Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the CPS. 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. This inspection of CPS Gloucestershire was carried out in parallel with a pilot joint inspection of the Gloucestershire criminal justice area. That joint inspection was undertaken by HMCPSI in conjunction with HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation. The joint inspection looked in detail at the effectiveness of the interfaces between the criminal justice agencies in Gloucestershire. The HMCPSI report on CPS Gloucestershire must therefore be considered in conjunction with that report which contains more detailed comment about the contribution of CPS Gloucestershire to partnership working.
3. CPS Gloucestershire services the Area covered by the Gloucestershire Constabulary.
4. CPS Gloucestershire employed at the time of the inspection the equivalent of 45.2 full time staff.
5. At the time of the inspection in 2003 the Area handled 12,808 cases in the magistrates' courts and 794 cases in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 447 cases.
6. The Area was the subject of inspection in 2000 and because of the findings a re-inspection in 2001. The reports were published in July 2000 and June 2001 respectively.

7. On this occasion the team visited the Area for two weeks in September 2003. The inspection looked at a sample of files and management information. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and the Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. 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.
8. The reference in the press release to the Glidewell concept is a reference to proposals for integrated working by police and CPS set out in the report of the Review of the Crown Prosecution Service by Sir Iain Glidewell which was published in June 1998.
9. 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 the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
10. For further information, please contact either Tesca Barnett-Osman at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1148; e-mail: Tesca.Banrett-Osman@cps.gsi.gov.uk or Sharon Caesar at CPS Gloucester (tel: 01452 872 402; e-mail: Sharon.Caesar@cps.gsi.co.uk).