



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 31 July, 2008

HMICA's inspection report: **The Family Courts – The Experience of Service Users** is published today. This report outlines the findings of a pilot inspection conducted at Sheffield family courts from the perspective of a non-professional service user – such as the parties, children of parties and significant other family/friends in family proceedings.

Inspectors were looking for:

“The provision of accessible, effective and efficient, high quality administrative services in a timely manner that gives all service users, (represented and unrepresented) sufficient knowledge and understanding to engage with family court processes, and where attendance at court is necessary, in an environment that ensures their safety and security”.

Service users told Inspectors that the staff at Sheffield family courts were courteous, helpful and good at using simple, clear language to explain legal terms. Inspectors also found that the administration systems that support case progression are effective and efficient, resulting in shorter case completion times for service users when compared to some other family courts.

However, Inspectors also found that Sheffield family courts need to make some changes in the way they deliver services to improve the experience for people using the courts, with particular regard to provision of information, privacy and security.

HMICA made four recommendations to Sheffield family courts in relation to:

- Providing service users with information and guidance;
- Complying with the national objective - “Provide a knowledgeable, personalised and readily accessible service, keeping users informed about the progress of their case”;
- Ensuring that standards outlined in the Family Courts Charter are adhered to;
- Ensuring that safety and security risks are fully identified and managed.

Next Steps:

Sheffield family courts have accepted the recommendations and developed an action plan to address them. HMICA will measure progress against the action plan over a maximum period of 18 months.

ENDS

Notes for Editors:

1. Contact for HMICA: Eddie Bloomfield, HM Chief Inspector of Court Administration Tel 020 7217 4342
2. Following this pilot, HMICA is undertaking a series of Family Court inspections across an HMCS Area and the report will be published in late 2008.
3. Inspection reports are public documents. For copies of this and HMICA's other publications, including annual reports and thematic reviews, please contact:

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