

CPS Response to HMCPSI Area Assurance
Inspection of CPS Wessex



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Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) has today issued a report [13 December 2016] following its inspection of the performance of CPS Wessex. The Area was assessed in relation to the following aspects:

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

We are pleased that the Inspectorate recognises the Area's performance transformation in recent years. We welcome its findings that there is strong leadership within CPS Wessex with a high level of staff engagement. This success is reflected in the Area's strong relationships with stakeholders and the role that it takes in joint agency meetings with focus upon improving CJS-wide efficiency and performance. The Area remains committed to working with the police to deliver quality police files and with our partner agencies to further embed Transforming Summary Justice in the Magistrates' Courts and Better Case Management in the Crown Court.

The report recognises that the Area has robust systems in place to manage its expenditure and monitor its resources efficiently. The report compliments the Area on its proactive performance monitoring regime, which has contributed to higher than average conviction rates with fewer hearings and fewer cracked and ineffective trials.

Seven of the eight issues identified by the Inspectorate (detailed below) relate to the quality of casework and the standard of communications with victims. Our response to these issues below demonstrates our commitment to improving performance and the service which we provide to victims and witnesses.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address

The CPS provides its responses below to each of the issues:

1. The Area should reconsider local PTPM meetings as an effective means by which to drive forward improvement strategies at an operational level.
CPS Response: We will conduct a joint review with the police of the effectiveness of PTPM and agree with the police a model for conducting these meetings, which provides greater focus on operational improvement.
2. 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 increase our monitoring of police files 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. This monitoring will also enable us to ensure that our staff are complying with the National File Quality Assurance process and challenging the police in circumstances where there are quality issues with files.

3. The Area needs to put a mechanism in place to enable managers to quality assure the initial reviews of their teams effectively so as to improve quality.
CPS Response: We will conduct an immediate analysis of our lawyers' initial reviews in both the Crown Court and magistrates' court in order to identify where improvements need to be made and ensure that feedback is provided to lawyers directly. Managers will undertake quality assurance reviews and report outcomes on a monthly basis ensuring themes are analysed and lessons learnt.
4. The Area needs to ensure that prosecutors undertake a full review of unused material and record their decisions on the Disclosure Record Sheet (DRS).
CPS Response: We will reissue guidance to all prosecutors in relation to the review and disclosure of unused material. Compliance with this guidance will be monitored by managers during regular quality assurance activity and through an intensive sampling of 100 files in early 2017. The findings of this sampling will be used to inform feedback to staff and identify knowledge and skills gaps which will inform future training.
5. The Area needs to ensure that Hearing Record Sheets (HRS) are entered promptly and accurately onto the case management system.
CPS Response: We will undertake daily monitoring of the return of HRS to ensure that they are returned in a timely manner. We will use the Case Management System to analyse the timeliness and quality (of endorsements) of Hearing Record Sheets with themes and issues being collated for consideration by the Area Management Board.
6. The Area needs to improve its case preparation work and comply fully with the requirements of the Transforming Summary Justice initiative.
CPS Response: We will assess our current compliance with minimum standards as to file content, which we will support by guidance as to what needs to be included in file reviews. We will monitor the application of the principles of TSJ on a monthly basis and will draw any themes from lessons learned by Individual Quality Assessments of lawyers and through regular and frequent compliance checks.
7. The Area should reconsider its arrangements with the police for dealing with unused material in volume cases in the Crown Court.
CPS Response: We will work with the police, through the sampling of a selection of Crown Court cases and through individual feedback in relation to all submitted files to identify issues with the content of schedules of unused material and address them. The need for adequate descriptions on all schedules will be reiterated to prosecutors and the agreement with the police, whereby certain documents are routinely revealed to prosecutors, will be reviewed.
8. An effective mechanism should be put in place to ensure that Victim Communication and Liaison (VCL) communications are of a high standard and sent in all appropriate cases. This should include re-visiting training for all relevant staff and ensuring the prosecutor drafts the appropriate paragraph.
CPS Response: We will immediately review a sample of victim correspondence with a view to identifying quality failings and provide feedback and guidance to improve content. Compliance will be monitored via weekly checks of correspondence supported by training for staff to provide timely and professional communications to victims.