

GWENT CRIMINAL JUSTICE AREA JOINT INSPECTION

The Gwent Criminal Justice Board (GCJB) must play a greater role in leading the work of individual agencies in order to drive up performance, according to an inspection report published today.

The report found:

- Public confidence in the criminal justice system was falling (from 40% in September 2004 to 34% in March 2005);
- Performance in bringing offenders to justice had decreased by 9.9% between March 2002 and March 2005;
- Although shadow charging was re-launched in January 2005, the Crown Prosecution Service was not stationed at each charging centre and police from some stations had to travel or telephone for advice. There were concerns that not all appropriate cases were being referred and there was no proper system for monitoring defendants returning on police bail following further enquiries. (Pre-charge advice is now on a statutory footing.)

The report also noted:

- The Crown Court performance on ineffective trials was better than the national average and the target of reducing such trials was achieved by magistrates' courts.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan said:

“The inspection team found good performance in some key aspects of the Gwent criminal justice system but the Board can play a more effective part in leading and co-ordinating this work.

“The commitment of all agencies to improve victim and witness care is commendable but again better co-ordination is needed. Separate Witness Care Units exist for the Crown Court and the magistrates' courts, managed by the Crown Prosecution Service and police respectively, and there are opportunities for shared learning.

“I recognise that the Board, under the relatively new leadership of the Chief Constable, is making determined efforts to deliver its very important objectives to raise confidence in the criminal justice system, and I urge it to re-examine its purpose of the Board and the role of each member. In doing this, I am confident that the Board can promote effective leadership that delivers and communicates a coherent system for improving confidence in the criminal justice system in Gwent.”

Notes to Editors:

- 1.) The inspection of Gwent Criminal Justice Board took place between 11 July 2005 and 18 July 2005.
- 2.) Local Criminal Justice Boards operate on a non-statutory basis and formally came into existence on 1 April 2003. They represent a new way of doing business within the criminal justice system, through better co-ordinated and more cohesive working arrangements.
- 3.) The Government has established 42 criminal justice areas in England and Wales, each with a local criminal justice board which is made up of the chief officers of the criminal justice organisations of the area. The Gwent Criminal Justice Board (GCJB) formally assumed its responsibilities in April 2003. All local criminal justice boards are charged with establishing and delivering, at local level, targets to support the achievement of national objectives for the criminal justice system.
- 4.) Five inspectorates carried out the joint inspection of GCJB. They are HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, HM Crown Prosecution Service and HM Inspectorate of Court Administration.
- 5.) The inspection report can be found at www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/