

CPS Response to HMCPsi Area Assurance Inspection of CPS Thames & Chiltern

27/07/2017

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today [27 July 2017] issued a report following its inspection of the performance of CPS Thames & Chiltern. The Area was assessed in relation to the following aspects:



Success of CPS People – rated 'Good';
Continuously Improving – rated 'Fair';
Casework Quality – rated 'Fair';
Public Confidence – rated 'Poor'

The Inspectorate recognises the effectiveness of the Area's leadership, particularly regarding the approachability of senior managers, the work undertaken to improve staff engagement, and the commitment shown to CPS values and to equality and diversity policies. The Area also has good working relationships with key stakeholders. Staff morale remains high despite difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff.

Inspectors highlight issues with the effective review and preparation of cases for court, as well as with their subsequent management through the criminal process. We are committed to improving performance in this area of work. We recognise the need to improve communication with victims and witnesses, including the way in which we manage complaints and requests for Victims Right to Review. We accept that our community engagement strategy should fully reflect the views and interests of the diverse community that we serve. We acknowledge that a more robust analysis of key performance data will ensure more consistent improvement across the board.

The effective use of Individual Quality Assessments by the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Unit and their provision of training to police colleagues on file quality are recognised as good practice. The use of Crown Advocates is compared very favourably with other Areas and Area managers are commended for encouraging staff to take advantage of training opportunities, of which there is a high uptake.

The Area remains committed to working with the police to deliver quality police files and with partner agencies to further embed Transforming Summary Justice in the magistrates' courts and Better Case Management in the Crown Court.

The report raises eleven issues to address.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address and CPS response

1. Senior managers need to instil a one Area ethos.

CPS Response: We will work to break down perceived barriers between different Area offices and work streams through the creation of a staff forum, chaired by the ABM, comprising different grades and staff from all three offices. This will be complimented by a job shadowing scheme to give staff a greater understanding of the roles undertaken by colleagues across our three offices.

2. The Area needs to review the level of managers attending stakeholder meetings to ensure operational managers can contribute effectively to improving casework performance.

CPS Response: We will carry out a review of our stakeholder liaison to ensure the appropriate level of representation at stakeholder meetings.

3. The Area should evaluate whether there is sufficient oversight and sharing of information across the business and legal teams at a strategic and operational level.

CPS Response: We will review our Area governance arrangements and will ensure that the business we conduct at meetings is shared appropriately

4. The Area should develop a strategy for improving recruitment.

CPS Response: We will work with the HR Directorate to improve recruitment into the Area.

5. The Area needs to address the resourcing issues to which is impacting adversely on the work life balance currently experienced by some staff.

CPS Response: We do take the welfare of our staff seriously and we will continue to review our resourcing and workload to ensure that work is more consistently shared amongst the different teams within the Area. This will be monitored through the introduction of our weekly conference calls with the line managers.

6. The Area needs to work with, and challenge where necessary, the police forces to improve the quality of police files submitted.

CPS Response: We will work with local police colleagues to ensure that files received from the police comply with the National File Standard and are of good quality, ensuring that feedback is provided to the police on individual cases and recurring themes. Proper monitoring of police file quality will also enable us to ensure that our staff are complying with the National File Quality Assurance process and we will support colleagues in challenging the police in circumstances where there are quality issues.

7. The Area needs to ensure cases are being reviewed and progressed in a timely manner in the Crown Court and magistrates' court.

CPS Response: Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors (DCCPs) will monitor the timeliness of reviews through a weekly conference call, reallocating resources across the Area as required to improve performance. The DCCPs will report to the Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) and Area Business Manager on action taken to address timeliness issues at the monthly performance review.

8. The Area needs to improve the handling of unused material and to ensure that decisions are recorded on the Disclosure Record Sheet where appropriate.

CPS Response: The CCP and DCCPs, working with the Disclosure Champion, will lead a targeted piece of work to address the Area's application of the disclosure process. This piece of work will also identify any skills gaps amongst prosecutors, which will inform the delivery of a programme of training around disclosure.

9. The Area must ensure Case Management System Hearing Record Sheets are being used to record all court hearings accurately.

CPS Response: Managers will use Individual Quality Assurance (IQA) assessments to identify issues with the timeliness and quality of Hearing Record Sheets with a view to providing feedback to advocates so that shortcomings are addressed.

10. The Area must improve the timeliness of its communications with victims and ensure a letter is sent to the victim in every case in which it is required.

CPS Response: We will implement regular and rigorous checks, using our case management system and our IQA process, to ensure that communications with victims are dealt with in a timely manner. We will analyse all VCL data on a monthly basis, ensuring that key issues relating to timeliness and quality are addressed and communicated to staff.

11. The Area should review its engagement strategy and identify further avenues in order to address community issues and demonstrate how this leads to improvements in casework quality.

CPS Response: We will review our community engagement strategy having explored best practice adopted by other Areas and we will use this to identify and engage with at risk community groups. The strategy will set out how we propose to feedback the results of this engagement to prosecutors to inform their decision making.