

*HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE*



***PRESS RELEASE ON BEHALF OF THE CRIMINAL
JUSTICE CHIEF INSPECTORS' GROUP***

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25 February 2004



MCSI
Inspection of
Court Services



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate
of Prisons



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate
of Probation

The Chief Inspectors of the Criminal Justice Inspectorates¹ have today published their first joint report on a criminal justice area. It relates to Gloucestershire. A joint team drawn from five inspectorates undertook a detailed diagnostic look at the workings of the Criminal Justice System in Gloucestershire to assess its overall effectiveness. The scrutiny ranged from the gathering of evidence relating to crime and the prosecution process, through the care of victims and witnesses, to the treatment of offenders under escort and in court cells. It also showed what needs to be followed up by targeted and thematic inspectorate work (such as the resettlement of offenders). The role of the newly established Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board was examined.

The inspection team acknowledged the work and progress of the Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board in the short timespan since its inception on 1 April 2003. Achievements included:

¹ The Criminal Justice Inspectorates is the collective term for:

- * HM Inspectorate of Constabulary;
- * HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate;
- * HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate;
- * HM Inspectorate of Prisons; and
- * HM Inspectorate of Probation.

For the purpose of this inspection HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate was assisted by senior staff of the Court Service on secondment. The inspectorates worked in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Unit of Victim Support who undertook an inspection of the Gloucestershire Branch.

- * The drawing up of detailed plans for the work necessary to achieve the targets set in order to give effect to the Government's objective of 'narrowing the justice gap' by bringing more offenders to justice, and for increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system;
- * The area appeared at the time of the inspection to be on target to increase the number of offences brought to justice by 646 for the year 2003/2004;
- * Improved performance in the Crown Court where the area had bettered its target of reducing cracked trials to 35% (32.4% achieved) and was making good progress in reducing the number of ineffective hearings (20% against a target of 17%);
- * The expeditious handling of cases involving persistent young offenders where Gloucestershire has achieved an average time of 40 days overall (35 days in the magistrates' courts) against a Government target of 71 days; this made the area the second best in England and Wales;
- * The Board had taken initial steps to develop its approach to increasing public confidence, including setting up an independent advisory group on black and minority ethnic issues;
- * Work on how the agencies deal jointly with mentally disordered offenders;
- * The quality of inter-agency contributions to the multi-agency Public Protection Panel.

However, the inspection team also noted that some actions planned by the Board had slipped and others needed to be re-invigorated. For example, the cracked trial rate in the magistrates' courts remained at 40.5% (target 35%) and 23.6% of cases fixed for trial were ineffective.²

² A cracked trial occurs when either the defendant pleads guilty, or the case is dropped, on the day of trial. An ineffective trial is one which is adjourned, for whatever reason, to another day. The common feature is that in each case the court will have set aside time for a contested hearing and witnesses will have been warned. Cracked and ineffective trials are a source of inefficiency and wasted time for witnesses.

Inspectors also found a lack of effective communication, which was leading to a delay in addressing issues, and at its worst the continuation of an unhealthy blame culture. There is a need for the agencies to work more closely to resolve outstanding issues, for example:

- * The quality of police files;
- * The timeliness of CPS requests to the police for additional information and evidence;
- * The delay in updating the police national computer with case results;
- * The lack of clarity between agencies about responsibility for liaising with Witness Service where difficulties in witness attendance are identified;
- * The need to reduce unnecessary witness attendance;
- * The need for ethnicity monitoring across the whole criminal justice process;
- * The need for clarity in court scheduling and listing practices;
- * Some aspects of the treatment of prisoners while under the control of the escort contractors or in the custody of the court; and
- * The need to take action to reduce the number of ineffective or unnecessary productions of prisoners from prison custody.

In total the inspectors:

- Identified 13 strengths;
- Made 13 recommendations to improve inter-agency aspects of performance in Gloucestershire; and
- Identified 38 issues to address relevant to aspects of performance.

A copy of the executive summary is attached.

The report will be formally presented to the Ministers responsible for the criminal justice system (the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and the Attorney General). It will also be submitted to the National Criminal Justice Board.

In presenting the report, Stephen Wooler (HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate) said on behalf of the Chief Inspectors:

“The Government’s purpose in creating a system of Local Criminal Justice Boards was to develop better cohesion and co-ordination among those responsible for criminal justice. What has been achieved in Gloucestershire so far shows how well that can work. But it is only the start of a process and there are many issues yet to be tackled. Our report is intended to provide a firm foundation for that work.”

Notes for Editors

1. The joint inspection of Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Area represents a significant strengthening of the arrangements for scrutinising the effectiveness of the criminal justice system across England and Wales. It complements a range of measures initiated by the Government to develop cohesion and better co-ordinated working arrangements amongst the criminal justice agencies so that the system can operate in a more holistic manner. Public Service Agreements between HM Treasury and the relevant Departments set out the expectations which the Government has for the criminal justice system at national levels. The framework within which this system is managed nationally has been substantially revised and that is reflected by the establishment in each of the 42 criminal justice Areas of a Local Criminal Justice Board. Each Inspectorate now places even greater emphasis on the effectiveness of relationships between the organisation which they are responsible for inspecting and other criminal justice agencies and its contribution to the work of the newly established Boards. The Boards operate on a non-statutory basis and formally came into existence on 1 April 2003. They provide a national infrastructure for more integrated inspection and so this is a natural development.
2. Although the inspection focused on the criminal justice agencies, the existence of a Local Criminal Justice Board makes it possible for the first time to undertake a detailed diagnostic look at how the agencies in a specific area work together to deliver justice for all members of society, ranging from the investigation and prosecution of crime, through the care of victims and witnesses, to the treatment of offenders and the steps taken to prevent them re-offending.
3. In doing so, the inspection team has identified and endeavoured to bridge some gaps in the existing arrangements for inspection of the criminal justice system. For example, custody facilities at courts and escort arrangements for moving prisoners between courts and prison were examined although they do not ordinarily feature in inspection programmes. Likewise, the work of the Court Service at Gloucester Crown Court Centre was scrutinised with the blessing of the Senior Judiciary. The Chief Inspectors are grateful for their co-operation.

4. The Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group comprises the Chief Inspectors of the Inspectorates of Constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, Magistrates' Courts Service, Probation Service and Prison Service. They work in conjunction also with the Social Services Inspectorate, OFSTED and others when their responsibilities touch on the criminal justice system.
5. The strategic aim of the CJCIG is "to foster and contribute to the continuous improvement of the criminal justice system for all its stakeholders, through a programme of individual, co-ordinated and joint inspections and monitoring, in accordance with the Ministers' policy for a better joined-up Government".
6. The Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group is supported in its activities by the Joint Inspectorates' Secretariat. The Secretariat has shadowed the inspection process and is assisting in evaluating the outcome of the pilot.
7. The Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board comprises:
 - Dr Timothy Brain (Chief Constable) Chair
 - Withiel Cole (Chief Crown Prosecutor)
 - Alan Davies (Justices' Chief Executive)
 - David Gentry (The Court Service)
 - David Chalmers (The Prison Service)
 - John Carter (Chief Officer of Probation)
 - Phil Kendrick (Youth Offending Services Manager)
8. The inspection process consisted of two phases:

Phase 1 consisted of exploratory work, and took place in March 2003. The team are gathered evidence from the chief officers of the agencies about how they work together in Gloucestershire. An initial meeting with the Gloucestershire Criminal Justice Board and other interested parties was held on Monday 3 March 2003.

Phase 2 was a detailed evaluation of all the evidence supplied by the agencies, in accordance with the inspection team's terms of reference (attached). The team carried out fieldwork in September 2003.
9. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Prisons combined the joint inspection of the criminal justice system in Gloucestershire with full inspection of the CPS and relevant prison establishments.
10. The joint report will be co-ordinated with the publication of the individual report in relation to the CPS. HM Inspectorate of Prisons has published reports in relation to prison establishments in Gloucestershire as follows, HMP Gloucester, HMP/YOI/RC Eastwood Park and HMP/YOI Ashfield.
11. Any inquiries about this press release should be addressed to: Tesca Barnett-Osman at HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1148; fax: 020 7210 1195; email: Tesca.Barnett-Osman@cps.gsi.gov.uk).
13. Press co-ordination will be through a lead agency which will be the Gloucestershire Constabulary Press Office (tel: 01242 276 071). All general inquiries or response to the report should be addressed there.

14. Agency-specific inquiries to:

Gloucestershire Constabulary: Kate Nelmes (tel: 01242 276 071; e-mail: ate.Nelmes@Gloucestershire.Police.uk)

Gloucestershire Magistrates' Courts Service: Alan Davies, Justices' Chief Executive: (tel: 01452 420 100)

Gloucestershire Probation Area: Helen Allen, Acting Chief Officer: (tel: 01452 426 250)

Prison Service: David Chalmers, Governor HMP Gloucester (tel: 01452 453 000)

The Court Service (Crown Court): Kathryn Montague (tel: 020 7210 1397; e-mail: Kathryn.Montague@DCA.gsi.gov.uk)

Gloucestershire Crown Prosecution Service: Sharon Caesar (tel: 01452 872 402; e-mail: Sharon.Caesar@cps.gsi.gov.uk)