



**Embargoed to
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Achieving real improvements

Multi-agency reviews into high-profile incidents, such as court resulting in Leeds and the case of Anthony Leon Peart, that were undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) last year are detailed in its Annual Report being published today.

In addition to scrutinizing the administration of Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) Areas, HMICA was engaged in inspections of the enforcement of court orders, the use of court cells to hold prisoners overnight, people's experiences of family courts and, finally, electronic monitoring to see how well sentences involving curfews and Home Detention Curfews were being monitored.

Publishing his third Annual report, HMICA Chief Inspector Eddie Bloomfield said:

'2007–08 has been a year of change for Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS). HMICA has continued to engage with that change, working with HMCS and the other justice inspectorates to ensure real improvements for the end users of court services.'

'The focus of this year's programme has been working alongside others to help the organisations we inspect to deliver real improvements for service users and, in so doing, provide assurance to Ministers and the public about the delivery of those services. Our programme of work included planned inspections and unplanned, high profile, special reviews undertaken at the request of Ministers.'

This year, HMICA reviewed its internal processes, through our Strategic Review, to ensure that our organisation, methodology and working practices are at the forefront of inspection practice. 'We continue to embrace change and to continue improving the way we work for the benefit of the organisations we inspect, their service users and the public.'

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Notes for Editors

1. Copies of the Chief Inspector's Annual Report were laid before Parliament and placed in the libraries of both Houses on 16 July 2008.

2. About HM Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA)

HMICA is an independent, statutory inspectorate created by the Courts Act 2003 as amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006. Our duty is to inspect and report on the system that supports the carrying on of the business of the Crown Court, county courts and magistrates' courts and the services provided by those courts. These courts are administered by HMCS. HMICA also works closely with colleagues from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) to deliver a joint programme of Area and thematic inspections.

Eddie Bloomfield has been HMICA's Chief Inspector since its creation in 2005.

3. Inspection work undertaken over the last year

Joint-agency special reviews: these reviews illustrate the success of enhanced joint working arrangements developed between the five justice inspectorates¹ over the last 12 months.

- **Leeds Magistrates' Court – a review of court resulting and warrant procedures.** An inspection led by HMICA. In November 2007, HMICA was directed to report on the court resulting and warrant withdrawal procedures in place at Leeds Magistrates' Court. Although the report confirmed that historic failures at Leeds Magistrates' Court had been rectified, there remained weaknesses threatening overall effectiveness. We set out, in our recommendations, the steps needed to be taken to rectify these weaknesses. Each of the agencies involved co-operated fully with the inspection; demonstrating their commitment to improving services in the future and resolution not to dwell on historic failings.
- **Peart Review:** Towards the end of the year, we took part in a review led by HMCPSP to ascertain the circumstances in which a defendant (Anthony Leon Peart), wanted on a warrant, was released from custody on 29 July 2005 and so was able to commit a serious crime. Whilst inspectors found that no single cause had led to the defendant's release, they identified a number of aspects within the criminal justice system that need to be strengthened to reduce significantly the risk of this happening again. The review also emphasised the need for the criminal justice agencies to ensure that they communicate with each other when defendants commit offences across geographical jurisdictions.

4. Other joint-agency inspection work

Our planned partnership working with the other criminal justice inspectorates has been a key area of work for us during 2007–08.

- **Area Joint Inspections of Dorset and Lancashire.** These inspections were led by HMICA and focused on the leadership and governance arrangements in the Areas, how they delivered successful justice with particular regard to domestic violence cases, and how they engaged with the community. **Dorset** was found to have a clear vision for the future, robust service delivery, effective Domestic Violence provision and collaborative working with all agencies involved with Domestic Violence work, and were successfully engaging community groups at danger of exclusion. **Lancashire** demonstrated a 'can do' attitude with consistently good performance across many areas and a positive approach to

¹ The five Criminal Justice Inspectorates are: HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC); HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI); HM Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA); HM Inspectorate of Prisons; HM Inspectorate of Probation.

innovation. They were committed to public events (such as 'Question Time' and 'You be the Judge'). Their internal communications needed strengthening.

- HMICA led a joint thematic inspection of the **Enforcement of Court Orders**. We found that there had been improvements in performance since 2005, supported by the production of inter-agency guidance on dealing with community penalty breaches and the introduction of the Community Penalty Enforcement Tracker (COMET). The team saw some good partnership working but also some places where it was less good and had led to inefficiencies in the enforcement process. The full report will be published in the summer of 2008.
- HMICA supported a joint inspection of **Electronic Monitoring**. This inspection was undertaken to see how well sentences involving curfews and Home Detention Curfews (HDC) were being monitored. Inspectors found pockets of good practice, some very knowledgeable and dedicated staff and a general willingness to improve and get things right. The team also identified some significant areas for improvement. The report on the inspection is due for publication by HMI Probation.
- HMICA supported a joint inspection of the **Transmission of Orders from Courts to Probation**. Inspectors checked that systems by which the courts communicate pertinent information to the Probation Service were working effectively. Inspectors found that, generally, the system worked well. Where it did not, Inspectors made a number of recommendations for improvement.
- **The Use of Court Cells to Hold Prisoners Overnight**. HMICA and HMI Prisons carried out an inspection into the practice of holding people overnight in some court cells. We visited one of the most regularly used courts, West London Magistrates' Court, to assess the conditions and the treatment of prisoners held there. The inspection identified very clearly a number of problems, including serious concerns about the safe and decent treatment of prisoners. The inspection provided a valuable example of the benefits of inspectorates working together. Together with HMI Prisons we remain ready to conduct further inspections should court cells need to be used again in this way.
- **The Experience of Family Court Users**. This year has seen our first inspection of family court administration, thereby extending HMICA inspection activity to our full remit under the Courts Act 2003. This was conducted simultaneously with an inspection by Ofsted of CAF/CASS offices across South Yorkshire. Inspectors found that there were examples of the good treatment of service users by court staff and CAF/CASS officers, but both HMCS and CAF/CASS had improvements to make in the

provision of information to service users. The outcomes of this inspection will now inform our methodology for future inspections.

5. Inspections conducted by HMICA only

- **Performance Management.** We have also completed a major thematic review of Performance Management, which has led to significant changes in HMCS's approach to performance management. We found that HMCS has made real progress and improvements in its structures, processes and culture for performance management. However, Inspectors made recommendations to move HMCS beyond the achievement of targets towards consistent improvement of service delivery and improved outcomes for service users.
- **Aspects of County Court Administration in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire Area.** Inspectors visited the Lincolnshire, Leicestershire & Rutland and Northamptonshire Area, in the HMCS Midlands Region. This is its first year of operation as an amalgamated Area and we were interested in the challenges it faced. We found that the Area's leadership was stretched by a range of factors, but county court users in the Area were treated with courtesy by approachable and helpful front-line staff. We made a number of recommendations to help the Area and expect to publish our report in mid 2008.

Contact:

Copies of HMICA's publications, including the Annual Report, may be obtained from:

Tim Paviour, (Publications and Web), HMICA, Block 2, Government Buildings, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, BS10 6EZ.

Tel: 0117 959 8201 / 8200 - Fax: 0117 950 0408

E-mail: tim.paviour@hmica.gsi.gov.uk

Or visit our website at: www.hmica.gov.uk

Members of the Press should contact HMICA's Press Officer, Becky Dearden, on 0207 210 8643