

Press Notice

Embargoed until 00:01 Hrs
Tuesday 14 August 2007



Area Effectiveness Inspection Report on CPS Leicestershire

Some improvement but a number of challenges still remain

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Leicestershire (the Area).

There have been some important improvements since the HMCPsi overall performance assessment (OPA) in October 2005 when Leicestershire was assessed as "Fair". Inspectors found that the Area had worked hard to address a number of weaknesses outlined in the OPA report. In particular there has been significant improvement in communicating with victims in cases where charges are altered or dropped.

There had also been significant investment to ensure that statutory charging (a scheme whereby the CPS has responsibility for the initial decision to charge – something that was previously a police responsibility) was delivered effectively, realised its potential benefits and delivered efficiencies. Even so, performance against other key targets has mainly deteriorated since the publication of the OPA report.

Improvements have also been made in the way the Area manages and accounts for performance and it needs to complement this by improvements in some of the processes that support casework.

Other main findings were:

- The Area has made good progress since moving to the statutory charging scheme, with a very strong prosecution team ethos developing with the police, improved guilty plea rates and high levels of convictions.

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- The levels of effective trials in the magistrates' courts (33% compared to 43% nationally) and Crown Court (38% compared to 48%) are too low. Weakness in file ownership for cases in the magistrates' courts has hampered performance, although the introduction of a duty lawyer scheme is beginning to improve this.
- Performance in relation to handling cases involving persistent young offenders in 71 days from arrest to sentence is poor, taking 98 days, although inspectors found that there was a renewed focus and a series of recent initiatives was beginning to show some improvement.
- The standard of casework in sensitive and hate crime cases is high and the identification and management of them and quality of decision-making is also good. The Area has recently set up a dedicated domestic violence team to concentrate efforts to handle these cases more consistently and to work in closer partnership with the police and courts.
- There is one Witness Care Unit (which is almost exclusively staffed by police employees). A number of staffing issues in the unit have had a detrimental impact on its performance and the lack of clear expectations between the CPS and the unit has also hampered performance. These issues have been recognised by the Local Criminal Justice Board and plans have been put into place to address concerns.
- The Area had substantially improved the number of letters it sent to victims in cases where charges were dropped or altered, from a compliance rate of 9% in 2004-05 to 87% of appropriate cases.

HM Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said

"It is pleasing that CPS Leicestershire has managed to implement some important improvements since the last assessment in 2005. There are a number of issues that require immediate action and I am confident that the Area will use the Inspection report to concentrate its effort to strengthen its performance further."

The full text of the Report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPs Inspectorate (telephone 020 7210 1197) and is also available online at www.hmcp.si.gov.uk.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1 HMCPSI undertook overall performance assessments of all 42 CPS Areas in 2005 and 14 aspects of work were assessed in each. Areas were rated as "Excellent", "Good", "Fair" or "Poor" and aspects for improvement were highlighted. Leicestershire was assessed as "Fair" and 32 aspects for improvement were identified.
- 2 HMCPSI is now conducting two types of Area inspection. A full one considers each aspect of performance within the Inspection Framework, while a risk-based inspection considers in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on the OPA and other key data. In Leicestershire, inspectors assessed six of the 13 themes within the Framework.
- 3 CPS Leicestershire serves the area covered by the Leicestershire Constabulary. It has two offices, one of which is in Leicester the other in Beaumont Leys. The Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is also based at the Beaumont Leys office.
- 4 Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates' courts and Crown Court work. The Criminal Justice Units (CJUs) are responsible for the conduct of all cases dealt with in the magistrates' courts. The City CJU covers Leicester and Market Harborough Magistrates' Courts and County CJU covers the work of the other magistrates' courts in the Area. The Trial Unit (TU) reviews and handles cases dealt with in the Crown Court.
- 5 Face-to-face charging advice is provided on a full time basis (9am to 5pm) at four police charging centres: Euston Street, Loughborough, Beaumont Leys and Hamilton.
- 6 At the time of the inspection in February 2007, the Area employed the equivalent of 113.6 full-time staff.
- 7 HMCPSI was established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

An Executive Summary of the Report accompanies this Press Notice. For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 348.

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