

CPS Response to HMCPsi Area Assurance Inspection of CPS West Midlands

03/10/2017

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today [3 October 2017] issued a report following its inspection of the performance of CPS West Midlands. The Area was assessed as follows:



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

The Inspectorate commended the Area for its vision ("people first") created by the Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) and her senior team. This vision focuses on investing in staff training, setting clear Area priorities which are understood by all with visible leaders who prioritise engaging with staff.

The Area's excellent relationships and engagement with criminal justice partners, witness services and community groups were commended. Importantly, the Inspectorate noted that the initiative taken by the Area, under the stewardship of the Chief Crown Prosecutor, had resulted in tangible performance improvements, for example, improved conviction rates for hate crime and domestic abuse.

The Inspectorate highlighted the Area's effective performance management regime and commended its approach and focus on data integrity. Performance information is analysed and shared with staff and CJS partners. Joint performance meetings enable aspects of learning and good practice to be shared across agencies leading to commitments to introduce performance improvements that are acted upon.

Although the Area is continuing to deliver improving case outcomes, it accepts that more can be done to improve case management and progression, including communications with victims and witnesses. In particular, it is committed to improving casework quality and has already taken various steps to address this, including the introduction of a casework improvement strategy which is personally led by the Chief Crown Prosecutor.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address and CPS Area response

The Inspectorate identified the following eight issues:

1. Increase awareness of the vision of the Area within the administrative cadre.
2. The Area needs to focus on creating a more effective training programme for non-legal staff, which improves the focus on the professionalisation of the administrative cadre.

Area response to recommendations 1 and 2: We have developed an Operational Delivery Plan following consultation with staff. The Plan was launched on 25 September. Presentations to all administrative staff, to raise awareness of both the Area vision and the training opportunities available to them, will commence on 5 October 2017.

3. The Area needs to raise awareness of value for money principles amongst its operational managers, especially with regard to the impact of agent spend and use of external counsel.

CPS Response: Training sessions are being provided for operational managers on the use of the CPS' National Resource Model which is predicated on best practice. This includes bespoke training on budget and resource management approaches that will lead to a reappraisal of current agent spend and the use of external counsel.

4. The Area needs to work with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) to address the current listing practices and to work systematically to reduce the number of court sessions which would allow it to reduce its reliance on prosecutor agents.

CPS Response: The Area recognises the need to reduce court sessions and will continue to work with HMCTS. HMCTS plan to implement a new listing strategy with a revised approach to remand cases. This new approach should reduce the requirement for agent prosecutor deployment.

5. The Area needs to ensure that cases are reviewed in accordance with Transforming Summary Justice timelines.

CPS Response: The Area will continue to ensure that strong casework governance drives both the timeliness and quality of reviews, in accordance with TSJ principles. The Area has recruited additional prosecutors and has increased the number of charging decisions made locally through improved digital solutions. These arrangements will provide greater opportunity for cases to be allocated to prosecutors from the outset with consequent improvements in timeliness and quality. The Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor (Magistrates) will review Individual Quality Assessment (IQA) findings and, through analysis will ensure that improvements are delivered and, where appropriate, inform further improvement activity.

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

CPS Response: The correct handling of unused material and the proper use of the Disclosure Record Sheet are a priority for the senior management team. Compliance will be monitored by managers through the IQA process. The results of IQAs will be used to provide feedback to individual staff and to identify knowledge and skills gaps which will be addressed in individual's training plans. The Area will continue to work closely with senior police leaders to improve the quality and timeliness of unused material provided by the police. The Area will also contribute to the national response to the HMIC/HMCPSP national report on disclosure.

7. Area to ensure that all staff manage their task lists effectively.

CPS Response: CMS task management formed part of the recent training provided to staff as part of the Area's digital training strategy. This will be followed up by an offer to all staff of a one-to-one training session with the Area's Digital Transformation Team. This will enable more bespoke training to be provided, tailored to each individual's needs and will reiterate the

requirement to record the completion of tasks. The Area will continue to monitor task completion as part of its regular analysis of performance.

8. The Area needs to ensure adherence to VCL processes, that they are fully understood by all legal staff in the Area and that steps are implemented to improve the quality of the letters sent.

CPS Response: The Area will develop a detailed training programme to improve the Area's management of communications with victims, including the VCL process and, specifically, the quality of letters sent. This will be supplemented by a rigorous quality assurance mechanism, the results of which will be assessed by the senior management team and used to inform further actions to ensure improvement is maintained.



CPS