

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **CPS GWENT**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its Report on the inspection of CPS Gwent.

The Area has continued to make progress since last inspected in 2001. The quality of casework decision-making is better than the national average in the cycle of inspections to date in a number of respects. This now needs to be matched by the strengthening of some aspects of subsequent casework handling, where the picture is variable.

Co-location of police and CPS staff has benefited the handling of cases in the Crown Court, although some problems have yet to be resolved. For magistrates' courts cases, the benefits of co-locating police and CPS staff have yet to work through, and this has significantly affected the Area's ability to deliver an effective prosecution process at that level. In particular, there is a need for better compliance with several aspects of the prosecution's obligations of the disclosure of unused material to the defence.

The Area has continued its co-operative working with other criminal justice agencies and is currently at the forefront of two inter-agency pilot initiatives – the No Witness: No Justice Project and the Domestic Violence Project in Caerphilly. These are designed to ensure that more offenders are brought to justice and to secure improvements in public confidence in the criminal justice system. CPS Gwent has also taken innovative steps to engage with local communities.

**Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPsi, said:**

“This inspection shows that CPS Gwent delivers a fundamentally sound service and has made progress since the previous inspection. Some aspects of performance - notably compliance with the prosecution’s obligations of disclosure - need strengthening. I hope that the Area will be able to build on this Report to bring that about.”

**Main findings** by the Inspectorate include:

- \* The Area is committed to playing a key role in achieving the aims set by the Government for the criminal justice system. The numbers of offenders being brought to justice are rising, even from a relatively high existing baseline. Public confidence in Gwent’s criminal justice agencies’ performance in bringing offenders to justice is also growing, although in this instance from a low baseline.
- \* Levels of ineffective trials in the magistrates’ courts (i.e. those which do not proceed on the day listed for a contested hearing) are around the national average and case management here needs to be improved. However, levels of ineffective trials in the Crown Court are significantly better than the national average, due to the established Witness Care Management Team (which is based in the CPS Trial Unit), and supportive work by the Crown Court itself.
- \* The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence is generally good and the Area and its criminal justice partners produce good results against the shared national target for finalisation of these cases (63 days from arrest to sentence during March - May 2004, against the national target of 71 days).
- \* Casework and administrative processes are variable. More robust case progression and focused joint working with the police is needed to achieve more timely delivery, demonstrate a clear commitment to the new pre-trial review system in the magistrates’ courts, and help achieve the demanding timescales set by the Crown Court.

- \* The Area is providing pre-charge advice to police under the Shadow Charging Scheme, but uptake is low.
- \* All those covered by the Direct Communication with Victims scheme need to have explanations sent to them when their cases are discontinued, or the charges substantially reduced. The timeliness of letters sent is good, and above the national average in this respect, but there is a need to ensure that this is done in all appropriate cases and that the quality of letters is consistently high.
- \* The Area has an effective performance management system, but needs to develop a strategy for continuous improvement, as well as developing stronger joint performance management with the police.
- \* CPS Gwent has a diverse workforce and good employment policies, particularly concerning staff deployment and rotation. There is a high level of staff satisfaction in relation to access and support for training and development.
- \* The Area's financial management is carried out to a high standard.
- \* Improved use of technology is required.

**An Executive Summary of the Report is attached.**

### **Notes to Editors**

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second cycle of Area inspections of the CPS, following its restructuring in 1999 as a result of the Glidewell Review. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may either be full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Gwent was a full one. The Area was previously reported on in May 2001.
3. CPS Gwent serves the area covered by Gwent Police. It has one office in Newport, where the Area Headquarters (Secretariat) are based, and one of its Criminal Justice Units is co-located with the police at Newport Police Station. The Area covers six magistrates' courts and two Crown Court venues.

4. At the time of the inspection it employed the equivalent of 86.2 full-time staff (this figure includes a number of part-time staff).
5. In the year to June 2004, the Area handled 21,399 cases in the magistrates' courts, 1,218 in the Crown Court and, in addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 1,814 cases, which was 8.5% of the Area's caseload.
6. Before visiting the Area between 5 - 13 August 2004, the team of inspectors examined a total of 118 cases. They interviewed CPS staff at all levels and also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints, communication with victims following the discontinuance or reduction of a charge, and the care and treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. CPS National Initiatives
  - (i) Charging Scheme (pre-charge advice to police)

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 took forward the recommendations of Lord Justice Auld in his Review of the Criminal Courts, that the CPS will determine the decision to charge offenders in the more serious cases. Shadow charging arrangements are in place in CPS Areas; the statutory scheme will have a phased roll-out, firstly across priority Areas and subsequently all 42.
  - (ii) Effective Trial Management Programme

This initiative, involving all the criminal justice agencies working together, aims to reduce the number of ineffective trials by improving case preparation and progression from the point of charge through to the conclusion of a case.
  - (iii) No Witness: No Justice

This is a project to improve witness care: to give them support and the information that they need from the inception of an incident through to the conclusion of a criminal prosecution. It is a partnership of the CPS and the Association of Chief Police Officers and also involves Victim Support and the Witness Service. Jointly staffed Witness Care Units will be introduced into all CPS Areas by December 2005.
8. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
9. For further information, please contact Jean Withall at HMCPSI tel: 020 7210 1180; e-mail: Jean.Withall@cps.gsi.gov.uk.