

## Press Notice

### Follow-Up Report on CPS Avon and Somerset

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01hrs  
TUESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published a report of its follow up visit to Avon and Somerset. This follows publication in January 2005 of the report of a full inspection carried out in September 2004.

The **full inspection** commented on the energy and commitment within CPS Avon and Somerset to taking forward national initiatives to improve criminal justice. The Area had worked hard to implement statutory charging and had generally improved its casework and casework management since the previous inspection. In particular, performance in respect of summary trial preparation and compliance with the prosecutions obligation of disclosure in relation to unused material was above the national average. The inspection report, however, also commented upon the need to improve several aspects of casework which included the quality and timing of decisions about discontinuance and avoiding adverse outcomes in the Crown Court. In most cases these casework results were largely due to lack of proactive and robust review. The Area's working relationships with its partners were considered a strength but more needed to be done internally to improve communications and improve staff confidence.

The **follow up visit** assessed progress against the recommendations made and aspects for improvement identified in the full report. Inspectors found that the Area had made generally good progress since the full inspection in implementing the recommendations and addressing aspects for improvement, though more needed to be done in respect of custody time limits despite improvements to the Area system.

The Area had made progress towards the delivery of the three key national criminal justice initiatives, namely the assumption of responsibility for charging; the effective trial management programme and the no witness no justice initiative.

Other significant findings were:

- The statutory charging scheme is now well embedded within CPS Avon and Somerset and implementing the effective trial management programme has ensured that cases progress through the courts more quickly.
- Measures, which include better mechanisms for providing feedback to staff about casework quality, have been introduced to bring about a more proactive consideration of cases in the initial and later stages of progress. Although review is more timely and robust the Area has yet to realise fully the benefits in respect of discontinued cases;
- Internal communications have been improved and the Area builds in the opportunity for group and individual consultation in business planning and when taking strategic decisions;
- The management and representational role of team leaders has been enhanced; they are more involved in inter-agency initiatives and formulation of the area Business Plan.

The strengths identified in the full report had been maintained. The Area continues to take a lead role in dealing with anti-social behaviour and performance in respect of disclosure remains sound, although lawyers need to be trained in the new provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. Unsuccessful outcomes are monitored and performance issues are discussed with the police and the courts. The Area continues to demonstrate its commitment to community engagement and senior managers and other staff are involved in a wide range of activity.

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

*“It is particularly pleasing to note that the Area has brought about improvements whilst continuing to maintain the strengths identified in the full inspection and the general level of good performance in other aspects. The arrangements for case progression are having a positive effect on cracked and ineffective trial rates and there have been some improvements to the standard of witness care following the establishment of Witness Care Units.”*

A copy of the follow up report is attached.

## Notes to Editors

1. In 2002-04 HMCPsi undertook its second programme of inspections of the reorganised CPS. All 42 Areas in England and Wales received a full or intermediate depending on circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Avon and Somerset was a full one. The report of the inspection can be found on the HMCPsi website at: <http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk>.
3. The Area serves the area covered by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. It has offices at Bristol and Taunton. The Area covers seven magistrates' courts and two Crown Court venues.
4. At the time of the inspection CPS Avon and Somerset employed the equivalent of 166.3 full time staff (This figure includes a number of part-time staff) which had fallen to 161.9 by March 2005.
5. In the year ending March 2005 the Area handled approximately 31,146 cases in the magistrates' courts and 2,014 Crown Court cases were handled during the same period, advice was given to the police before charge in a further 11,064 cases, which was 25.2% of its caseload.
6. Follow-up inspections are undertaken to assess the extent to which Areas have addressed recommendations and aspects for improvements, as well as monitoring strengths and casework performance.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution 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.
8. For further information, please contact **Heather Minshull** on 020 7210 1166 or [heather.minshull@cps.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:heather.minshull@cps.gsi.gov.uk) at HMCPsi.