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**Press Notice**

**HMCPSI Concern over CPS Victim Liaison Units**

Victims are not being properly supported by the CPS, says a new report *Communicating with Victims* by Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI).

The Director of Public Prosecutions has committed the CPS to improving the quality of service it provides to victims and witnesses and has set up Victims Liaison Units to provide a dedicated point of contact for victims. HMCPSI inspectors found that only a few CPS Areas were able to reach the recommended staffing levels which had an impact on the timeliness of correspondence with victims. Inspectors found that communications with victims were very slow in 43.4% of cases. The use of template paragraphs, while helping to ensure consistency, led to letters that lacked empathy.

CPS staffing and courts listing more than one trial in the same courtroom have put a strain on the ability of prosecutors to meet victims and witnesses before they are called to give evidence. This means there is a real risk of victims failing to attend court to give evidence if they do not feel supported which in turn could put trials at risk. The removal of CPS legal support workers (paralegal officers) from the Crown Courts has also had an adverse effect in that previously they assisted the prosecutors at court by carrying out much of the CPS and witness liaison work.

Chief Inspector Kevin McGinty said:

“Victims and witnesses play a vital role in any criminal procedure, and it is important to make sure that their experiences are as positive as possible. One of the ways the CPS can achieve this is by communicating effectively.

“However our inspection has shown that in nearly half of the cases looked at, letters were not sent to victims and witnesses quickly enough. We were also told that victims felt let down by receiving what they see as a standard impersonal letter, which did not give them enough information to let them understand what has happened to their case.

“It is important that the CPS makes sure that all its communications are both timely and effective, and that they live up to their duty of care in making sure that victims feel supported.”

**Recommendations:**

1 The CPS and the police should agree their respective roles in communicating the outcome of cases to victims and witnesses, in order to avoid duplication of correspondence and to reduce the risk of communicating inaccurate information

2 The CPS should ensure that the quality assurance checks specific to the Victim Liaison Unit are effective in ensuring greater consistency in the quality and timeliness of letters sent to victims

3 The CPS should implement an effective process which ensures that VLU staff are alerted promptly of any case where the charge against a defendant has been substantially altered thereby triggering a requirement for a VCL letter

Inspectors from HMCPSI visited six CPS areas over a period of three weeks including two pilot sites for the VLU and conducted interviews with CPS staff and criminal justice partners. They also evaluated one hundred and sixty-two files that had been finalised to assess the quality and timeliness of CPS communications with victims.

**Further information**

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