



HMCPsi

HM Crown Prosecution
Service Inspectorate

Annual report

2025–26

**HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE CROWN
PROSECUTION SERVICE INSPECTORATE**



**HIS MAJESTY'S CROWN PROSECUTION
SERVICE INSPECTORATE**

Annual report for the period April 2025 to March 2026

From HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service
Inspectorate to the Attorney General

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 2(2)
of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000

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→ *Welcome*

Chief Inspector's letter to the Attorney General

Dear Attorney General

It gives me great pleasure to present the Annual report for 2025–26. It has been a busy year for HMCPST. We have delivered 12 inspections, including a significant joint inspection with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), as well as two using my assistance powers:

- *An inspection of legal casework in the Health and Safety Executive (page 20)*
- *A follow-up inspection of the recommendations made in the 2024 report: an inspection by invitation of the quality of casework in the Service Prosecuting Authority (page 33).*

We have also published nine inspections of different aspects of work conducted by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

When I took up post in 2025, I set out four priorities for HMCPST:

1. We hold the CPS and Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to account for what they deliver
2. Victims will be at the heart of inspection
3. Using our experience, we will help public prosecutors improve
4. Inspection will identify and spread best practice.

My four priorities were built on firm foundations, given our 25 years of experience inspecting the CPS and SFO, but set out a new focus to enhance the impact of what we do.

As well as continuing to deliver on our statutory requirements to inspect the CPS and the SFO – delivering evidence-based reports to allow you to superintend and understand the quality of the services being offered – I set out that HMCPST would make sure that voices of victims would become more central within our inspections.

It was my view that HMCPsi needed to engage and include victims' experience as a fundamental part of our methodology.

We have made great strides over the last year. We have worked with numerous third sector organisations as we have developed, scoped and conducted inspections. Victim voice is now firmly embedded into our approach, and we continue to work with third sector organisations.

A further priority for my term was to make sure that we used our expertise to help other prosecutors develop their understanding of quality of legal decision-making. This year we have assisted the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) by using our assistance powers to inspect HSE legal services division. We have also begun an inspection of the Criminal Cases Review Commission and worked with the Military Court Service to scope an inspection which will start in April 2026. Sharing our expertise, experience and understanding of what drives quality of legal decision-making is crucial to enhancing public confidence. It must be a priority for HMCPsi to help drive improvement across all prosecution work and I am pleased to be involved in discussions with officials about how we may move from having an assistance power to a more statutory remit for all prosecutors.

And as I said in my letter to you last year: given the pressures that the criminal justice system is under, anything that we can do to improve efficiency, and identify what works well, should help to promulgate good practice.

The composite report published at the end of the CPS Area Inspection Programme¹ highlighted the Inspectorate's view of the core components that drive high-quality casework. This was the first time HMCPsi had published a report that simply set out what works well – highlighting clearly what we found to be good practice.

I am pleased to note that the Director of Public Prosecutions and CPS have developed a clear plan to make sure that the findings of this report are driven across all CPS Areas.

¹ *Area inspection programme: composite report of the baseline assessments of the 14 Crown Prosecution Service Areas in England and Wales*; HMCPsi; September 2023. hmcpsi.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/report/area-inspection-programme-composite-report-of-the-baseline-assessments-of-the-14-crown-prosecution-service-areas-in-england-and-wales

→ *Priority 1:*

We hold the CPS and SFO to account for what they deliver

As part of my inspection strategy, I aim to conduct an annual inspection of the SFO. We published an inspection of SFO disclosure in the 2024–25 year and committed to an inspection of the SFO’s use of counsel in 2025–26 which was published in April 2026, falling just outside of the period covered by this Annual report. However, it would be remiss not to highlight that over the past year we have seen further improvement in the management and leadership of the SFO. Director Nick Ephgrave and his team have continued to deliver improvement across a broad range of aspects. We see this transformation in the openness of discussion and the way that the organisation engages in inspection. I have no doubt that the outgoing director has been able to influence the culture of the SFO, and he leaves a very firm foundation for the new director to build on.

In July, we published *A joint inspection by HMCPST and HMICFRS of case building by the police and CPS* (page 14). This was a significant undertaking. Historically, we have regularly reported file quality issues that have caused tension between the police and CPS. This joint inspection allowed us to examine both organisations, considering the culture and performance, and what issues may sit behind some of the longstanding challenges.

The findings of the joint inspection are somewhat pertinent, given the announcement of long-term and significant police reform. The reform proposals will present an opportunity to address the longstanding issues of inconsistent and local practices.

The inspection highlighted how the lack of co-terminosity of police forces and the CPS was a real barrier – as varied practice impacted quality. We made 18 recommendations, but without coordinated national partnership leadership, improved digital infrastructure, joint accountability, and shared targets, the system will continue to be disjointed and inefficient.

We are starting to see some degree of improvement, and some initiatives – such as the Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan, Joint Operational Improvement Boards and Operation Soteria – are improving local coordination and engagement.

However, much of the focus remains on specialist casework. The improvement we are seeing needs to be replicated across all types of casework; this will be the real challenge.

In every inspection, we see huge commitment and dedication at all levels. The desire to serve the public and deliver justice is palpable and there is no doubt that, in the difficult circumstances of the increasing caseloads and delays caused by the backlog of cases, every single member of staff we interact with wants to deliver a good job.

However, the overarching finding from inspections is a need to focus on the basics – whether in terms of casework or governance – and make sure there is clear accountability, responsibility and proportionate activity to underpin quality.

There are examples of management reacting to specific issues, which can lead to disproportionate activity. There needs to be a laser focus on what adds value.

This year we have published several inspections where we have been able to highlight activity that the CPS can stop doing. Our findings in *An inspection of the CPS's approach to prosecuting crimes against older people* (page 53) and *An inspection of the CPS's approach to handling knife crime* (page 56) highlight changes that would reduce the frontline burden and free up resources to focus on higher quality legal decision-making.

→ *Priority 2:*

Victims will be at the heart of inspection

We have revised our methodology to make sure that, as we develop, scope and deliver inspections, we engage effectively with the third sector and others to check and challenge ourselves.

We first tested this approach in *An inspection of the CPS's approach to prosecuting crimes against older people*. I was very grateful to both Age Concern and Hourglass, who worked with us as we developed our inspection. Hourglass were especially helpful, as they were able to highlight specific issues faced by older victims, given their expertise in the field of supporting older victims through the criminal justice system.

Victims' voices are now firmly embedded into our approach, and we continue to work with third-sector organisations, Victim Support, the Victim Commissioner for England and Wales, the Victim Commissioner for London, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and the government's rape advisor, as we develop inspection approaches and share findings. We have engaged with the Stalking Consortium as we develop and progress our current stalking inspection. We are using the same approach in our honour based abuse inspection and our inspection examining the CPS's handling of non-fatal strangulation cases in a domestic context, which we are about to begin.

In my letter last year, I said I was keen to include follow-up inspections, to make sure that what we recommend is driving improvement.

This year, we published *A follow-up inspection of the recommendations made in the 2023 report: CPS handling of complaints* (page 25). This follow-up inspection was able to highlight some examples of good practice, but overall, the quality of complaint handling remains inconsistent and often inadequate.

In 2026–27, we will report on the CPS’s handling of Victim Communication and Liaison (VCL) scheme letters. Given the extensive work that the CPS has done on the Victim Transformation Programme, I hope that the findings of the VCL letter inspection may highlight more of a cultural change than that seen in the complaint inspection.

In my *Annual report 2024–25*,² I reflected on the disconnect between victims’ expectations and the experience being delivered by the criminal justice system, in the wake of our rapid inspection of the CPS’s handling of the Valdo Calocane case.³ Since the publication of that inspection, I have provided evidence to the Nottingham Inquiry and was asked by the chair of the inquiry to set out my thoughts about what might be done to improve the experience of victims.

There is one recurring issue which I believe is a fundamental problem for victims who encounter the criminal justice system: no overall strategy for what is trying to be achieved.

It is laudable that there is a huge degree of effort and resource being committed to by the government to support victims. The Victim and Prisoner Act strengthened the powers of the Victim Commissioner to hold public bodies to the delivery of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The recent announcement of advocates for rape victims and additional spending for domestic abuse and rape support services are clearly positive.

However, these changes and initiatives are developed in isolation and often across different departments. There needs to be a much more joined-up approach to victim strategy.

² *Annual report 2024–25*; HMCPsi; September 2025.

hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/annual-report-2024-25

³ *An inspection of the CPS actions in the Valdo Calocane case*; HMCPsi; March 2024.

hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/an-inspection-of-crown-prosecution-service-actions-in-the-valdo-calocane-case

This is clearly highlighted by the recent changes in the Bail Act and the abolition of Police and Crime Commissioners, both of which have a direct impact on victim support and cut across victim services. Without a more joined up and strategic approach to criminal justice, I am not convinced that service will reflect the desire to put victims' experiences at the heart of the system.

→ *Priority 3:*

Using our experience, we will help public prosecutors improve

This year, we inspected the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s Legal Services Division and the Service Prosecuting Authority. Both organisations wanted to understand whether there were aspects of their work that could be improved, and were keen to have an independent external assessment and scrutiny of their legal decision-making.

In our recommendations for the HSE, we were able to draw from and build upon what we see working well in the CPS. Feedback on our approach was very positive and, having presented our findings to the HSE Board, there was recognition of how HMCPST's expertise can be used to spread best practice and give a degree of independent scrutiny that cannot be secured elsewhere.

It is on that basis that I continue to work with officials at the Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Justice to consider if HMCPST's powers could be extended to inspect public and private prosecutors, subject to any necessary funding, to increase accountability and public confidence.

→ *Priority 4:*

Inspection will identify and spread best practice

In the early days of the CPS, HMCPST had a vital role in identifying best practice, as there was greater autonomy in Areas that led to far more inconsistent approaches than we see today. The advent of digitisation, the development of Standard Operating Practice, as well as the creation of a national compliance and assurance team, meant that local practice diminished; today, a much more systematic and consistent approach is taken.

However, given our unique perspective of inspecting all CPS Areas regularly, assessing more than 2,000 files annually, there is an opportunity for us to help make sure that what we find to be working well is promulgated, tested and shared with the CPS and other prosecuting bodies.

To make sure we do this in a managed way, I have tasked a senior legal inspector to develop a more structured approach to how we test and assess best practice, working with the CPS to make sure that this complements their current systems. I hope to have rolled out this revised and enhanced approach to best practice before the end of 2026–27.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to colleagues who, without fail, deliver evidence-based, high-quality inspections that help those whom we inspect to improve.

I would also like to acknowledge the service of those who left HMCPST during the year. I am immensely grateful to Eleanor Reyland, who left during the year to go to pastures new; to Mark Langan, who secured a promotion back at his home department; and to Leanne Townsend, who returned to the CPS at the end of her loan. I wish each of them every success in the future.



Anthony Rogers
HM Chief Inspector



Published reports



→ *Published reports*

Joint inspections

*Published
10 July
2025*

A joint inspection by HMCPST and HMICFRS of case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service

Background

This joint inspection examined how the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) work together to build prosecution cases. It focused on either-way and indictable only cases, up to the point of the first plea hearing. Effective joint working at this stage is critical to delivering timely justice and improved outcomes for victims, witnesses and the public.

The inspection was commissioned against a backdrop of increasing system pressure, rising complexity in criminal investigations, expanded disclosure obligations, and widespread workforce inexperience.

It aimed to identify both effective practice and structural barriers that undermine the efficiency and quality of joint case building, and to make recommendations for sustainable system-wide improvement.

Inspection

The inspection was conducted jointly by HMCPST and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in two phases.

Phase 1 examined practice in two CPS Areas and four police forces and was published in January 2024 as an interim report. **Phase 2** extended the scope to an extra four CPS Areas and eight police forces, alongside engagement with national stakeholders, culminating in the final report published in July 2025.

Inspectors:

- examined 120 case files
- analysed national and local performance data
- conducted interviews and focus groups with police and CPS staff at all levels
- observed governance and performance arrangements, including Joint Operational Improvement Meetings.

Findings

The inspection found clear commitment among police officers, prosecutors and staff to build strong cases and deliver justice for victims and the public. However, despite improving relationships at senior levels, communication between the police and CPS is often ineffective: shaped by differing priorities, limited understanding and appreciation of respective roles, and a lack of shared accountability across the prosecution team.

Police file quality remains inconsistent. Fewer than half of the files examined kept to the National File Standard at initial submission. Weak supervision, high workloads, inexperience among investigators and supervisors, and variable gatekeeping arrangements contributed to rework, delay, and missed opportunities to take early, proportionate decisions. In some forces, delays in gatekeeping created risks to statutory time limits and undermined victim confidence.

CPS practices also contributed to inefficiency. We found an inconsistent approach to the administrative triage of cases and prosecutors' use of the Director's Guidance on Charging⁴ assessment. We found that some CPS requests to the police for additional material and information did not include a clear rationale, that requests were made for material that had already been provided, and that requests were made for unnecessary or irrelevant documents. In addition, prosecutors frequently failed to include contact details, limiting opportunities for timely resolution of issues and collaborative problem-solving.

Outdated and fragmented digital systems were a major barrier to effective joint working. The absence of an overarching criminal justice digital strategy has resulted in incompatible police and CPS systems. This leads to unreliable transfers of material and routine disagreements about whether documents sent by the police were correctly received by the CPS.

⁴ *Director's guidance on charging, sixth edition, incorporating the National File Standard; CPS; December 2020.*
cps.gov.uk/prosecution-guidance/directors-guidance-charging-sixth-edition-december-2020-incorporating-national

Pre-charge redaction requirements were identified as one of the most significant sources of inefficiency and frustration. Police spend considerable time redacting material that is never disclosed and, in many cases, never results in a charge. Conflicting interpretations of data protection and disclosure obligations have negatively impacted trust between police and the CPS and increased workload without clear benefits.

Governance and performance management need improvement. There is no clear national criminal justice strategy that sets shared priorities, and performance data is disjointed and difficult to interpret. While Joint Operational Improvement Meetings have potential value, they are often undermined by unbalanced datasets, limited analytical capacity, and insufficient escalation of systemic issues.

Conclusions

The inspection concluded that weaknesses in joint case building are structural and systemic rather than isolated or localised.

While there were encouraging signs of improving relationships at senior leadership levels across the police and CPS, these had not yet translated consistently into improved frontline practice. Without coordinated national leadership, improved digital infrastructure, clearer guidance, and stronger joint accountability, inefficiencies and tensions are likely to continue.

Poor joint case building has tangible consequences, including:

- delay
- wasted effort
- reduced effectiveness at court
- a diminished experience for victims and witnesses.

Addressing these issues is critical to improving both efficiency and public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Recommendations

The inspection made 18 recommendations aimed at improving leadership, governance, digital capability, guidance, supervision, performance management, and communication across the prosecution team.

1. By July 2026, the National Criminal Justice Board should create and publish a clear strategy and oversee the delivery of improvement across the criminal justice system but specifically the prosecution team. As soon as possible afterwards:
 - a. implement a national criminal justice action plan which identifies priorities, allocates responsibilities, and sets performance objectives
 - b. oversee the work of other relevant groups, including Local Criminal Justice Boards
 - c. publish regular updates on progress against the national criminal justice strategy and objectives.
2. By October 2025, the National Criminal Justice Board should extend its membership to include the chair of the Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group.
3. By July 2026, the National Criminal Justice Board should, as part of its national criminal justice strategy, create a viable, realistic plan for securing a national joint police and CPS Digital Case File management system or multiple, fully compatible systems. The National Criminal Justice Board should approach the challenges associated with securing the necessary funding for its proposed solution, and subsequently implementing it, as either its highest priority or one of its highest priorities.
4. By January 2026, the Joint Operational Improvement Board should make sure that there is a clearly defined action plan reflecting adequate resourcing, joint commitments and shared milestones and outcomes to expedite the development and implementation of the Digital Case File management system.
5. By July 2026, police forces should have in place, as part of their gatekeeping or comparable arrangements:
 - a. an effective governance and decision-making capability to make sure that investigations are timely and completed to the appropriate standards
 - b. agreed contact arrangements in place in forces and CPS Areas to facilitate clear, consistent and transparent communication between police and the CPS
 - c. sufficient, trained and competent decision-makers
 - d. effective and efficient systems and processes to manage case file submission queues, to avoid unnecessary delays and risks to cases subject to statutory time limits.
6. By July 2026, the College of Policing should develop a national supervisors' training course and assessment on case file building.
7. Within 12 months of the completion of recommendation 6, police forces should make sure that every supervisor responsible for assessing case files before referral to the CPS for a charging decision is trained in case file building and Director's Guidance on Charging quality assurance.

8. By July 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the CPS should review all national and local case file submission checklists to identify good practice and consolidate this into a single national checklist. This should ensure accuracy and consistency of case file checklists until the Digital Case File is fully operational in all police force and CPS Areas.
9. By July 2026, the police and the CPS at Joint Operational Improvement Meetings should develop a joint local training plan to increase awareness and understanding of each other's roles, including the operation of IT systems.
10. By July 2026, the National Criminal Justice Board should commission a joint review – supported by independent expertise – of performance data. This should include:
 - a. the current use of criminal justice system performance data
 - b. how criminal justice system performance data is collected, presented and analysed
 - c. how criminal justice system performance data is used to support effective partnership working between the police and the CPS.
11. By January 2027, the National Criminal Justice Board should use the outcome of that independent review to define and publish a national set of common metrics to enable effective scrutiny of all relevant aspects of the police's and CPS's performance in pre- and post-charge cases. The National Criminal Justice Board should also extend this to include other aspects of performance, including matters relating to His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.
12. By July 2026, the Joint Operational Improvement Board should review the Director's Guidance on Charging (sixth edition), including the National File Standard, and issue a new (seventh) edition to reduce unnecessary burdens on police and prosecutors. The review should include, as a minimum:
 - a. reconsidering whether front loading is necessary in all cases
 - b. reconsidering the extent to which rebuttable presumption material must be supplied to the CPS before charge
 - c. clarifying the format in which medical and forensic evidence is required for a charging decision
 - d. in as many respects as possible, removing ambiguity from the guidance.
13. By July 2026, CPS Area managers should take steps to satisfy themselves that all action plans:
 - a. are produced in keeping with the requirements of the Director's Guidance
 - b. have a clearly documented rationale
 - c. only contain requests for necessary and relevant documents, evidence or other material
 - d. do not duplicate previously completed actions.

14. By January 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council should undertake a review of redaction systems and determine which systems are the most effective, including their compatibility with the CPS case management system, and communicate this across all forces.
15. By July 2026, building on the work already started, the Joint Operational Improvement Board should take action to:
 - a. work with the Home Office to, if necessary, draft proposals for amendments to the Data Protection Act 2018 and place these before Parliament for its consideration
 - b. work with the Attorney General's Office to consider how the Attorney General's Guidance on Disclosure may be amended to reduce the burden of redaction in cases
 - c. set out a list of approved police IT systems so that they become capable of handling unredacted and redacted material without the risk of unlawful disclosure
 - d. consider how making greater use of artificial intelligence to automate elements of the redaction process may reduce the burden.
16. By October 2025, CPS Area managers should take steps to make sure that prosecutors provide their contact details on all Manual of Guidance Form 3 and Manual of Guidance Form 3A documents to facilitate communication where required.
17. By October 2025, the Director of Public Prosecutions should consider amending the current Director's Guidance on Charging (sixth edition), which states that digital communication is the preferred means of communication.
18. By October 2026, the Joint Operational Improvement Board should conduct an evaluation of early advice surgeries to assess their impact on culture and communication between the police and the CPS, and whether they add value to the effectiveness of the charging process. If found to be successful, their use should be expanded nationwide.

→ *Published reports*

Inspections by invitation

*Published
27 November
2025*

An inspection of legal casework in the Health and Safety Executive

Background

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the United Kingdom's main authority for workplace health and safety. In addition to its regulatory and preventative functions, HSE prosecutes individuals and organisations where there is evidence of serious failings that put workers or members of the public at risk.

In 2022, HSE created a new Legal Services Division (LSD), replacing the Legal Advisers' Office and introducing a fundamental change to how prosecution decisions are made. In-house lawyers are now responsible for the decision to prosecute, rather than inspectors. This creates a clear separation between investigation and prosecution, and strengthens independence and consistency.

We do not have a statutory remit to inspect HSE. However, the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 permits HM Chief Inspector to assist other public authorities so that they can fulfil their functions. This inspection was therefore conducted by invitation from the Director of Legal Services, to provide independent assurance on the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of legal casework, following the creation of LSD.

Inspection

The inspection examined the quality of legal casework, from submitting for a decision to prosecute, through to the first court hearing. The focus was on pre-charge

decision-making, reflecting the scale of organisational change and the importance of this stage in effective prosecutions.

Inspectors examined 26 cases, including charged cases and cases resulting in no further action. More evidence was gathered by:

- analysing performance data
- reviewing documents
- interviewing LSD staff, strategic leads and inspectors in operational divisions
- engaging with external stakeholders, including the judiciary and defence representatives.

Findings

The inspection found that the quality of legal decision-making within the LSD was generally good and the creation of LSD has been a positive development for HSE.

Lawyers consistently applied the Code for Crown Prosecutors and showed sound judgement in assessing evidential sufficiency and public interest considerations. They clearly reasoned and appropriately recorded decisions, providing transparency and clarity.

Timeliness of pre-charge decisions was a notable strength. Almost all cases met the internally set 12-week charging target, and many were resolved more quickly. We found no evidence that timeliness led to poorer quality. Early engagement between lawyers and HSE inspectors was particularly effective in more complex cases, helping to refine lines of inquiry and avoid unnecessary work.

Legal case strategies were usually well developed, with clear consideration of disclosure responsibilities, venue allocation, ancillary orders and likely plea. Overall, case summaries were concise and effective: supporting efficient first hearings and constructive engagement with defence representatives. External stakeholders – including the judiciary – reported confidence in the competence and professionalism of HSE prosecutors.

Despite these strengths, the inspection identified inconsistent practice across LSD. This was evident in expectations around disclosure, particularly in relation to anticipated plea and the proportionality of material review. Guidance was sometimes outdated or difficult to locate, increasing the risk of inconsistent application and inefficient use of lawyers' time.

Communication between lawyers and HSE inspectors was generally constructive but not consistently effective. While some inspectors described strong collaborative

relationships, others reported uncertainty about timescales, expectations, and points of contact. In some cases, inspectors were not promptly informed of key developments – including the outcomes of first hearings – and this limited shared understanding of case progression.

Governance and assurance arrangements were still developing. LSD had introduced quality assurance activity, but this was not yet embedded enough to give a comprehensive view of casework quality or to support learning systematically. Performance management focused primarily on timeliness and output, with limited focus on qualitative measures such as decision quality, communication or victim care.

Service to victims and witnesses broadly met statutory requirements, but practice varied. Victim communications were not always written in clear, empathetic language, and guidance for staff was not easily accessible. We found limited evidence that victim and witness feedback was routinely used to inform learning or improvement.

Overall, the findings reflect an organisation that has effectively carried out significant reform, but which now needs to consolidate progress by embedding consistent standards, strengthening assurance and improving internal communication.

Conclusions

The establishment of the LSD has improved the quality and consistency of HSE's legal decision-making and provides a strong foundation for future development. The separation of investigation and prosecution is delivering clear benefits and is widely supported within HSE and by external stakeholders.

The issues identified reflect the recent creation of the new division and the pace of change since 2022, rather than fundamental weaknesses in legal practice. Continued focus on embedding clear standards, strengthening governance and assurance, improving communication and learning from quality data will be critical to sustaining improvement and maintaining public confidence.

Recommendations

1. By December 2026, LSD will:
 - a. develop, carry out and embed clear guidance on the identification of guilty anticipated plea cases and not guilty anticipated plea cases
 - b. develop and deliver joint mandatory disclosure training
 - c. make sure that all relevant disclosure legislation, guidelines and policy are complied with in casework.

2. By March 2026, LSD is to have set and clearly communicated timescales for lawyers' engagement with inspectors and investigators on cases. By June 2026, the approach is to be embedded.
3. By December 2026, LSD will have developed, communicated and embedded clear standards and expectations for all lawyers and paralegal roles.
4. By March 2026, LSD is to have clearly communicated that lawyers must inform inspectors of the outcome of first hearings. By June 2026, LSD is to have assured that this is happening consistently.
5. By June 2026, LSD is to have reviewed victim and witness resources to make sure that:
 - a. guidance is accessible and contains all relevant internal and public-facing documents in one place
 - b. template letters contain:
 - i. simple and easy to understand language and an appropriate amount of empathy
 - ii. specific dates by which the reader is required to reply.
6. By June 2026, LSD is to incorporate file quality issues and the quality of legal decision-making into performance metrics and make sure that the data is analysed and shared with operational divisions to identify issues, agree actions and monitor outcomes.
7. By December 2026, LSD is to have reviewed the senior enforcement lawyer role to make sure that responsibilities enable increased grip of casework, development of the enforcement lawyer cadre and effective corporate contribution.
8. By December 2026, LSD is to have:
 - a. reviewed its individual quality assessment process to improve casework quality and grip
 - b. carried out a formal process for regular dip sampling of individual quality assessments by deputy directors.

Follow-up inspections



We added follow-up inspections to our inspection strategy in 2024. Follow-up inspections assess progress, whether recommendations have been implemented, and whether there has been an improvement.

We published three follow-up inspections 2025–26.

→ *Follow-up inspections*

CPS handling of complaints

*Published
24 July
2025*

A follow-up inspection of the recommendations made in the 2023 report

Background

In August 2023, we published an inspection into how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) handled complaints.⁵ The inspection assessed the quality and timeliness of 351 complaint response letters across all CPS Areas and casework divisions.

The inspection found that only 51% of letters were of adequate or better quality, despite the CPS having introduced two levels of quality assurance after concerns about the quality of victim communications were identified in 2018.

The quality of complaint handling is important because complainants (often victims or witnesses) are people who are dissatisfied with their experience of the criminal justice process. Transparent, empathetic, and accurate responses are central to maintaining public confidence in the CPS.

The inspection highlighted weaknesses in several key areas, including:

- clarity in communications
- addressing all issues raised by complainants
- giving solutions or apologies if needed.

To support improvement, we made five recommendations to address the issues we found.

⁵ *CPS handling of complaints*; HMCPsi; August 2023.
hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/cps-handling-of-complaints

Follow-up inspection

In July 2025, we did a short follow-up inspection to assess the CPS's progress against the five recommendations.⁶ We examined 151 complaint response letters from all 14 CPS Areas and two casework divisions – the Proceeds of Crime Division and the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Division – as well as conducting interviews, focus groups, and document reviews.

At the time of this inspection, the CPS considered recommendations one and three to be closed. The remaining three recommendations were still under active work.

Our assessment was made against each recommendation, mirroring the criteria used in the original inspection.

Findings

The five previous recommendations are listed below together with the judgement of the follow-up inspection.

1. By December 2023, the CPS will have clarified the time limit for complainants to escalate their complaints to stage two of the process. It will make sure that this information is provided consistently in all letters in response to stage one complaints.
→ NOT ACHIEVED
2. By March 2024, the CPS will develop and deliver training to make sure that all staff (it is relevant to) are using Contact consistently and keeping to the requirement to fully use its functionality.
→ NOT ACHIEVED
3. By September 2023, the CPS will include timeliness data from the Contact application in the internal CPS databank. This data should feature in Area performance reporting at Area and divisional accountability meetings.
→ ACHIEVED
4. By December 2024, the CPS will have improved the quality of complaint response letters showing a substantial improvement in the number of letters rated as adequate.
→ NOT ACHIEVED

⁶ *A follow-up inspection of the recommendations made in the 2023 report: CPS handling of complaints*; HMCPsi; July 2025.
hmcp.si.justiceinspecto.rates.gov.uk/report/a-follow-up-inspection-of-the-recommendations-made-in-the-2023-report-cps-handling-of-complaints

5. By January 2024, the CPS will clarify what the complaints coordinator role entails and what is expected of them in terms of quality assurance processes for complaint letters.
→ NOT ACHIEVED

Roles and responsibilities of staff remained unclear, especially relating to quality assurance. Coordinators often carried duties beyond what guidance expected, and inconsistencies existed within and between Areas.

Conclusions

Our follow-up inspection found only one out of five recommendations achieved, with only marginal improvement in overall letter quality. Although we spotted examples of good practice, the quality of complaint handling remains inconsistent and often inadequate.

The minimal increase, from 51% to 52%, in letters graded adequate or better indicates that the CPS has not yet delivered the substantial improvement needed. There are still issues in key areas such as:

- addressing all issues raised
- showing empathy
- acknowledging mistakes
- giving appropriate solutions.

Confusion also remains around escalation time limits and the role of complaints coordinators. In addition, the quality assurance process is still not robust.

While the CPS has made progress on the timeliness of reporting, more fundamental improvements are needed to make sure that all members of the public receive clear, accurate, empathetic complaint responses that comply with CPS guidance.

Recommendations

We made four new recommendations, which replace the unachieved recommendations from 2023. These reflect the need for clearer processes, strengthened quality assurance, and consistent national standards.

1. By August 2025, the CPS should ensure the correct escalation time limit, “within one calendar month of the date of this letter”, is included in all stage one letters, and by October 2025 undertake an internal evaluation of compliance.
2. By March 2026, the CPS should deliver a substantial improvement in the overall quality of complaint response letters, with evaluation completed by July 2026.

3. By September 2025, the CPS should carry out a robust and consistent quality assurance process, with evaluation by January 2026.
4. By December 2025, the CPS should clearly define roles and responsibilities within the complaints process, including the complaints coordinator role, ensuring clarity and consistency.

These new recommendations reflect the continuing need for systematic improvement in complaint-handling processes.

We will follow up again in the future to assess progress.

→ *Follow-up inspections*

Evidence-led domestic abuse prosecutions

*Published
16 October
2025*

A follow-up inspection
of the recommendations made
in the 2020 joint inspection

Background

HMCPST and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published a joint inspection report in January 2020⁷ to assess:

- whether the guidance and policy on evidence-led prosecutions in domestic abuse prosecutions was widely understood by both police officers and prosecutors
- whether they tried to build viable, evidence-led prosecutions where appropriate.

The 2020 inspection found that the CPS recognised domestic abuse as a priority area of work, and it had continued to commit resources, training and support to make sure that it was treated as such. However, the inspection found that the CPS did not always identify those cases where an evidence-led approach may be more effective, and that improvement was needed in the consideration of evidence-led prosecutions at both the charging stage and later post-charge review by prosecutors.

The inspection found that training was in place for domestic abuse across both organisations, but because of other pressures, uptake was variable.

The joint inspection report set out a total of eight recommendations, four of which were directed to the CPS to address the issues we found.

⁷ *Joint inspection evidence-led domestic abuse prosecutions*; CJJI; January 2020. ciji.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/inspection-report/joint-inspection-evidence-led-domestic-abuse-prosecutions

Follow-up inspection

Given the prevalence of domestic abuse, we decided that it was appropriate at this time to conduct a single agency follow-up inspection to find out to what extent the CPS carried out the recommendations made in 2020 and how successful it was.

At the time of writing of our follow-up report, the CPS continued to act on recommendation four, having completed recommendations one and two. Recommendation three had been incorporated into recommendation four, with our agreement, so that the CPS's activities encompassed both pre- and post-charge reviews.

We examined progress against each of the four recommendations. For each recommendation, we made a judgement as to whether it has been achieved or not.

To check progress against recommendations one and two, we interviewed CPS policy and training leads and assessed relevant, available CPS training. We also assessed relevant documents from CPS Areas, CPS Direct, CPS Headquarters, and CPS Learning Services Team.

To measure progress against recommendations three and four, we assessed 112 recently finalised domestic abuse cases from the magistrates' courts, including a mix of successful and unsuccessful cases, and cases where the victim had withdrawn their support after charge. This helped us to work out whether prosecutors considered evidence led prosecutions – both when it was a hypothetical scenario before charge and when it was a reality after charge.

Findings

The four previous recommendations are listed below, together with the judgement of the follow-up inspection.

1. Police supervisors and CPS legal managers should maximise opportunities to share examples of good work and successful outcomes with their teams.
→ **ACHIEVED**
2. As well as the CPS's bespoke e-learning – which all Area prosecutors have to complete – the police and CPS should make sure that refresher training in domestic abuse, and particularly evidence-led cases, is available to staff as appropriate.
→ **ACHIEVED**
3. Prosecutors should make sure that in all domestic abuse cases, they set out clearly at the charging stage whether an evidence-led prosecution is viable and, if so, define an effective prosecution strategy.
→ **NOT ACHIEVED – NEW RECOMMENDATION MADE**

4. At review stage, prosecutors should – in all appropriate domestic abuse cases – clearly outline a strategy for proceeding with an evidence-led prosecution.
→ NOT ACHIEVED – NEW RECOMMENDATION MADE

Conclusions

In 2020, we found that the CPS could not distinguish evidence-led prosecutions from other cases flagged as domestic abuse, and this hampered its ability to share good work and success stories from these cases. These difficulties remain.

Nevertheless, we found evidence of significant work at both national and Area level to highlight the need to properly consider evidence-led prosecution in all domestic abuse cases, and to share good work and success stories.

The Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan (DAJJP) was launched on 12 November 2024 by the CPS and the National Police Chiefs' Council. This prioritises the CPS and police working together to build effective, evidence-led prosecutions, and share good practice. We welcomed this focus on joint working and the opportunities it brought through conferences and workshops to share joint examples of good work and successful outcomes.

Since the 2020 inspection, the CPS has rolled out face-to-face domestic abuse refresher training to most of its prosecutors. We found the training materials to be of good quality and the sections on evidence-led prosecutions were detailed and comprehensive. We also assessed the specific e-learning and found it to be of good quality, and we found evidence of significant take-up since it started.

At the charging stage, we found that consideration of an evidence-led prosecution was significantly better where either the victim had never supported the prosecution or had already withdrawn their support before the prosecutor's pre-charge review.

Performance was weakest in cases where the victim was supportive at the time of the prosecutor's review. As we found in 2020, prosecutors remain reactive rather than proactive in considering evidence-led prosecutions. As a result, opportunities to build and present viable prosecutions are being missed.

We found that where the charging review did not include consideration of evidence-led prosecution, it was unlikely that this would be remedied after charge, unless the victim retracted their support.

In addition, we found that not all cases where an evidence-led prosecution was considered after charge included a proper, appropriate and proportionate rationale by the prosecutor. This included where the prosecutor's review mentioned an evidence-led

prosecution but did not record adequate reasoning explaining why it was or was not feasible, or set an appropriate strategy to pursue it.

Recommendations

To reflect our findings, we recommended that the CPS supersede recommendations three and four to improve consideration of an evidence-led prosecution in all domestic abuse cases, as well as all other case types, given that the principles are equally applicable to cases that do not involve allegations of domestic abuse.

5. By December 2026, the CPS is to improve consistency of reviews in relation to the consideration of additional reasonable lines of enquiry and opportunities to strengthen cases in all case types, but particularly in domestic abuse cases, so that where appropriate and necessary, domestic abuse cases can proceed without calling the victim to give evidence.
6. By June 2027, the CPS is to have demonstrated improvement through internal assurance.

→ *Follow-up inspections*

An inspection by invitation of the quality of casework in the Service Prosecuting Authority

*Published
10 December
2025*

A follow-up inspection
of the recommendations
made in the 2024 report

Background

The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) is responsible for the review and prosecution of all offences which come before the Service Courts for the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force (RAF).

We do not have statutory authority to inspect the SPA. However, the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 permits HM Chief Inspector to assist other public authorities so that they can fulfil their functions. In 2024, HMCPsi was invited by the Director of Service Prosecutions (DSP) to inspect the quality of the SPA's casework.⁸

Our overall inspection findings were positive, highlighting several strengths in the SPA's casework, including its legal decision-making. We made seven recommendations for improvement.

⁸ *The Service Prosecuting Authority*; HMCPsi; November 2024.
hmcp.si.justiceinspecto.rates.gov.uk/report/the-service-prosecuting-authority

Follow-up inspection

This follow-up inspection, again at the request of the DSP, examined the work that the SPA has done in response to those recommendations. For each recommendation, we received an update and documentation from SPA, carried out a series of interviews and focus groups with prosecutors and managing prosecutors, and also dip sampled randomly selected cases to assess whether we could see any evidence that the recommendations had impacted specific aspects of casework.

Findings

The seven previous recommendations are listed below, together with the judgement of the follow-up inspection.

1. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to amend the template Commanding Officer referral letter to align with the guidance set out in the Manual for Service Prosecutors.
→ **ACHIEVED**
2. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to embed a process for ensuring that post-charge decisions are recorded in the case analysis. By the same date, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to ensure that post-charge decisions are subject to a second lawyer check, which should also be recorded in the case analysis so there is a full record of decision-making and assurance.
→ **ACHIEVED**
3. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to mandate the completion of disclosure management documents in all Court Martial casework for schedule 2 offences or cases investigated by the defence serious crime unit.
→ **ACHIEVED**
4. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to provide training to all prosecutors, and ensure that all prosecutors joining are effectively trained on the following aspects of disclosure:
 - a. the approach to dealing with defence statements
 - b. the importance of scheduling all unused material on the relevant schedules
 - c. the drafting of meaningful disclosure management documents
 - d. the consideration and appropriate endorsement of the schedule 6C relating to non-sensitive unused material, and schedule 6D relating to sensitive unused material.→ **ACHIEVED**

5. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to ensure that prosecutors record in their case analysis their considered view on the applicability of special measures and any other ancillary matters intended to support victims and witnesses.
→ **ACHIEVED**
6. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to mandate the sending of a letter to the complainant(s) in all cases where a charge has either been dropped or substantially altered, providing an explanation for the decision.
→ **ACHIEVED**
7. By the end of March 2025, the Service Prosecuting Authority is to ensure that all casework decisions, case materials, and the handling, receipt and service of those materials are consistently and fully recorded in the appropriate place on the SPA's case management system.
→ **NOT ACHIEVED**

The SPA's case management system, CIMA, has its limitations, which we explored in our 2024 inspection. The SPA has invested in the development of a new case management system that we were told would be implemented in December 2025. The SPA hopes that this will support more efficient working and improve the recording of casework decisions and actions on cases.

Conclusions

The 2024 inspection emphasised that the SPA delivers high-quality legal decisions. The seven recommendations highlighted best practice that we saw in other places that we thought would be of benefit to SPA. We found six of those seven recommendations have now been achieved.

The senior team in SPA made sure that they carried out the recommendations, and that assurance work was carried out to make sure that the changes were embedded and resulted in a positive impact on the quality of casework. We anticipate that when the SPA introduces its new case management system, it will be able to achieve the final recommendation.

*Crown
Prosecution
Service
inspections*



→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

An inspection of early advice and pre-charge decision making in adult rape cases

*Published
15 July 2025*

Background

Rape is a serious crime causing long-term trauma. Improving how these cases are prosecuted has been a government priority for several years.

In 2019, the UK Government commissioned the End-to-end rape review to understand why rape prosecutions had declined sharply since 2016. The review led to a £176 million investment and a commitment to increase the number of rape cases referred by police and charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) back to 2016 levels.

The CPS plays a key role in prosecuting rape cases. To address systemic issues, it introduced the national operating model (NOM) in July 2023, informed by Operation Soteria: an academic and operational programme designed to improve rape investigations and prosecutions.

Operation Soteria promotes a suspect-centric approach, shifting focus from the victim's credibility to the suspect's behaviour before, during, and after the alleged offence. The NOM aims to standardise processes, improve early CPS–police collaboration, and embed cultural change in handling rape cases.

Our inspection aimed to assess:

- the quality of early advice and pre-charge casework
- the consistency and effectiveness of the CPS's implementation of the elements of the NOM relating to the consistency and quality of decision-making at this early stage of a rape case.

Inspection

Inspectors examined 90 pre-charge adult rape advice files from six CPS Areas. This included:

- 36 files that had received early advice followed by a Full Code Test charging decision
- 54 files that had not received early advice before a Full Code Test charging decision.

We focused on assessing the quality of early advice and pre-charge decision casework, and how consistently NOM elements were implemented in the early stages of an adult rape case.

We visited the six CPS Areas and held focus groups and interviews with prosecutors, legal managers, and senior legal managers. We also spoke to relevant staff at CPS Headquarters, including the Deputy Director of Operational Change and the Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy. In addition, we spoke to police personnel from six police forces and the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for rape and serious sexual offences.

Findings

We found that despite significant investment and the introduction of the CPS NOM, improvements in the quality of early advice and pre-charge decision-making in adult rape cases had been limited and inconsistent.

The inspection identified several themes.

Collaboration improved but quality did not

While there was greater collaboration between CPS and police at early stages, this had not consistently translated into better decision-making or stronger case strategies.

Early advice meetings were being offered and held in most cases, but their impact on quality was marginal.

Early advice quality remained weak

While early advice improved case management, as we noted fewer action plans were required on cases then submitted for pre-charge advice, the quality of legal reviews at early advice stage was weak. We found only 33% of early advice cases fully met the required standard, and action plans were often inadequate.

Pre-charge decision-making was inconsistent

Case analysis and strategy were weak: fewer than 16% of cases fully met the standard, and over one third did not meet it at all. Disclosure duties were also poorly handled, with only 12% of cases fully meeting the standard. Prosecutors often failed to adopt a suspect-centric approach, which is central to the NOM. Only 23% of cases fully demonstrated this approach.

Victim support and ancillary issues were poorly addressed

Prosecutors were not proactive in supporting victims at the earliest stage. Consideration of bail, Victim Personal Statements, and protective orders was often missing.

Police file quality and CPS feedback need urgent attention

Police file quality was poor at both early advice and pre-charge stages (75% and 70% non-compliance respectively). CPS feedback on poor files was inconsistent and often inadequate.

Cultural change and skills development required

The suspect-centric approach was not embedded and required ongoing cultural change and skills development. Heavy caseloads and inexperience among some prosecutors were affecting quality.

Governance and assurance was weak

NOM implementation varied across Areas, and assurance processes lacked robustness. Individual quality assessments were not consistently completed because of resource pressures. Rape scrutiny panels were generally being held but feedback was inconsistent and consequently learning from them was not fully embedded.

Conclusions

We found that the NOM had improved collaboration and introduced some positive structural and cultural changes, but it had not yet delivered consistent improvements in the quality of early advice or pre-charge decision casework in adult rape cases. Significant work was needed to embed the suspect-centric approach, make sure that robust case strategies were developed to improve legal decision-making, strengthen victim support, and make sure that governance and assurance were robust.

Recommendations

We made eight recommendations aimed at improving the quality of service provided at this crucial stage of a rape case.

1. By September 2025, on every adult rape case, in accordance with the national operating model, the CPS will offer a face-to-face or virtual meeting in every case referred for early advice before the early advice is finalised. The offer of the meeting and the detail of the meeting, (or confirmation that it was declined) is to be consistently recorded in the case. This approach to be embedded by November 2025.
2. By September 2025, on every adult rape case, in accordance with the national operating model, where no meeting took place at early advice stage (either because it was declined or early advice was not required), the CPS will offer a face-to-face meeting or virtual meeting in every case before the pre-charge decision is finalised. The offer of the meeting and the detail of the meeting, (or confirmation that it was declined) is to be consistently recorded in the case. This approach to be embedded by November 2025.
3. By July 2026, the CPS to have invested in the ongoing development of skills and confidence to equip rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) prosecutors to improve casework quality by adding value through good quality prosecutorial decision-making demonstrating sound evidence-based suspect-centric case strategies when providing early advice or making charging decisions in adult rape cases.
4. By July 2026, the CPS to have significantly improved the quality of early advice and pre-charge decision reviews.
5. By October 2025, the CPS to have decided and communicated internally whether a Victim Communication and Liaison scheme letter explaining a decision to charge is to be compulsory in all adult rape cases.
6. From October 2025, the CPS to ensure that, as a minimum, pre-charge advice cases with three or more substantive action plans are on the agenda to be scrutinised at rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) local Joint Operational Improvement Meetings to identify and address themes and issues.
7. By October 2025, at local and strategic Joint Operational Improvement Meetings, the CPS to ensure that there is a clear, consistent and detailed recording of issues being raised at those meetings, detailing actions agreed and assessment of impact of those actions to strengthen casework quality and to identify and disseminate best practice.
8. By December 2025, the CPS to have developed and implemented a quality assurance regime in rape cases, that assesses and improves casework quality.

Given the importance and priority of high-quality casework in rape cases, we intend to carry out a follow-up inspection of pre-charge casework and an inspection of post-charge legal decision-making and case progression in adult rape cases to complement this inspection.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

CPS Direct – an inspection of the quality and timeliness of charging decisions made by CPS’s out-of-hours service

*Published
18 September 2025*

Background

CPS Direct is primarily an out-of-hours service that works through the night, at weekends and bank holidays to provide charging decisions to the police on cases where a suspect cannot be released on bail. These tend to be cases that would be dealt with by the geographical Areas rather than the specialist casework divisions.

Once a decision to charge has been made on a case by CPS Direct, it is passed on to the relevant CPS Area to take local responsibility for the progression of the case through the courts.

Charging is the gateway to a suspect being prosecuted in the criminal courts. Making sure decisions to charge or take no further action against a suspect are both legally sound and timely is vital to an effective criminal justice system.

We last examined CPS Direct’s decision-making as part of our overall charging inspection in 2020⁹, which identified that there was room for improvement in respect of the quality of prosecutors’ legal analysis, timeliness of decision-making and familiarity with both the CPS’s own policies and the Director’s Guidance on Charging.

⁹ *Charging inspection 2020*; HMCPsi; September 2020.
hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/charging-inspection-2020

Inspection

This inspection considered three questions:

- **Quality:** Do CPS Direct's charging decisions consistently meet the CPS's legal and policy standards?
- **Timeliness:** Are urgent charging decisions delivered within agreed service level agreements, despite high demand and challenges around file quality?
- **Assurance:** Is CPS Direct's internal quality assurance regime effective in identifying weaknesses and driving improvement?

This inspection combined file analysis, documentation review and fieldwork interviews. We focused on priority 'red' cases referred to CPS Direct for immediate charging decisions, most involving suspects in custody and a Threshold Test decision.

We examined 150 finalised and live files where the charging decision was made between 1 July 2024 and 31 January 2025. The file sample covered casework concluded, or destined to be concluded, in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court. The selected files covered the full range of criminal offences, including homicide and RASSO.

We analysed a selection of documents and performance data relevant to the operation of CPS Direct. We interviewed senior members of staff from CPS Direct and CPS Headquarters and held focus groups with a selection of CPS Direct managers and prosecutors. We also interviewed the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for charging.

Findings

Generally, CPS Direct continues to provide high quality and timely charging decisions, maintaining performance levels that are comparable – and in some instances superior – to those in CPS geographical Areas.

However, improvement is needed in the quality of case analysis and strategy and in the clarity and proportionality of pre-charge action plans. Over-reliance on generic templates led to action plans that were either unclear, unnecessary or lacked realistic timescales.

The quality of police file submissions remained a persistent issue, although CPS Direct demonstrated robust feedback to police forces on deficiencies.

CPS Direct met the three-hour service level agreement for the provision of a charging decision in just under two-thirds of cases. Approximately 85% of charging decisions were delivered within four hours. Performance has improved over the past two years,

supported by increased resources; but peaks in demand, poor-quality police files, and submission of complex Annex 6 cases continued to exert pressure.

CPS Direct's internal assurance is embedded and increasingly robust. It had identified similar issues to those found by the inspection and was being used to drive improvement.

The 'Chat Not Cap' initiative – encouraging prosecutors to speak to officers to agree actions – is improving communication and case progression, and was identified as good practice.

Conclusion

We found that CPS Direct is consistently making the right decisions to charge or to take no further action on cases. It is performing well and delivering good quality in several crucial aspects of its work. But if some aspects were improved as needed, it would benefit the overall prosecution process.

The decisions it makes are timely in the vast majority of cases, despite the pressure on it as an on-demand, national, out-of-hours service.

Recommendations

1. By December 2026, CPS Direct to consistently provide to the National Joint Charging Board a breakdown of National File Standard non-compliant files that were rejected at triage and those accepted with remedial work during the CPS Direct three-hour service level agreement period.
2. By September 2026, CPS Direct to have improved the quality of case strategy and analysis in pre-charge reviews and the quality of action plans. By December 2026, the CPS to have carried out assurance to evidence improvement.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

Area Inspection Programme phase 3

Background

HMCPsi started an Area Inspection Programme (AIP) in 2021, designed to have a minimum of two cycles of inspection: a baseline and follow-up.

In the baseline inspection, the focus of the AIP was casework quality in all aspects of volume casework, establishing whether the 14 CPS Areas added value to the prosecution through proactive decision-making and gripped the management of their cases. During 2021–22, we published the first cycle of individual baseline reports from the 14 individual CPS Areas.

In January 2025 we published a follow-up inspection (phase 2) to re-assess and compare the casework quality following the baseline assessment and identify:

- where improvements had been made
- where performance had deteriorated
- a direction of travel.

We used that data to identify two CPS Areas where there was significant improvement or decline to visit in phase 3 of the AIP to examine what drives casework quality.

The CPS Areas chosen were Yorkshire and Humberside and Cymru-Wales.

Inspection

The objective of phase 3 of the AIP was to assess whether and how these factors affected the CPS Area's results for added value and grip, following the data from the baseline AIP. By doing so, we sought to gain insights to inform improvements in casework quality and enhance overall operational effectiveness across all CPS Areas.

The three components we used to determine drivers of casework quality were:

- legal leadership and assurance
- resource utilisation and management
- stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

An inspection of CPS Yorkshire and Humberside

*Published
30 September 2025*

CPS Yorkshire and Humberside's results for added value and grip improved from the baseline to follow-up across both magistrates' court and Crown Court.

The data from the AIP highlighted that CPS Yorkshire and Humberside had a positive direction of travel:

- added value improved by 9.9% and grip improved by 13.2% from our baseline figures in the magistrates' court unit
- added value improved by 11.2% and grip improved by 1.7% in the Crown Court unit.

Therefore, we selected CPS Yorkshire and Humberside as the first CPS Area to be inspected as part of AIP phase 3.

Findings

The Area had adopted a strategic back-to-basics ethos, focusing on core priorities and adopting a staged approach, rather than trying to address all issues simultaneously. This targeted strategy has enabled the Area to concentrate efforts where it can deliver the greatest impact. The Area showed good governance, which is central to embedding this approach, particularly in driving improvements in casework management.

There was a strong, collaborative partnership between operational delivery and legal teams that was fundamental to the Area's success in improving casework quality. Inter-team partnership enabled both sides of the organisation to understand the issues and challenges facing each other. We found a real appetite for collaboration, and it appears to be an approach which is embedded.

A strong team ethos was evident across the Area. Anchor days are used to encourage office attendance and strengthen team relationships. Communication is effective and well-managed with a good flow of consistent information and messaging from senior leadership setting clear priorities. There is a regular and effective mechanism of feedback up to the senior team from operational levels. Staff relationships were positive and collaborative.

Learning and development were a priority. Opportunities were sought to embed knowledge in the casework teams. In addition to mandated training, the Area has carried out some local initiatives, such as the extensive use of Local Case Management Panels as a learning and development tool, embracing the use of case conversations to drive casework quality. These, along with the individual quality assessment process, are also used by managers to assure themselves of casework quality and to address issues in a constructive way.

Following the baseline AIP report, the Area had made tangible progress by addressing key recommendations. Notable improvements have been seen in areas such as Victim Communication and Liaison scheme letters and significant event reviews. A forensic, structured approach to improvement has been adopted.

Performance management has significantly improved, with the Area making effective use of real-time data through a bespoke performance tool which was developed by the Area performance manager. This performance tool enables legal managers to quickly identify trends and take corrective action.

Operational grip is evident in initiatives such as internal Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing management by crown advocates and magistrates' court clinics, which have contributed to reduced trial backlogs and lower vacated and ineffective trial rates.

Partnerships with police and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service have matured into meaningful operational improvements. The Area is open to innovation and has successfully trialled new approaches, supported by strong stakeholder relationships.

Despite facing similar challenges to other CPS Areas, with constraints on budget and the highest volume of custody time limit cases, Yorkshire and Humberside manages its resources effectively. The Area uses its budget creatively to address shortfalls and regularly reviews resource allocation to make sure it remains responsive and efficient.

Good practice

We identified the following aspects of good practice.

1. Cross-functional collaboration between operational delivery and legal across all levels is instrumental in cultivating a unified and collaborative workplace culture.
2. Relationships with external stakeholders are well-developed and contribute meaningfully to service improvement.
3. Governance across the Area is robust, supported by strong leadership and a clear focus on improvement. A structured approach is used to identify issues, set actions, hold owners accountable, and assess impact.
4. Communication is effective and two-way, enabling transparency and engagement across teams.
5. The increased use of Local Case Management Panels in volume casework is harnessing the value of casework conversations to support the development of prosecutors and first-line legal managers, with proactive involvement from senior legal staff.
6. Performance data is used consistently at all levels to proactively identify areas for improvement and drive targeted interventions.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

An inspection of CPS Cymru-Wales

*Published
8 January 2026*

Cymru-Wales's results for added value and grip declined between baseline and follow-up, across both magistrates' court and Crown Court casework.

The data from the AIP presents CPS Cymru-Wales as having declined in both added value (down 8.4 percentage points from our baseline figures) and grip (down 6.2 percentage points) in the magistrates' court unit.

In the Crown Court team, added value improved by 5.2 percentage points but grip declined – albeit from a relatively high starting point – down 1.2 percentage points from our baseline figures.

Therefore, we selected CPS Cymru-Wales as the second CPS Area to be inspected as part of AIP3.

Findings

The Area demonstrated a proactive approach to leadership and communication, using a variety of channels such as all-staff calls, weekly bulletins, team meetings, and intranet updates to keep staff informed and engaged. There was also a clear strategy designed to foster transparency and inclusivity.

Introducing a way that line managers can be more consistent when sending organisational messages in team meetings would further underpin this approach and ensure clarity and cohesion across the Area.

The Area was going through a period of transition. It faced significant challenges caused by a sharp decline in experienced staff during 2022–24 as well as changes to the senior leadership team, which affected casework quality in the magistrates' court unit.

The significant change in experience in the magistrates' court unit is reflected in our follow-up findings. The decline in performance of the magistrates' court unit is set against the stable performance of the Crown Court team, which continued to perform well. The Area has understandably focused its deployment of experienced people on more serious casework.

Training and development in the Area were a strength. Mock trials in the magistrates' courts, led by District Crown Prosecutors and involving police colleagues, provided valuable courtroom experience and targeted advocacy training, aimed at increasing the capability and experience of prosecutors. The initiative was well received and set for wider rollout.

For legal managers, the Area has introduced the Legal Leadership Forum. This monthly forum offers structured training and peer learning, with a focus on legal knowledge and internal talent development. It is one of the tools the Area uses to develop its less experienced legal managers.

Prosecutors in the magistrates' courts expressed the view that post-induction support was lacking. Because of the inexperience of some managers, we were told that new prosecutors seek to fill skills gaps themselves by informally shadowing experienced colleagues. This approach can put casework quality at risk in the absence of effective managerial oversight.

Some legal managers expressed concern about their induction process once they were newly promoted. Although an induction plan exists, it was not consistently followed or recognised as part of a formal training pathway. Consequently, this has left broader management competencies underdeveloped. Coupled with the level of new managers in the magistrates' court management cadre, this has an adverse impact on casework quality.

Governance structures, such as record keeping, monitoring action logs, and measuring outputs, were in place across all units but inconsistently applied.

Although we saw evidence of action being taken to drive improvement, a more forensic and structured approach to support improvement activity would be helpful. While it was evident that analysis and performance data was used in some places to proactively identify and drive actions, with individuals who are then held to account for delivery, this was not consistent. There was evidence of longstanding issues drifting and not being fixed.

Joint Operational Improvement Meetings (JOIMs) between the police and CPS were poorly recorded and overly focused on presenting data rather than actions to drive improvement. The data used was often outdated or lacked analytical support and the Area struggles to meet the level of detail requested by police forces.

Strategic JOIMs faced similar challenges, with no clear evidence that they were positively influencing casework quality, despite recent governance changes aimed at improving consistency.

The Area demonstrated a strong commitment to innovation and improvement, actively engaging in a range of pilots and initiatives. With a history of successfully delivering pilots, especially within the Crown Court context, and often supported by strong stakeholder relationships, such as the Chief Crown Prosecutor's role in the Crown Court Improvements Group, the Area plays a key role in shaping policy and practice across England and Wales.

The Area participates in many pilots which affect Crown Court casework. The Crown Court team has continued to perform well, and it is the Area's successful involvement in these pilots which has been a key factor contributing to driving casework quality.

Good practice

We identified the following aspects of good practice:

1. The use of mock trials to increase the capability and experience of magistrates' court prosecutors, with assessment and assurance by legal managers through feedback and peer-led sessions to reinforce learning.
2. The Area's local induction programme, introduced in 2023–24, when the Area experienced a high volume of new prosecutors joining. It received national recognition for its structured and tailored approach, which included detailed timetables, mentoring expectations, and regular progress reviews.
3. The induction process, which provided a robust framework to support and equip those joining the CPS to fulfil their roles. Each new starter's timetable varied slightly, in line with training availability and progress made; this approach enabled consistency of training and assurance that required steps for development had been taken.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

Composite report of the phase 3 inspections of CPS Yorkshire and Humberside and CPS Cymru-Wales

*Published
11 March 2026*

This report presented a thematic, high-level comparative analysis of the two phase 3 inspections. We identified the strengths across both Areas, where Yorkshire and Humberside excelled, and where Cymru-Wales needed to consolidate.

Findings

Across both Areas, inspectors identified shared drivers of improvement:

- strong strategic direction
- a commitment to strengthening fundamental casework practices
- close and purposeful collaboration with partners.

While each Area faced unique operational pressures, the evidence indicates that positive casework outcomes are shaped by:

- senior leadership clarity
- consistent management of fundamental processes
- collaborative working between the operational delivery and legal disciplines
- a culture that encourages problem-solving across organisational boundaries.

The purpose of this thematic report was to summarise the findings from our inspection activity in these two Areas under three core components:

Setting direction

Both Areas demonstrated commitment to improvement, but CPS Yorkshire and Humberside was more advanced in embedding structured, data-driven leadership across the Area and casework types.

CPS Cymru-Wales had strong intentions and pockets of innovation, but the impact was less consistent.

In our judgement, clarity of direction, stability, and data-driven decision-making were the decisive factors to deliver change and improved quality.

Focusing on the basics

CPS Yorkshire and Humberside demonstrated a more mature, embedded approach to fundamental casework practices. Its application of structured learning, disciplined process management, and strong assurance mechanisms set a clear benchmark.

CPS Cymru-Wales showed commitment and some innovative practice, particularly around prosecutor capability building, but the variability in performance, especially in magistrates' court casework, indicated that there were some basic fundamentals that needed a more consistent application.

A focus on building experience through legal management, including coaching and mentoring of new staff, would lead to better decision-making and improved casework quality.

Working together

Both Areas recognised the importance of collaboration, but CPS Yorkshire and Humberside's partnerships – both between legal and operational teams and with criminal justice partners – produced more measurable impact on casework quality. The Area's practical, problem-solving approach, supported by strong inter-agency engagement, directly contributed to its improved performance.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis highlights clear patterns in what drives high quality casework. Effective leadership direction, disciplined focus on the basics, and strong partnership working are essential to achieving positive outcomes.

CPS Yorkshire and Humberside's substantial improvement demonstrates the value of a clear vision, structured governance, robust assurance mechanisms, and collaborative culture, both internally and with partners. The Area provides an example of how coordinated, data-driven action can transform performance, even in challenging circumstances.

CPS Cymru-Wales continues to deliver positive results and has strong foundations – particularly in staff development and commitment to improvement – but needs to consolidate fundamental processes and stabilise its delivery. It is clear that the Area can achieve this, given the scale of improvement seen in Crown Court casework.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

An inspection of the CPS's approach to prosecuting crimes against older people

Published 4 March 2026

Background

The CPS currently defines a crime against an older person as occurring “where the victim is 65 or over, any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be committed by reason of the victim’s vulnerability or presumed vulnerability through age”. This definition is based on the five statutory forms of hate crime (race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity), in that it requires the offending to be motivated or targeted due to vulnerability or perceived vulnerability due to age.

The CPS uses an electronic ‘flag’ to identify and monitor cases involving crimes against older people on its case management system (CMS).

Inspection

This was the first inspection we conducted using our new victim experience methodology, making sure that victims’ voices are at the heart of our inspections.

We engaged with two charities with expertise on ageing and the abuse of older people: Age UK and Hourglass. Our discussions helped us to shape the scope and methodology of our inspection, and they provided valuable insight into the challenges faced by older people who are victims of crime.

The inspection assessed whether older people can be confident in the CPS’s approach to prosecuting cases in which they are victims. There were four inspection criteria:

- Does the CPS apply the proper care and consideration when reviewing cases involving crimes against older people at a pre-charge stage?
- Does the CPS handle prosecutions involving crimes against older people proactively, efficiently and expeditiously after a suspect has been charged?

- Is the CPS effective in making sure that older people are properly supported through the prosecution process?
- Does the CPS have effective monitoring arrangements in place to make sure that cases involving older people as victims are accurately identified and prosecuted, in line with the CPS's policy and guidance?

Inspectors examined a total of 168 cases: 12 from each of the 14 geographical CPS Areas, including magistrates' court and Crown Court cases. Two thirds (112) of the cases were flagged on the CMS as a crime against an older person. The remaining third (56) were cases in which the victim was aged 65 or over, but the case had not been flagged as a crime against an older person.

Inspectors also conducted a dip sample of 20 cases in which the victim was aged between 60 and 64.

Inspectors visited four CPS Areas and interviewed:

- leads for crimes against older people
- performance managers
- inclusion community engagement managers
- others who were responsible for completing hate crime data assurance.

We also spoke to relevant staff at CPS Headquarters, including individuals from the CPS legal assurance team and policy directorate, and to representatives of Hourglass.

Findings

We found that in general the CPS provided a good service to older people who are victims of crime. Prosecutors were good at identifying where victims are vulnerable. There was a focus on applying for appropriate special measures to help victims give evidence, as well as asking the court to make ancillary orders to protect victims during and after a prosecution.

In the majority of cases, prosecutors assessed older victims' reliability, credibility and competence without making assumptions based on their age, and considered older victims' views before accepting pleas to alternative or less serious offences.

We found room for improvement in some aspects of the prosecution process. For example, the CPS's instructions to court prosecutors were not always of high quality and often did not include information about the victim as an older person. This can prevent court prosecutors from giving the court the full information it needs to properly sentence defendants.

We found that cases were not flagged consistently or accurately. We found many examples of cases that were flagged where the victim was not targeted due to age-related vulnerability, or where the victim was under the age of 65.

There was little difference in the way prosecutors handled cases, regardless of whether they were correctly flagged as a crime against an older person or not.

We also found that the CPS's guidance for prosecutors about crimes against older people was helpful, and that much of it was relevant to older victims, whether or not they had been targeted due to their vulnerability.

Conclusions

The evidence demonstrated that the CPS is committed to providing a good service to older people who are victims of crime.

Prosecutors were good at identifying the vulnerability of victims and there was a focus on applying for appropriate special measures to assist victims to give evidence, and asking the court to make orders to protect them, during and after a prosecution.

The current CPS definition of a crime against an older person is subjective, requiring the offending to be targeted due to vulnerability or perceived vulnerability through age. This means that cases where there is no targeting are not included in the CPS's approach, either in terms of applying the policy and guidance on crimes against older people, or to the collation of data through flagging.

A simpler definition which includes any crime committed against a person aged 60 or over, and removes the element of targeting, would reduce unnecessary pressure on prosecutors, improve data accuracy, and bring the CPS into line with the definition used by the third sector.

Recommendations

By September 2026 the CPS should:

1. simplify the definition of a crime against an older person to anyone aged 60 or older who is a victim of crime and align the flagging requirement to the new definition
2. simplify the crimes against older people guidance to remove the requirement to treat such offences as quasi-hate crimes and instead focus on the need to consider vulnerability in all aspects of communication with and support of older victims throughout the prosecution process, providing links to and from other elements of relevant guidance and policy to enhance the experience of older victims of crime
3. ensure the accuracy of the flagging data is monitored and quality assured.

→ *Crown Prosecution Service inspections*

An inspection of the CPS's approach to handling knife crime

*Published
31 March 2026*

Background

Knife crime has increased significantly over the past decade, posing a major challenge for public safety and confidence in the criminal justice system.

The Safer Streets Mission is the UK Government's long-term strategy to reduce serious harm, halve knife crime within a decade, and restore public confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system. It focuses on prevention, robust enforcement, and system-wide consistency – supported by reforms to policing standards, neighbourhood visibility, and legislative changes targeting violent crime.

The CPS plays a key role in delivering the Safer Streets Mission and its ambition to make communities feel safer, by prosecuting knife offences robustly in line with its guidance. Our inspection assessed how effective the CPS was in consistently applying policy, guidance and the law in prosecuting crime involving knives.

Inspection

Evidence was gathered through the examination of 210 cases from across the 14 CPS geographical Areas, covering a range of knife-related offences.

In addition, we viewed documentation and conducted interviews with policy leads in CPS Headquarters, including the Deputy Director (Policy Directorate). This enabled us to assess both the quality of individual case decisions and the wider operational context of those decisions.

Findings

Overall, the inspection found that the CPS was strongly committed to tackling knife crime and positively contributed to the government's Safer Streets Mission.

Prosecutors mostly applied the Code for Crown Prosecutors (the Code) carefully and proportionately, particularly at the charging stage. Inspectors identified sound decision-making, thoughtful legal analysis and examples of good practice that support public protection and confidence in the justice system. Where weaknesses were identified, they largely reflected issues of consistency and clarity.

We identified the following themes.

Strengths in early decision making

Early decision-making was a notable strength. In cases charged by the CPS, prosecutors usually selected appropriate knife-related offences at the point of charge and applied the Code in a structured and disciplined way.

Inconsistency in charge selection for more serious offending

Most cases involved possession of a knife with no aggravating features. In these cases, charge selection was good.

However, in the smaller number of cases where aggravating factors were present, decision-making was less robust.

Complexities in legal classification

There were challenges in distinguishing between bladed article and offensive weapon offences, understanding specific legal classifications, and determining whether the circumstances of the offence took place in a public or private location.

Consideration of defences and reasonable lines of inquiry

We found some positive practice in the consideration of defences and reasonable lines of inquiry. Prosecutors demonstrated a thoughtful approach, anticipating potential issues, and identifying proportionate enquiries.

Conversely, we also found examples where the analysis lacked depth and did not fully address available lines of inquiry, meaning that the extent of offending was not always fully reflected in the charges brought.

Positive practice in youth cases

Cases involving youth defendants were a clear area of strength. Prosecutors usually applied youth justice principles appropriately, considered diversion at an early stage, and made proportionate decisions.

Use of ancillary orders at sentence

We found positive practice in the use of ancillary orders at sentence. Advocates generally sought forfeiture and deprivation orders appropriately and showed a clear understanding of their preventative value.

Need for greater consistency and clarity

The inspection identified areas where greater consistency and clarity would enhance the CPS's response to knife crime. The type of knife used in the offence was often incompletely or inaccurately identified, and prosecutors did not consistently use available guidance to support knife classification.

Mandatory minimum sentencing provisions

We found that mandatory minimum sentencing provisions were inconsistently considered at the review stage.

Variable quality of sentencing analysis

Many reviews did not demonstrate structured engagement with the relevant guideline or offence category, which limited the instructions to advocates and, consequently, the representations made to the court on sentence.

Conclusions

Overall, the CPS performs well in several key aspects of knife crime casework, most notably in early decision-making, youth related cases and the pursuit of ancillary orders. There is clear guidance and policy emphasising the need for prosecutors to charge knife-related offences to protect the public and maintain public confidence.

However, there are some aspects that could be improved:

- identifying the specific type of knife involved in an offence
- applying relevant sentencing frameworks
- considering mandatory minimum sentencing provisions
- consistently referencing CPS legal guidance and the Attorney General's Guidelines on Accepting Pleas where a knife crime is not proceeded with.

Addressing gaps in guidance, strengthening training and improving the quality of recording would support more consistent decision-making and stronger outcomes for victims and communities. Greater assurance and focus on the issues identified will improve the quality of legal decision-making and outcomes for victims.

Recommendations

We made two recommendations aimed at improving quality of legal decision-making and outcomes for victims.

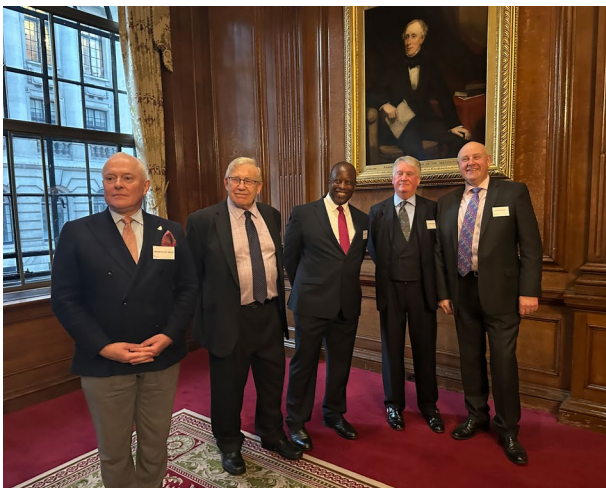
1. By June 2026, the CPS to review, refine and re-publish Knife and Other Weapons Offences guidance to support and highlight the need to identify mandatory minimum sentence cases.
2. By April 2027, the CPS to be able to demonstrate a significant improvement in its compliance with identification of minimum mandatory sentence knife crime cases in pre- and post-charge reviews.

Our year



→ *Our year*

Inside HMCPST



All five Chief Inspectors together for our 25th anniversary



An all-staff photo from our all-staff conference

Staff engagement continues to be strong within HMCPST, as evidenced by this year’s Civil Service People Survey results, which recorded an engagement score of 83%. This marks a notable increase of 8% compared to the previous year and is the best in class for all Civil Service departments who took part in the survey.

We continue our commitment to developing our staff and making HMCPST a great place to work.

HMCPST was created in 2000, making this year our 25th anniversary. We celebrated the occasion with an all-staff conference, and took the opportunity to invite all our previous Chief Inspectors.

HMCPST is committed to sharing our 25 years of experience and best practice with others, including other jurisdictions.

We have also engaged alongside Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) colleagues, and delivered presentations to prosecutors from other countries. This year we engaged with Albania’s High Inspector of Prosecution, and delegations from Kenya, Malaysia and Ireland. We were also delighted that former Director of

Public Prosecutions of Jamaica, Paula Llewellyn CD KC, agreed to come and share her experiences on a call with all HMCPST staff.

HMCPST has representation on the Whitehall Prosecutor’s Group and our Chief Inspector sits on the Victims’ Commissioner’s Advisory Group.

We will have a number of meetings with those we inspect over the course of the year, and have regular stakeholder meetings with the Attorney General’s Office and the other criminal justice inspectorates. We are also increasingly engaging with third-sector groups, in particular those working with victims, to help us make sure that victims’ experiences are considered as part of our inspections.

→ *Our year*

HMCPST’s year in numbers

<p>30</p> <p>staff</p>	<p>12</p> <p>inspection reports</p>	<p>52</p> <p>recommendations made</p>
<p>1,014</p> <p>files read relating to published inspections</p>		<p>1,148</p> <p>items of public correspondence received</p>
<p>24</p> <p>suggestions for improvement made</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Freedom of Information requests responded to</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Parliamentary questions replied to</p>



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