

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS CUMBRIA

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Cumbria. The inspectors found that the quality of lawyers' decision-making is sound, the standard of pre-charge advice given to the police is good and sensitive cases are in the main handled well. However, work is needed to improve compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure, the quality of instructions to counsel and the recording of decisions, the reason for taking them and actions taken in relation to cases.

The inspectors praised the work done by managers and staff since the restructuring of the CPS to raise its profile within the criminal justice system in Cumbria. However, they felt that progress towards internal restructuring into functional units along the lines of the Review of the CPS (the Glidewell Report) had been slow. They also felt that the Area's proposals may not secure the improvements in the quality of Crown Court casework envisaged by Glidewell, nor enable the Area to work towards staffing arrangements which may help it to keep within budget.

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

“This report shows that CPS Cumbria has both strengths and weaknesses. It is to the credit of the Area that the quality of its casework decision-making and most aspects of performance have remained fundamentally sound despite the pressures faced by staff and the extent of the change programme within the CPS as a whole, including Cumbria. There are, however, some areas identified for improvement and the report contains recommendations as to how they should be taken forward. I am confident that the experience and commitment of the staff in Cumbria is such that the necessary improvements can be achieved.”

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- The Area needs to develop a robust performance management regime;
- Consistent arrangements for monitoring the quality of casework need to be developed across the Area.
- In over half the cases discontinued by the CPS, the reason was lack of evidence to establish an essential legal element; the Area therefore needs to undertake work to identify emerging trends so that the police may be advised about problems in relation to the collection of evidence;
- The criminal justice system area performance on reducing delay in the handling of persistent young offenders has steadily improved during 2001, as a result of joint working with other criminal justice agencies. Published figures for October 2001 for Cumbria were the best in the country.
- Concerns about the accuracy of domestic violence and racist incidents monitoring scheme data. The location of designated prosecutors to deal with racist incidents need revisited in light of existing data as to the distribution of casework. Systems to secure the return of child video evidence from external practitioners need tightening up.

- Although the quality of pre-charge advice to the police is good and its timeliness better than the national average, arrangements to monitor the quality of service vary across the Area. Inspectors would wish local managers to have more meaningful performance information.

Responding to the report Chief Crown Prosecutor, David Farmer, said:

“I welcome the Inspectorate’s recognition of the many sound aspects of casework performance in Cumbria. The Inspectorate’s helpful comments on the need to improve performance management and monitoring particular types of casework and decisions, will be implemented and will assist the Area to focus attention on improving the overall delivery of its work in the Criminal Justice System.”

Notes to Editors:

1. This is the latest report of Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the cycle of inspections based on the 42 Area structure adopted by the CPS on April 1 1999. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each Area led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy.
2. CPS Cumbria as an Area comprises of one Branch. It has four offices: Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness, Workington and Kendal. Carlisle office covers magistrates’ court at Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness office court at Barrow-in-Furness, Workington courts at Workington and Whitehaven, and Kendal office courts at Kendal and Penrith. Most Crown Court cases are dealt with at Carlisle Crown Court with others being heard at Preston, Barrow and Lancaster.
3. CPS Cumbria employs the equivalent of 57.9 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
4. In the year ending 30th September 2001 the area handled approximately 13,634 cases in the magistrates’ courts. And 846 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police before charge in a further 490 cases.
5. Before visiting the area the team of inspectors examined a total of 159 cases drawn from all four offices. The team visited the area for a total of three weeks during October and November 2001. The inspectors interviewed staff of all levels from each of the offices. The team also spoke to representatives of other

criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made on 24 advocates at magistrates and crown courts, these included CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was also assisted during the on-site phases by a lay inspector who looked at the public interest side of casework decisions, the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.

6. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had, previously, been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
7. For further information, please contact either Jan Wilson at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488; e-mail: janice-c.wilson@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Andrew Calvert at CPS Cumbria (tel: 01228 882900).