

PRESS RELEASE

(EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01hrs 14 SEPTEMBER 2004)

14 September 2004

15/04

CPS DEVON AND CORNWALL

Positive Casework Outcomes

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report on the inspection of CPS Devon and Cornwall.

The review and preparation of casework by the Area is very sound in relation to both magistrates' courts and the Crown Court. Cases are generally well presented in court and witness care at court is good. The Area needs to do more to ensure compliance with the prosecution's obligation of disclosure and to ensure more effective monitoring of custody time limits cases.

Partnerships within the local criminal justice system are strong. CPS Devon and Cornwall works well with its partners to improve the quality and timeliness of police files and minimise the numbers of cracked and ineffective trials. Work is still being done to implement and develop the shadow pre-charge advice scheme under which the CPS will eventually assume responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge – hitherto a matter for the police.

The Area is playing its part in improving public confidence within Devon and Cornwall.

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

“Managers and staff can take credit for the report. They have maintained a level of performance which is generally sound and in some respects improved and at the same time coped with extensive change both in the CPS nationally and the criminal justice system as a whole.”

Other main findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * Casework results are better than the CPS national average in all respects, except for magistrates’ courts acquittals. The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence has been consistently good.
- * Quality of decision-making after charge was sound. 98.7% of cases in the file sample were dealt with at the correct level of charge.
- * Summary trials were well prepared and any necessary additional work done in a timely manner.
- * The quality and timeliness of preparation for Crown Court trial was sound.
- * CPS policy guidance on the handling of child abuse and racist incidents is being correctly applied, and review and case preparation is generally good.
- * Good practice on domestic violence cases has been disseminated and the overall standard and timeliness of decision-making is sound.
- * Decisions to discontinue cases are generally timely and well handled.
- * Direct communication with victims to explain reasons for dropping or reducing charges has been implemented. The quality of letters is generally good, but not all cases are identified and action taken.

- * The Area complies with CPS corporate employment policies. It has sought to address issues around sick absence (through the introduction of an outside consultant) and most staff in the Area recognise the Service as a good employer.
- * Planning, project management and performance management need to improve if the Area is to make best use of its resources. The Area would benefit from reviewing its meetings commitments to ensure they represent value for money

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 reorganised CPS. 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 Devon and Cornwall was a full inspection.
3. CPS Devon and Cornwall has offices in Exeter, Plymouth and Truro. The Area is divided on functional lines between the magistrates' courts and Crown Court work.
4. CPS Devon and Cornwall employs the equivalent of 117 full time staff.
5. In the year to March 2004 the Area handled 26,465 cases in the magistrates' courts and 1,527 cases in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 3,627 cases.
6. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 165 cases. The team visited the Area between the 10 and 24 May 2004. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. 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 the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
8. For further information, please contact either Pamela Yoofoo at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1173; e-mail: pamela.yoofoo@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Chris Hoyte, Deputy Press & Publicity Officer at CPS Devon and Cornwall (tel: 01392 288011; e-mail: christopher.hoyte@cps.gsi.gov.uk).