



Press Release

Embargoed until 00:01 on 12 December 2008

HMICA's inspection report on the family courts in Surrey and Sussex is published today. This is the first full-scale Area inspection of the family services in HM Courts Service (HMCS).

The inspection focused on aspects that impact on the experience of family court users, such as the quality and timeliness of information provided to them and the facilities at the courthouse.

Eddie Bloomfield, HM Chief Inspector of Court Administration, said:

'I am pleased to be able to report that...court managers and staff are enthusiastic about family work. HMCS frontline staff make commendable efforts to keep court users, especially those feeling vulnerable at court, comfortable and safe, and, in the main, are open and responsive to ideas and issues raised with them by external stakeholders.'

These findings are particularly welcome since the merger of Surrey and Sussex is still a relatively recent event and the current financial climate is increasingly challenging.

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However, some findings are of significant concern, such as those relating to:

- Health, safety and security (especially in relation to custody areas)
- The quality and timeliness of some important information provided to court users
- Key assessment, planning, communication and performance management processes that are underdeveloped and not coordinated across the Area.

Four recommendations have been made to address these issues. We are pleased to say that the Area Director has accepted the recommendations and drawn up an effective action plan to fulfil them. We will return to the Area over the next 18 months to see what this has achieved.

Julia Eeles, the Area Director, said:

“HMCS is committed to providing a top quality service for users of the family courts in Surrey and Sussex. We welcome the Inspectorate’s report and accept their recommendations. We have taken action to address the health and safety, security and other issues highlighted in the report.”

END

Notes for Editors

- This Inspection report is entitled: **Inspection of the administration of HMCS Family Court Services: Surrey and Sussex Area**. It will be available on HMICA's web site (www.hmica.gov.uk) from 12 December 2008. Inspection reports are public documents.
- Copies of HMICA's publications, including annual reports and thematic reviews, may be obtained from:

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