



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Defendants in the West Yorkshire Courts

The first inspection of the criminal courts in West Yorkshire, since Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) was formed on 1 April 2005, took place in November. A Public Information Booklet entitled *How good is the service provided for defendants by the Courts' Service in West Yorkshire?*, has been published today. Inspectors looked at:

- What kind of facilities are provided at the courthouses
- Whether the information given to defendants is useful and helps make the experience easier
- How well people are treated when they come to court
- How long people have to wait; and
- Whether the needs of all types of defendants are taken into account.

Inspectors found that, overall, the service provided to defendants and their witnesses by Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) in West Yorkshire is satisfactory. Many courthouses have good waiting areas with facilities like TVs to help pass the time, and there is a good 'quiet room' at Leeds Combined Court. Court staff try to find a private space for defendants to wait or speak to their lawyer but not all courts have the space to ensure privacy. Some cell areas are poor and we have advised on the need for some improvements to these. We have also asked court managers to make it easier for disabled people to get help with getting into or around some of the courthouses.

Inspectors were pleased to see court staff treating defendants with respect and courtesy. They were willing to answer questions, provide help and information and to meet special needs. Unrepresented defendants have a greater need for assistance when in court, and overall we found that they are given the right amount of help. Ushers play a positive role in making sure that the courts run smoothly, gathering information from defendants to pass on to the legal

adviser. Some courts offer defendants the chance to visit the courthouse before their trial, so that they can see how the court works. We think that this is good practice. Court managers have good systems to keep improving their service and quickly make changes when defendants raise problems. Inspectors advised court staff how to provide even better access to the complaints system, especially for those in custody.

Good information is provided to defendants in many courthouses but inspectors identified that more information still needs to be provided such as information signs, directions and information about how long defendants can expect to wait.

HMCS in West Yorkshire has responded positively to the inspection, and is taking forward the recommendations we have made.

### ***Comment from the West Yorkshire Area***

*West Yorkshire welcomes HMICA's independent inspection. The objectives and recommendations are a valuable control to our aim of continuing to improve services to court users.*

**E N D S**

### **Notes for Editors**

1. **HMICA:** HMICA is an independent inspectorate. Being independent means we report direct to Ministers about what services are like for those who have to come to court. We will praise good ideas and ways of working but we will also say when things are not working well. If necessary, we ask for improvements to be made. We look at how well the Crown, county and magistrates' courts are managed. We check if the people who use the courts are given good service. We do **not** inspect or comment on judicial decisions.
2. **HMCS:** The purpose of Her Majesty's Courts Service is to deliver justice efficiently and effectively. It administers the civil, family and criminal courts in England and Wales. This covers Crown, county and magistrates' courts.
3. This inspection forms part of a series of inspections of HMCS Areas looking at the quality of service provided to defendants and their witnesses in the criminal courts. After each Area inspection a public information booklet will be published which will give local people information about the service provided. Following the series of Area inspections, an overview report on the way defendants are treated by HMCS will be produced.

4. Inspection reports are public documents. Copies of **HMICA's publications**, including annual reports and thematic reviews, may be obtained from:

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