

Press Notice

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Area Effectiveness Report on CPS Surrey

Challenging times for CPS Surrey

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Surrey (the Area).

The Area has made limited progress since the HMCPsi Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) in December 2005 when it was assessed as “Fair”. Inspectors found that it had taken positive action to address some key aspects of performance, but that other issues remained outstanding. Furthermore, inspectors identified some significant new concerns following the re-structuring that took place in early 2006.

The main findings were:

- The quality of casework decision-making is good in Crown Court cases, but a little more variable in magistrates’ courts and sensitive cases. Overall, the level of successful outcomes has improved over previous years and is now very similar to the national average. The ineffective trial rate (i.e. cases fixed for a contested hearing which do not proceed on that day), at 18.8%, is reasonably good, but this masks the high level of ineffective hearings before a trial is fixed.
- The Area migrated to statutory charging in January 2006 and outcomes have gradually improved, with three of the six relevant key performance indicators having been achieved. The level of face-to face advice needs to be increased, and the timeliness of decision-making can be improved in some cases. It is important for the police and CPS to develop a “prosecution team” ethos.

Promoting Improvement in Criminal Justice

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- There are serious weaknesses in the management of cases through the courts. Following the re-structure the Area's administrative systems have not functioned well, with a significant knock-on impact affecting case preparation and progression and the subsequent presentation of cases at court. Prosecutors are often not sufficiently prepared and this is exacerbated by the very high use of agents in the magistrates' courts. The quality of advocacy is variable but mainly positive. A new role has been created to tackle the case progression problem and some progress has been made in improving the situation.
- These problems were evident in the sample of files examined by inspectors. Files were not ready for pre-trial review in 39% of cases and court orders were not complied with in good time in 56%. Correspondence with the defence was not dealt with properly in 39% of cases and reports and additional evidence from the police was not actioned appropriately in 43%.
- Significant effort has been made to improve the service to victims and witnesses. However, whilst the commitment at strategic level is clear, operational delivery is being hampered by delays in information flows, much of which is caused by the problems with CPS administration.
- Planning and implementing major change needs to improve significantly. Managers have struggled to translate high level plans into effective operational delivery. Training and development has been affected by the lack of appropriate appraisal and development reports.
- There are good systems for controlling finance, although the low level of in-house court coverage means that the Area is likely to overspend against its allocated budget. High levels of sickness absence have affected deployment plans.
- Staff motivation and morale have been traditionally high in Surrey, but this was clearly an issue at the time of the inspection. Relationships with other criminal justice agencies are less positive than in the past.

- In addition to the quality and improved deployment of designated caseworkers, other strengths include the positive handling of anti-social behaviour cases and constructive regular liaison with the Witness Service.
- Public confidence in the criminal justice system in Surrey is higher than the national average.

The Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said

“It is pleasing that much of the decision-making and case presentation by CPS Surrey is sound so that case outcomes are satisfactory. However administration systems are creating serious problems and the Area is struggling to manage change effectively and so necessary improvements are not being achieved. Action is necessary to address the underlying issues so that CPS Surrey can regain a sound position within the local criminal justice system”

The full text of the report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPS Inspectorate (telephone 020 7210 1197) and is also available online at www.hmcp.si.gov.uk.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. HMCPSI undertook overall performance assessments of all CPS Areas in 2005 and 14 aspects of CPS work were assessed. Areas were rated as **EXCELLENT, GOOD, FAIR** or **POOR** and aspects for improvement were highlighted. CPS Surrey was assessed as **FAIR** and 54 aspects for improvement were identified.
2. HMCPSI is now conducting two types of Area inspection. A full one considers each aspect of performance within the inspection Framework, while a risk-based inspection considers in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on the OPA and other key data. In Surrey inspectors assessed fully only eight of the 13 themes within the Framework.
3. CPS Surrey serves the area covered by the Surrey Police. It has one centralised office in Guildford, having recently withdrawn its staff from co-located units in Guildford and Staines Police Stations.
4. At the time of the inspection Area business was divided on geographic lines with two combined units, each handling both magistrates' courts and Crown Court cases. This had evolved and was due to be changed to a functional arrangement (one magistrates' courts' team and one Crown Court team) shortly after the inspection
5. The Area provides face-to-face charging advice at four police stations (Staines, Guildford, Woking and Reigate).
6. At the time of the inspection in November the Area employed the equivalent of 69 full-time staff.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 - which came into effect on 1 October 2000 - as a statutory body, having previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

An Executive Summary of the report accompanies this Press Notice. For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 348.