

CPS Response to HMCPSI Area Assurance Inspection of CPS Yorkshire and Humberside

21/02/2017

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) has today [21 February 2017] issued a report following its inspection of the performance of CPS Yorkshire and Humberside. 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 'Good'

We are pleased that the Inspectorate recognises the Area's improved performance in recent years. We welcome its findings that there is strong leadership of the Area, supported by engaged and committed members of staff. This commitment is replicated in the Area's effective relationships with local criminal justice partners, many of who commented on the positive attitude of the CPS and the impact that this has had on the service offered to victims and witnesses of crime. We are also pleased the Inspectorate acknowledges the service offered by the Area's Victim Liaison Unit is a particular strength. This is complimented by a successful strategy for engaging with the diverse communities within the region.

The report commends the Area for its robust approach to performance management, and its use and understanding of performance data, which is shared with staff members, ensuring that they are engaged in the success of the organisation. This is underpinned by the robust systems that the Area has in place to manage its expenditure and allocate and control its resources.

The decisions made by prosecutors to start or continue with a prosecution are of a very high standard and are delivering improved and increasing conviction rates.

The report does raise some issues with the preparation of cases for court and their subsequent management through the criminal process. 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. Our response to these issues below demonstrates our commitment to continue to improve performance, especially in relation to casework quality.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address

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

1. The Area needs to ensure greater senior management engagement with administrative staff.

CPS Response: We will review and revise our people engagement strategy to reflect specific activity relating to engaging with our administrative staff.

2. The Area needs to consider maximising the resources available in-house to cover magistrates' courts in order to minimise agent spend.

CPS Response: We will continue to recruit prosecutors to fill current vacancies. In addition, work will be undertaken with HM Courts and Tribunals Service to ensure that the right number of court sessions are arranged to reflect the overall reduction in magistrates' court work. We will work to ensure that as many of these sessions as possible are covered by CPS in-house prosecutors.

3. The Area needs to further engage with police partners to raise the level of police file quality to the required standard.

CPS Response: We will monitor 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.

4. The Area must embed the Individual Quality Assessment (IQA) process to ensure it improves casework quality.

CPS Response: We have established a Casework Quality Board to strengthen our quality assurance process of casework and to drive further improvements. This Board will work with legal managers to ensure that they comply with the IQA process and identify emerging themes to inform Area training.

5. Disclosure Record Sheets guidance in magistrates' court cases should be disseminated across the Area to ensure consistency and ensure disclosure audit trails are kept where necessary.

6. Prosecutors should feedback poor quality disclosure documents to the police to raise standards

CPS Response to 5 & 6: We will conduct a review of disclosure handling and delivery across all teams creating an Area strategy that will cover: training, systems, expectations and performance management. In addition to consulting with our police partners on the implementation of the strategy, we will feedback to them our findings in relation to the quality of the disclosure documents that they provide, in order to drive improvement.

7. The Area must improve compliance with court directions and case progression tasks in order to increase the effective trial rate.

CPS Response: We will undertake a review of case progression activity and develop plans to improve compliance with court directions and task management including strengthening performance monitoring by line managers.

8. The Area needs to ensure that cases are reviewed in accordance with Better Case Management (BCM) and national Standard Operating Practices (SOP).

CPS Response: We will undertake a review to establish where members of staff are not complying with BCM or the SOP, and take appropriate action.

9. Compliance with the requirements for the disclosure of unused material must improve.

CPS Response: In line with our review on Disclosure handling, as set out in our responses to 5 & 6 above, we will undertake a skills gap analysis for all prosecutors in relation to the disclosure of unused material and the application of national guidance.

10. The Area should ensure robust case progression of Crown Court cases.

CPS Response: Please see our response to 7 above, which addresses case progression also.

11. Victim and witness issues arising during the trial process should be prioritised consistently across the Area.

CPS Response: The report refers to inconsistent practices relating to the warning of witnesses to attend court and the obtaining of Victim Personal Statements from the police and witness summonses from the court. These do not relate specifically to the trial process. A review will be undertaken which will establish where and how these issues arise. The results of this review will be used to ensure that guidance to staff in all parts of the Area is updated and retraining provided, where necessary.