

Response from NICtS

“The Northern Ireland Court Service (NICtS) welcomes this inspection on the standard of service provided to our customers in the Court Funds Office. This independent review confirms that we are providing a quality customer service.

Work has already started to implement the suggestions for the Court Funds Office outlined in the Inspector’s Report.

In order to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of our high standard of customer service we will be applying for Charter Mark accreditation for the Court Funds Office in Spring 2005.”



How good is customer service at the Court Funds Office?



HMICA contact details:

This leaflet can be provided, on request, in alternative formats and languages other than English. For more information, or more copies of this leaflet, please contact the publications team on 0117 950 7960.

Or go to our website: www.hmica.gov.uk

About Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA)

HMICA is an independent inspectorate, which means that we check how well courts are managed and what the service is like for people who use the courts. We want to help courts give a better service. We will praise good ideas and ways of working, but we will also say when we find things that are not working well. We are separate from the court management. Our reports go to the Lord Chancellor, or other Ministers, and we make them public, too.

We work by talking to people involved in court cases (including agencies like the police and Victim Support), checking courthouses, looking at how cases are dealt with in court, talking to court staff and judges and reading court documents. We compare what we have seen and heard to our standards and then tell the courts if they need to tackle any important issues. We are open and always tell the courts when we are coming. Our inspectors want to hear people's views, but will come to their own professional judgements based on all the evidence they have.

About our work in Northern Ireland

We have been asked by the Northern Ireland Court Service (called NICtS in this leaflet) to inspect its service, because it wants to do the best it can for the community in Northern Ireland.

We have agreed to start by looking at 'customer service'. This means:

- **how comfortable, safe and private the building is for all the people who use it**
- **how well staff treat members of the public and other customers**
- **how helpful the office is in providing leaflets, direction signs and other information**

We inspected all the courthouses in Northern Ireland between March 2004 and February 2005. We will write a formal report about these inspections, which you will be able to see. Please contact us to ask for a copy of this – our details are at the end of this leaflet.



This leaflet explains what we found at the Court Funds Office (called the CFO in this leaflet). The CFO is in Bedford House, Belfast. It mainly deals with customers who are unable to manage their money, such as children and people covered by the Mental Health Act 1986. The CFO holds and manages money for such people, paying it out when appropriate.

The CFO also looks after money that is left with the court until cases are finished.

We inspected the CFO in February 2005 and were pleased to find that, overall, customer service is very good.

What we found in the Court Funds Office

■ how comfortable, safe and private the CFO is for all the people who use it

In this section we are looking at whether everyone can get into and around the office, whether it is comfortable if you have to wait, whether you can speak to people privately and how safe and secure the building is.

We found that people can easily get into the CFO offices in Bedford House. NICtS has thought about and taken steps to provide some of the things that people might need. For example, there is an induction loop at the public counter for people who use hearing aids. There is a disabled toilet in the building but this is kept locked and there are no signs saying who holds the key. Some staff are trained in basic sign language but, again, there is no sign saying so.

The building is in good condition and safe and secure. Staff look after the waiting area carefully, ensuring it is clean, tidy and comfortable for people who are waiting to be seen, although customers who come to the office don't have to wait very long. Staff make sure that there are leaflets and magazines for people to read while they are waiting. There is also a room for people to use if they want to talk to staff in private.

■ how well staff treat members of the public and other customers

In this section we are looking at whether people are treated with respect and offered help when they need it, whether everything is done to reduce the time that people have to wait and how well NICtS deals with complaints.

We found that staff in the CFO work very hard to provide really good customer service. All staff have received customer service training to ensure they know how to look after customers. The CFO has set very high standards, such as how quickly staff will see customers at the counter and how fast they will respond to letters. They make sure that they meet these targets. To check this regular surveys are carried out to ask customers how well the CFO is doing and the results are put on the CFO website. They also use the information from the surveys to make improvements. Customers think that the CFO is doing very well.



The CFO has a good complaints system, which is also on the website. Customers are asked to make comments as well as complaints. Staff showed us that they keep a record of all comments and complaints made. CFO looks at these and uses the information to identify how services can be improved. We found that staff are good at stopping little issues becoming big issues, by sorting things out quickly.

■ **how helpful the court is in providing leaflets, direction signs and other information**

In this section we are looking at whether people are given clear written information about their case in a way that they can understand, and also whether signs make it easy for people to find out where to go without having to ask.

We found that the CFO is working hard to improve its leaflets, which are getting better. They regularly write to let their customers know how their cases are doing and send them a newsletter with lots of useful information.



There is a good section on the NICTS website about the CFO. This contains some useful information about what the CFO does and who to contact if you have a question. The website also lists all the cases where money has not been claimed after the case was finished.

We found that the signs inside Bedford House do help people to find their way around, although there aren't any road or pedestrian signs to tell people where the building is. There are many signs in the waiting area giving customers information about what they need to do. We suggested that they put some more signs up inside Bedford House, telling customers what facilities there are for them. We also suggested that the CFO let people know about their facilities before they visit the office.