

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

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CPS WARWICKSHIRE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published the report of its inspection of CPS Warwickshire. The inspectors found CPS Warwickshire to be a good Area, which conducts its core business well. There is a consistently high standard of casework, which is supported by a rigorous approach to monitoring and performance management. The review of cases is generally timely and the quality of review endorsements is commendable.

Warwickshire has the second lowest discontinuance rate in the country. Even so, inspectors had concerns about the manner in which the Area had reached the decision to discontinue some of its cases. There is scope for improvement in the quality and consistency of the decisions to discontinue, with some decisions being taken prematurely and others late. The inspectors also found that, whilst sensitive cases such as child abuse and domestic violence were handled appropriately, there were some aspects of those cases with a racial element when handling could be improved.

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

“This is the first inspection since CPS Warwickshire obtained Area status in 1999. It has established itself impressively. It performs to a consistently high standard and is well regarded by other criminal justice agencies. The people of Warwickshire can be confident that they are served by an efficient and effective local prosecution service.”

Case preparation is timely and, although the handling of unused material, particularly secondary disclosure, is satisfactory, prosecutors sometimes take decisions on the basis of inadequate schedules from the police, and do not always endorse disclosure decisions on the relevant schedules on the file.

The standard of advocacy by CPS lawyers and designated caseworkers (non-lawyers who have special training and conduct straightforward cases in the magistrates' courts) was fully satisfactory. The Area has two HCAs (CPS lawyers who have rights of audience and are authorised to appear in the Crown Court) whose work includes PDHs, the conduct of preliminary hearings in cases which are "sent" to the Crown Court under S51, Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and appeals and committals for sentence from the magistrates' court. Inspectors suggested that consideration be given to wider usage.

Warwickshire is the smallest of the 42 Areas and has made progress in the last two years at introducing initiatives to reduce delays in the criminal justice system. This gives effect to the recommendations made in the report "Reducing delays in the Criminal Justice System" (the Narey report). The Area is also taking forward the recommendations made by the review of the CPS (the Glidewell report) and has restructured into separate Magistrates' Court and Crown Court Units. However, the comparatively small size of the Area may lead to a reduction in the flexibility to deploy staff. In addition, a shortage of suitable accommodation has prevented the co-location of police and CPS staff in the new units.

CPS Warwickshire is currently involved in an innovative project to create Combined Criminal Justice Centres in the north and south of the county and the creation of these centres should provide the Area with the opportunity to review the operation and viability of the two separate units in due course.

The Area's performance against targets is excellent and there is strong positive leadership which provides a clear vision for the Area. However, the effective and efficient running of the Area is dependent on a small number of people. Staff tend to be deployed according to their strengths only and managers need to recognise the importance of fully developing all their staff. Inspectors also found that, whilst

internal communication is generally sound, the Area needs to re-assess its communications strategy to include both internal and external communications.

The Area has an Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2000/2001. Some steps have been taken to implement it but many of the initiatives are still outstanding and the plan needs to be re-assessed, updated and more rigorously actioned.

The CPS is well regarded by other criminal justice agencies. External relations and inter-agency working are particular strengths of the Area, which takes a full and active part in meetings at a strategic and operational level.

The Area is also taking steps to raise its profile in the local community on an inter-agency basis. However, more work needs to be done on an individual basis, especially among the local minority ethnic community.

The Inspectors made 6 recommendations and 6 suggestions designed to help the Area improve its performance. These included;

- * the allocation of advices more widely amongst all lawyers;
- * a thorough review of the manner in which discontinuance decisions are made to ensure that they are made at the appropriate stage and when all the evidence has been considered;
- * instructions to counsel to include the prosecutors' views on the acceptability of pleas;
- * a review of communication, both and within the Area and externally;
- * the completion of a complaints pro-forma to enable analysis to be made of the reasons for complaints and the action taken, as well as the need for an improvement in the quality of responses to complainants.

- * the review and evaluation of the organisation and operation of the Magistrates' Court Unit and the Crown Court Unit;
- * joining with other criminal justice agencies to develop inter-agency awareness on diversity issues;
- * identifying initiatives to promote CPS within the local communities apart from any joint initiatives with other criminal justice agencies.

The Inspectorate was pleased to be able to commend five aspects of the Areas' work and identified one aspect of good practice, the adoption of which elsewhere might benefit other CPS Areas. These were:

- * the quality of advice work;
- * the quality of review notes;
- * the handling of and the approach to persistent young offenders;
- * the monitoring of CPS prosecutors in court ;
- * the commitment to effective processes of performance management, and
- * the use of a manual to assist in the preparation of cases for the Crown Court;

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor for Warwickshire, Mark Lynn, said:

“I am delighted that the Inspectorate’s report recognises the results achieved by the hard work and dedication of the small group of staff who comprise CPS Warwickshire.

“In the financial year ending 2001, CPS Warwickshire returned the highest conviction rate, lowest acquittal rate and lowest discontinuance rate (percentage of cases not proceeded with) in the country.

“The Inspectorate’s recommendations have been accepted and with the measures now in place, we will continue to provide the ‘consistently high standards’ of performance expected by the people in Warwickshire.”

Notes to Editors

1. This is the latest report of Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the cycle of Inspections based on the 42 Area structure adopted by the CPS on 1 April 1999. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each Area led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy.
2. CPS Warwickshire has its office at Leamington Spa. On the 30 July 2001 it employed the equivalent of 30.6 full time staff, including six who were part time: the Chief Crown Prosecutor; the Area Business Manager; 10 other prosecutors; two designated caseworkers; 12.5 caseworkers; 1.6 administrative staff; and 2.5 typists.
3. In the year ending 30 June 2001, the Area dealt with 8,224 defendants in the magistrates’ courts and 595 defendants in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in another 754 cases.
4. The Inspectorate visited the Area during July and August 2001. The inspectors examined 151 cases covering a range of casework finalised between February and April 2001. Inspectors interviewed staff at all levels and spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Inspectors also observed the performance of advocates in the magistrates’ courts and the Crown Court.
5. 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. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
6. For further information please contact either the Enquiry Point at HMCPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1197), or Terry Quirke at CPS Warwickshire (tel: 01926 455005).