

Press Notice

Thursday 4 August 2005

INSPECTORATE CALLS FOR NETWORK TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS PRESS RELEASE AND THE
ACCOMPANYING REPORT AND SUMMARY ARE ALL
EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01, THURSDAY 4 AUGUST 2005.**

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) has called for a CPS network to be set up to assist prosecutors in the management of cases involving children.

A report published today on the role of the CPS in Safeguarding Children found many positive aspects in the work of the CPS which affects children in one way or another – whether as victims, witnesses or offenders. However, the relevant policies and associated stands of work are not brigaded under one strategy and this lessens the impact of some of the positive work being undertaken nationally and locally on specific topics.

The report recommends the setting up of a network of child abuse case co-ordinators or experts - linked to the existing co-ordinators and networks dealing with offences of rape and domestic violence - which will facilitate the collation of good practice, monitoring of case progress and outcomes to assist in performance management of such cases, and help develop policy.

This more cohesive approach would support the overall Government aim that issues relating to the safeguarding of children should be co-ordinated within and across public bodies. This national approach should ensure that the risk of harm to children's welfare is minimized and that, where concerns exist for the welfare of a child or young person, the relevant authorities all work within effective partnerships.

The report commended work undertaken by the CPS in relation to children who have been abused or affected by domestic violence, and in relation to child witnesses and young offenders. CPS public Policy Statements had been issued in relation to offences of rape, and a revised version covering domestic violence. In addition, the CPS's three key principles of policy in relation to child abuse – expedition, sensitivity and fairness – are long-standing and well established.

Inspectors also noted that there is only limited data surrounding safeguarding children issues, which has resulted in a limited ability to learn lessons. The report makes proposals for the update and revision of policies in relation to child abuse, and to formalise the positions of the child abuse co-ordinators or specialist prosecutors which already exist in many Areas.

The CPS was also praised for its significant contribution to forming and influencing Government policy and legislative changes on these issues and for its Domestic Violence Policy and training, which addressed the issue of children affected by domestic violence.

Greater emphasis does need to be placed on safeguarding issues in local and national Business Plans. This needs to be reflected in involvement with and attendance (where appropriate) at Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs).

Other findings of the report included:

- * The CPS is committed to a programme of witness care under the No Witness No Justice initiative, which includes issues relating to children. Data available from the CPS electronic case management system (CMS) collated from Area monitoring between April 2003 - March 2004 shows that, of the 6,064 witnesses requiring special measures, 74% were children (4,487). This highlights the considerable number of children that need safeguarding under the remit of witness care. This strand of work is appropriately prioritised, although it is not linked to the overall theme of safeguarding children.
- * Youth cases are appropriately prioritised and generally good standards maintained; this area of work is mainstreamed at national and local level within the CPS. Again, this strand of work is not linked nationally or locally under the banner of safeguarding children.

Stephen Wooler, Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

“The safeguarding of children is a Government priority which needs to be reflected in the strategic planning of all public authorities. The CPS is already doing much highly professional work in relation to children. These strands need to be drawn together so that safeguarding issues are addressed consistently and comprehensively across the Service.”

An Executive Summary of the report is attached to this notice, also on an embargoed basis. For further information, please contact Michael Fogg, HMCPSI Communications Manager, Tel: 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856346, email: Michael.fogg@cps.gsi.gov.uk.