

Press Release

Embargoed until 00:01 Hrs
Monday 8 October 2007



HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Lancashire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Lancashire (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 Lancashire was GOOD.

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	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Good	Stable
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Fair	Declined
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
Overall Critical Assessment Level		GOOD	
Progressing cases at court	Fair	Fair	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Good	Stable
Disclosure	Fair	Good	Improved
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Stable
Delivering change	Good	Good	Stable
Managing resources	Fair	Fair	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Good	Good	Stable
Securing community confidence	Good	Good	Stable
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	GOOD	GOOD	

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 Lancashire has maintained its overall good performance since the last OPA. During the intervening period it has experienced a significant increase in caseload, in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court, implemented and piloted new initiatives, and restructured. It has therefore done well to maintain performance in 11 of the 13 aspects inspected.

The standard of decision-making is good and conviction rates in Crown Court cases and in sensitive and hate crime cases are above national levels. In magistrates' courts cases conviction rates are slightly below the national average, although in 2006-07 the Area dealt effectively with over 1,000 cases as conditional cautions, which might otherwise have gone through the courts.

Conditional Cautioning was well implemented, and CPS Lancashire has worked effectively with its criminal justice partners in many respects. Targets for the numbers and value of orders made under the Proceeds of Crime Act have been exceeded; the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence is well within Government targets; and the Area has made a significant contribution to the Lancashire criminal justice area exceeding its target for the number of offences brought to justice.

Some performance needs to be improved, in particular timely preparation and progression of magistrates' courts cases and the service provided to victims and witnesses, where the Area has found it difficult to meet the enhanced standards of witness care now required. It needs to work with criminal justice partners to achieve the necessary improvements. There is a sound management team. Senior managers are committed to engaging with the community and undertake a considerable amount work in this field.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"I am pleased that CPS Lancashire has maintained its good overall performance. It has demonstrated it can deliver improvements in some parts of its work, and appears to have a clear understanding of the barriers to doing so in other aspects. Its capacity to overcome these will depend on robust management of projects, performance and continued, effective partnership working."

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).

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

Notes to Editors

- 1 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.
- 2 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'.
- 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 Lancashire serves the area covered by the Lancashire Constabulary. Its main office is based at Preston. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 229 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 36,488 cases before the magistrates' courts and 4,308 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 11,687 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Lancashire are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.