

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE  
INSPECTORATE***

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**CPS SOUTH YORKSHIRE**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS South Yorkshire. The team of inspectors found that strong leadership and good planning by senior managers has enabled the Area to perform well despite the pressures brought about by the current reorganisation of the CPS both nationally and in South Yorkshire. They commented, however, that some aspects of casework handling required attention and that improvements should be made in the monitoring of advocacy and in the arrangements for communicating with agencies about the care of victims and witnesses. Inspectors commended the Area on its effective communications.

Stephen Wooler, Chief Inspector of HMCPsi, said:

“CPS South Yorkshire has successfully laid the foundations for an effective and efficient prosecution service based on the decentralised model recommended in the Glidewell Report. The quality of its casework decision-making is good. It has achieved much in developing sound working systems. Provided the weaknesses identified by the inspectors are addressed, it will be well placed to offer a consistently high standard of service to the criminal justice system as well as to victims and witnesses.”

The inspectors found that staff in the Area work effectively together and that morale is good. The Area works well with the police in its dealings with the community. Relationships with other Criminal Justice Agencies are good with effective liaison at all levels.

The inspectors found that the quality of casework and decision making is very good, although decisions and reviews were not always fully recorded on files. The subsequent handling of cases revealed several weaknesses. Cases involving a significant number of defendants are discharged because the prosecution are not in a position to proceed to committal; there are weaknesses in arrangements for ensuring compliance with the custody time limits regime; too many indictments require amendment; and compliance with the discharge of the prosecutions obligation of disclosure needs to be strengthened.

The observation of CPS lawyers in court also revealed that some of the advocacy could have been better, a number of prosecutors lacked assertiveness and authority. However the designated case workers, where they were deployed, were good.

The Area has progressed well in relation to the implementation of Glidewell recommendations. The inspectors found that these major changes had been carefully planned contributing to the successful implementation. An impressive communications system ensured that all staff were fully aware of and involved in the changes.

The Area has an active Training and Development Group involving staff at all levels and the training programme is structured to take into account the national requirements and those of the individual. The high number of casual staff has increased the need for continuous training and supervision.

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- Timeliness of pre-charge advice to the police was unsatisfactory. Only 55% met the guideline agreed between the police and CPS.

- Systems need to be established to ensure that correspondence is dealt with promptly.
- There should be a system of quality assurance to improve clarity and quality of magistrates' court file endorsements by prosecutors.
- The level of discontinuance of cases at 11.5% was below the national average of 12.5%. There were, however a significant number of cases where late discontinuance occurred despite there being sufficient time to notify formally all parties and therefore avoid unnecessary attendance at court.
- There is a generous and flexible policy for part-time employees. There is, however a need for effective management of staffing to ensure that work is covered for those who are not in the office.
- There is a considerable variation between different court centres in relation to throughput of cases and effectiveness of pre-trial reviews, which has a bearing on CPS performance and victims and witnesses. The Government targets for persistent young offenders also varies between magistrates' courts.

Responding to the report Chief Crown Prosecutor, Judith Walker, said:

“We welcome this report, which highlights the Area’s many achievements in terms of performance, working with other agencies and implementing important changes to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system as a whole.

“We were particularly pleased that the Inspectorate recognised the consistently high quality of our casework and decision-making, which is central to our work.

“The report, quite rightly, identified some aspects of our work where improvements are needed. This is helpful and we will be taking their recommendations forward in order to provide an even better service.”

### **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 South Yorkshire as an Area comprises two Branches. Sheffield Branch covers one magistrates' court at Sheffield. South Yorkshire Branch covers courts at Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham.
3. CPS South Yorkshire employs the equivalent of 128.6 full time staff with a high proportion (22.9%) working part-time.
4. In the year ending 30 September 2000 the Area handled approximately 38,302 cases in the magistrates’ courts of which 49.7% were either way or indictable only cases as compared to the National average of 40.2%. 4,268 crown court cases were handled during the same period and advice was given to the police before charge in a further 956 cases.
5. The Area has embarked on the transition to the function based structure recommended in the Review of the CPS (The Glidewell Report). The implementation commenced in May 2000 with the establishment of a criminal justice unit (CJU) in Barnsley with staff from the CPS and the police working together. The CJU’s at Doncaster, Sheffield and Rotherham will be opened before summer 2001. A single crown court trials unit will be set up in January 2001.
6. Before visiting the Area the team of inspectors examined a total of 321 case files drawn from both Branches. The team visited the Area for a total of two weeks during October 2000. The inspectors interviewed staff of all levels from each of the two Branches. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the area. Observations were made on 35 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.
7. 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.

8. For further information, please contact either Jan Wilson at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488) or Andrea Marshall at CPS South Yorkshire (tel: 0114 2298621).