

CPS Response to HMCPsi Area Assurance Inspection of CPS

London North

23/10/2018



Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today 23 October 2018 issued a report following its inspection of the performance of CPS London North. The Area was assessed as follows:

Success of CPS People – Good
Continuously Improving – Good
Casework Quality – Fair
Public Confidence – Fair

Following an internal review in 2016–17, a decision was taken to split the single London operational Area into two: London North and London South. Inspectors found and staff felt that the change was handled well and the movement to one single location was seamless. Senior managers in the Area are commended for their leadership, their visibility and the work done to increase staff engagement. Although progress has been made in addressing levels of sickness absence and feelings of bullying and harassment an ambitious plan is in place to ensure improvement continues.

The Area was found to have strong working relationships with its criminal justice partners, enabling progress to be made on longstanding issues around police file quality and disclosure.

Performance is regularly reviewed, data is shared and actions for improvement are identified and monitored. Staff leads have been appointed to champion key areas of performance and the use of posters to share that information was identified as good practice. Inspectors found that the Area had robust systems in place for monitoring its budget and ensuring financial probity.

The two London Areas have an effective joint strategy for community engagement with monthly reports provided to the Area Strategy Board on work undertaken with key community groups. Feedback from Local Scrutiny and Involvement Panels is used to improve casework outcomes, but more needs to be done to improve the timeliness and quality of communications to victims.

Although the Area has taken steps to improve casework quality (including through the robust use of IQA and extended use of case management panels), more needs to be done to ensure all cases are reviewed and effectively progressed towards trial. The Area remains committed to working with the police to improve file quality.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address and CPS Area response (including joint issues for both London Areas)

1. The Area needs to address issues relating inclusion and fair treatment, and bullying, developing an effective measurable plan to reduce the levels before the 2018 Civil Service People Survey.

CPS response: The Area already has in place an ambitious plan ensuring that engagement with staff is focussed on tackling the underlying issues.

2. The Area needs to address the rising trend in sickness absence, with a particular focus on long-term absence.

CPS response: The Area Business Manager (ABM) will continue to work with HR colleagues to analyse and address the underlying causes of sickness absence. The ABM will also reiterate to line managers the processes in place for monitoring sickness absence and monitor actions that are taken.

3. The Area needs to review the functions of the pan-London Business Centre and those of dedicated Area staff to identify any duplication.

CPS response (joint with CPS London South): Both ABMs will undertake a joint review of the roles of the staff in the pan-London Business Centre to ensure compliance with the national model.

4. The Area should continue to influence the police to improve the quality of police files by having an effective mechanism to hold the police to account, monitor file quality, share data and escalate issues.

CPS response (joint with CPS London South): File quality is a matter for the police. However, The Chief Crown Prosecutors will continue to work with senior managers to assist the police to deliver the commitments in the pan-London joint CPS/Police File Quality Improvement Plan.

5. The Area should continue to influence the police to ensure that the identification of the anticipated plea is improved, to facilitate the timely review of cases and effective case progression.

CPS response: Identification of the anticipated plea is a matter for the police. However, the CCP and Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors (DCCPs) will continue to assist the Police to improve their performance on the proper identification of pleas.

6. The importance of constructive defence engagement should be emphasised and clear instructions given that reviews must include engagement with the defence when details are known.

CPS response: (joint with CPS London South): The CCP, DCCPs and legal managers will reiterate to prosecutors the importance of constructive defence engagement where details are known. This will be monitored through IQA. Barriers to effective engagement will be explored with the defence at regular liaison meetings and solutions identified.

7. The Area must ensure that quality reviews in Crown Court cases are undertaken in a timely manner, set out a clear case analysis and trial strategy, and facilitate effective grip.

CPS response (joint with CPS London South): Legal Managers will reinforce expectations around the quality and timeliness of reviews. Compliance will be monitored through IQA and individual feedback provided. Emerging themes will be escalated to the Area Casework Quality Committee.

8. The Area should continue to influence partners to ensure that case progression in the Crown Court adheres to the expectations of BCM.

CPS response: BCM is a judiciary-led initiative. However, the CCP will continue to work with CJS partners to ensure adherence to BCM.

9. The Area should ensure that the work to identify the letters that should be sent to victims, the number of letters and their quality drives measurable improvement in both.

CPS response (joint with CPS London South): Managers will work with staff to improve timing, content and tone of letters sent to victims. They will continue to monitor compliance through regular dip sampling. In addition CPS has introduced a new national quality assurance scheme and the Area will ensure compliance. Feedback will be provided to individuals and emerging themes will be escalated to the Area Casework Quality Committee.