

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS SUSSEX

Prosecutors boost their performance

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

The inspection team commented favourably on several aspects of casework handling by CPS Sussex. Decision-making and the initial handling of cases is good, and its performance in reducing delays in the handling of cases involving persistent young offenders is consistently very good. However, these achievements need to be matched by better preparation in relation to the later stages of cases proceeding to summary trial, or to the Crown Court, where inspectors found weaknesses. Sussex has one of the highest rates nationally for ineffective trials in the magistrates' courts and the CPS must play its part in reducing these by improving its management of cases awaiting trial. Inspectors were also particularly concerned that the Area has a number of cases that should be committed to trial at the Crown Court, but are discharged because they are not ready. This concern is shared by the Area, and they are working with the police to improve the quality of the files submitted.

The overall standard of advocacy in the Area is satisfactory, although a small number of advocates need to be better prepared. CPS Sussex has made significant improvements to arrangements for the care of victims and witnesses.

The Area's performance in compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure was stronger than that found nationally, and the cracked and ineffective trial rates in the Crown Court are also better than the national average.

Partnerships within the local criminal justice system are generally strong and CPS Sussex has also actively engaged with its local community. Staff are motivated and led by a cohesive and supportive senior management team, which has provided a clear vision for the Area, together with strong leadership.

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

“There are many positive aspects of this Report for which managers and staff alike can take credit. The casework performance and management structures of CPS Sussex are both sound. I hope that the Area will be able to build on this Report and bring up the standard of all aspects of its performance to match those which we have identified as being especially good. In particular, the CPS must work with the police to tackle the problem of discharged committals.”

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * The causes for the current trend in the discontinuance rate need to be ascertained.
- * The Area has played a full part in preparing the Action Plan developed by the Sussex Criminal Justice Board to raise public confidence.
- * Planning for, and implementation of, policy and the numerous national initiatives within the CPS and criminal justice system as a whole, is sound.
- * The quality of initial reviews is also sound, but the Area needs to improve the quality of continuing review, as its acquittal rates are higher than the national average.

- * The Area needs to improve its case management - especially in summary trials - to avoid unnecessary court hearings.
- * The operation of the Direct Communication with Victims scheme needs to develop further. While some of the letters are well written, the scheme has not been applied in all cases where it should have been, and there is also a need to improve the timeliness of letters.
- * The Area has sound systems for projecting and controlling expenditure; financial guidelines are being adhered to.
- * There is a good quarterly Area Newsletter and good communications exist within the offices.

An Executive Summary of the Report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second cycle of Area inspections of the CPS, following its restructuring in 1999 as a result of recommendations in the Glidewell Review. 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 Sussex was a full one.
3. CPS Sussex has offices in Chichester, Crawley, Eastbourne and Brighton and is divided on functional lines between magistrates' courts and Crown Court work.
4. At the time of the inspection, the Area employed the equivalent of 129.2 full-time staff.
5. In the year to March 2004, the Area handled 23,722 cases in the magistrates' courts and 2,468 in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 6,523 cases, which was 21.6% of its caseload.

6. Before visiting the Area between 28 June - 9 July 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 169 case files. 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 both 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. For further information, please contact Anthony Chan at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1181; e-mail: Anthony.Chan@cps.gsi.gov.uk).