

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Staffordshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Staffordshire (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 Staffordshire 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	Fair	Fair	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	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Excellent	Good	Declined
Disclosure	Excellent	Fair	Declined
Custody time limits	Good	Fair	Declined
Delivering change	Good	Fair	Declined
Managing resources	Fair	Good	Improved
Managing performance to improve	Good	Fair	Declined
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 Staffordshire's overall performance rating has remained good since the last OPA. However, performance has only improved in one aspect, with six remaining stable and six declining.

The quality of prosecutors' decision-making at the pre-charge stage was generally good and the statutory charging scheme (under which the CPS has assumed responsibility from the police for the initial decision whether to charge the more serious and contested cases) is now well embedded, with most of the expected benefits being realised. However, the needs of victims and witnesses are not always identified at time of the pre-charge decision. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure a better service is provided to victims and witnesses so that they are kept informed throughout the court process.

In 2006-07 the Area had a higher proportion of convictions in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court than national performance. Overall inspectors found that cases were generally well prepared, in particular there has been an improvement in the proportion of successful outcomes in sensitive cases and hate crimes. Nevertheless, joint arrangements with other criminal justice agencies for progressing cases through the courts would benefit from strengthening.

There had been a noticeable decline in performance in relation to the duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence, which had previously been assessed as excellent. The Area had identified this and action was being taken to address weaknesses.

The proportion of effective trials (contested cases which proceed on the day fixed for trial) is better in the magistrates' courts than the Crown Court and there is scope to improve joint case progression systems. Additionally, the CPS needs to work with its criminal justice partners to speed up the processing of persistent young offenders so that the Government target of 71 days from arrest to sentence can be met.

There is effective joint planning for new initiatives, however the Area needs to ensure that it does not lose sight of ongoing requirements for initiatives once implementation has been achieved.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"CPS Staffordshire has maintained its overall good performance even though some aspects have declined. This indicates fundamental strength as well as a need to tackle some weaknesses attributable to structural changes which have not delivered the expected benefits. However, the Area is aware of these. I am confident that CPS Staffordshire has the capacity to build on its underlying strength in order to move forward."

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.

The report is now available to journalists from the embargoed press copies page on the Inspectorate's website (www.hmcpai.gov.uk/press/press.shtml) and can be accessed using these details:

USERNAME: MEDIA
PASSWORD: pic5#Lon

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

Notes to Editors

HMCPST 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.

The OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPST using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPST 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'.

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.

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.

CPS Staffordshire serves the area covered by the Staffordshire Police. Its main office is based at Stoke-on-Trent. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 129.6 full-time equivalent staff and handled 20,973 cases before the magistrates' courts and 2,355 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 6,444 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Staffordshire are part of a block of nine reports published today. HMCPST has already published two tranches relating to 22 Areas, and will publish one further tranche of reports covering the remaining Areas.