

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **CPS SURREY**

#### *Area undergoing change*

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

The review and preparation of casework by the Area is generally sound in relation to casework dealt with in the Crown Court, but more needs to be done to improve the preparation of magistrates' courts cases, particularly for summary trials. Cases are well presented in court and witness care at court is good. Cases are also being dealt with at the correct level of charge, but the Area needs to do more to ensure compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure.

Partnerships within the local criminal justice system are strong. The CPS plays a leading role in the Surrey Criminal Justice Board. It has worked hard with the police to set up co-located offices and has been preparing to assume responsibility for the initial decision-making whether to charge offenders (currently a matter for the police) through a shadow pre-charge advice scheme. which operates at all four charging centres in Surrey. Plans are being developed to introduce dedicated Witness Care Units in the Area.

The Area is playing its part in improving public confidence within Surrey.

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

*“The commitment of CPS Surrey in working to implement a number of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of criminal justice is commendable. This Report does, however, show the need for greater focus on several aspects of casework where real improvement is needed, especially in the magistrates’ courts.”*

**Other main findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- \* The quality of decision-making was generally satisfactory at first review, summary trial and committal/service of prosecution papers stages, but on most measures fell below the average for CPS Areas in the current inspection cycles.
- \* The quality and timeliness of preparation for summary trials was poor.
- \* The quality of discontinuance decisions in relation to cases being dealt with in the magistrates’ courts was weak, and decision-making tended to be late.
- \* The quality and timeliness of preparation for Crown Court cases was generally sound, including decisions to discontinue.
- \* Cases were dealt with at the correct level of charge in 68 out of 70 (97.14%) relevant cases in a random sample.
- \* Child abuse cases are correctly applied, but more needs to be done to ensure the correct application of policy in racially aggravated crime, in particular where a lesser charge is being considered.
- \* Domestic violence cases are prosecuted pro-actively, even where the victim wishes to withdraw, but more can be done to ensure fully informed decisions are made.

- \* The Area is not complying with the national standards on Direct Communication with Victims where charges are reduced or dropped – either because letters are not sent out in all cases falling within the scheme, or through failing to meet time guidelines for doing so.
- \* Performance management by the Area needs to be strengthened and joint performance management with the police of file quality and timeliness needs to be reviewed and developed as a joint performance tool.
- \* There are a number of aspects of people management that are good – for example staff induction, family-friendly working, the staff newsletter and the accessibility of senior managers – but more can be done to engage staff in the running of the Area.
- \* The Area is taking part in a project by the National Association for the Care and Re-settlement of Offenders (NACRO) to track the handling of minority ethnic defendants through the Surrey criminal justice system.

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 re-organised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that time 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 Surrey was a full one. At the same time as this inspection, a joint inspection with the four other criminal justice Inspectorates was carried out on the Surrey criminal justice area.
3. CPS Surrey has offices in Guildford and Staines and is divided on functional lines between the magistrates' courts and Crown Court work.
4. CPS Surrey employs the equivalent of 62.6 full-time staff.
5. In the year to September 2004, the Area handled 12,109 cases in the magistrates' courts, 1,165 cases in the Crown Court and gave pre-charge advice to the police in a further 1,490 cases.

6. Before visiting the Area between 20 - 30 September 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 116 cases. They interviewed CPS staff at all levels, and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates - including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel - at magistrates' courts and the Crown Court. 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 CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
8. Any inquiries about this Press Release should be addressed to: Michael Fogg at HMCPSI, (tel: 020 7210 1143; mob: 07901 856346 fax: 020 7210 1195; email: Michael.Fogg@cps.gsi.gov.uk).