

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS SOUTH WALES

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its Report on the inspection of CPS South Wales.

The inspection team found that most aspects of casework decision-making and outcomes were good, or very good, when measured against the standards set and national averages. Casework and administrative processes are generally sound, although there are some inconsistencies between the units within South Wales.

The level of performance attained is commendable having regard to the tight timetables which tend to be imposed by the courts. Inspectors were impressed that the level of ineffective trials (cases listed for a contested hearing which do not go ahead on the date set) were lower (better) than the national average in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court; in the latter, it stood at 11.5% against a national average of 22.2%. However, inspectors were concerned that in the magistrates' courts between 1 April and 31 December 2003, 136 (7.2%) of the cases intended for committal were discharged because the prosecution was not ready to proceed. The CPS will need to work with the police to reduce this number and ensure the discharged committals are re-instated where appropriate.

CPS South Wales works positively with its partners in the criminal justice system to increase the number of offences brought to justice and to raise public confidence in the criminal justice system generally. Steps taken include restructuring so that police and CPS staff are co-located. A new charging scheme (whereby prosecutors give on-the-spot advice about decisions to charge offenders) has also been introduced and welcomed by the police.

CPS South Wales makes considerable efforts to engage with the local community, including minority ethnic groups and organisations, and is actively promoting equality and diversity amongst its staff.

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

“The managers and staff of CPS South Wales can take credit for maintaining such a generally good performance under the combined pressures of consistently tight timetables and extensive change within the CPS, both nationally and in the criminal justice system as a whole. The Report identifies some aspects of performance which need to be addressed. I am confident that the Area will build on this Report to achieve even higher standards.”

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * There needs to be a strengthening of compliance with the prosecution’s duty of disclosure.
- * The administrative processes in most units are satisfactory;
- * Most prosecuting advocates were satisfactory and their engagement with witnesses good. The attendance of a Case Progression Officer, to assist witnesses, at Cardiff Magistrates’ Court was an aspect of good practice.

- * There are Area and unit performance targets, but individual performance management needs to be strengthened.
- * The staffing and organisational structure of the Area is regularly reviewed and changed to meet demands. There is a great emphasis on personal development, and communications within the Area are well established through management meetings, new technology and Area publications.
- * The Area has effective systems to monitor and control its budget.
- * The Area is active in promoting equality and diversity.
- * The Area is pro-active in engaging with the community and has helped to produce a video for school children dealing with criminal justice issues and race crime.
- * The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders has been consistently very good and, at the time of the inspection, stood at an impressive 60 days (compared to the Government target of 71 days).
- * The Area is committed to playing a key role to achieve the aims set for the criminal justice system. The Chief Crown Prosecutor and Area Business Manager are seen to make a significant contribution to driving forward important initiatives.

Responding to the Report, the Acting Chief Crown Prosecutor, Catrin Evans, said:

“I readily welcome the Inspectorate’s Report. The Area is already working hard to implement the recommendations made to further enhance the service provided to the public. The Area has already commenced a comprehensive training programme run jointly with the South Wales Police to improve the quality of casework.

I am delighted that the Area has been commended for maintaining such a generally good performance despite the real pressures and challenges encountered in tackling the numerous changes within the CPS, the wider criminal justice system and the introduction of new information technology providing a more effective Case Management System.

The Inspectorate has recognised that the Area is committed to providing an improved public service by being pro-active within the diverse community we serve. I am grateful to all managers and staff for their clear commitment and dedication in continuing to improve performance.”

The Executive Summary of the Report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the reorganised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may either be full or intermediate, depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS South Wales was an intermediate rather than a full inspection. The area was last reported on in March 2001.
3. CPS South Wales has five Criminal Justice Units at Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea, Bridgend and Barry. These offices deal with magistrates' courts work. The Units at Swansea, Bridgend and Barry are co-located with the police. Trial Units at Swansea, Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil deal with Crown Court work.
4. At the time of the inspection CPS South Wales employed the equivalent of 201.4 full time staff.
5. In the year to September 2003, the Area handled 50,331 cases in the magistrates' courts and 3,737 cases in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 2,468 cases, which was 4.9% of its caseload.
6. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 274 cases. The team visited the Area for two weeks in January 2004. The inspectors interviewed CPS staff at all levels and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. 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 Heather Minshull at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1166; e-mail: Heather.Minshull@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Kim O'Neill at CPS South Wales (tel: 029 2080 3904; e-mail: Kim.O'Neill@cps.gsi.gov.uk).
9. The Report and Executive Summary are also available in Welsh.