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PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 31 MAY 2005

Report of a Joint Inspection of the North Yorkshire Criminal Justice Area

The Chief Inspectors of the five criminal justice inspectorates have today published a report on how the local criminal justice agencies in North Yorkshire were working together to meet government objectives, including the needs of all court users, especially victims and witnesses. The inspection, undertaken in November 2004, paid particular attention to the efforts the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) was making to take a lead in improving public confidence in the criminal justice system and looked mainly at pre-sentence issues.

Recorded crime in North Yorkshire is falling, and the number of offenders brought to justice is increasing. But the level of public confidence is below the average in England and Wales, and is not improving. Where improvements have been made, these are attributable to the actions of individual agencies, rather than the result of effective, cohesive joint working.

The LCJB, after 18 months in operation, is beginning to take a more strategic approach to breaking down the barriers between agencies. Its commitment to improving services for victims and witnesses is evident – it is one of the few to have co-opted a representative of Victim Support onto the Board. The LCJB is also playing a leading role in developing the Witness Care Unit – a joint unit being established with the assistance of *No Witness, No Justice* project funding from the Home Office.

Inspectors identified specific actions the Board can take, particularly to increase public confidence in the CJS, including

- Improve the treatment of victims and witnesses by ensuring the early identification of their individual needs, with prompt referrals to the relevant support agencies
- Strengthen links with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, to ensure appropriate support is provided for BME victims and witnesses

- Implement its communications strategy and engage more fully with the local community
- Tackle delays to trials in both the magistrates and Crown Court in York

Inspectors also highlighted the need for a new criminal courthouse in York to meet the needs of all users

Robert Turnbull, Chair of the Board at the time of the inspection, said:

“We are pleased that the report recognises the good working relationships between the criminal justice agencies within the county and the strong performance in many aspects of our working, particularly in relation to bringing offences to justice and the effectiveness of the court processes.

The report also highlights the fact that public confidence in the CJS in North Yorkshire is lower than the national average. This issue needs to be addressed and we will take forward the report’s recommendations and suggestions for improving public confidence levels as a major aim for the coming year.”

E N D S

[See Notes for Editors, following]

Notes for Editors

1. The joint inspection was undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of: Constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, Prisons, Probation and MCSI Inspection of Court Services, with assistance from the Victim Support Quality & Standards Department.
2. MCSI became Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) with effect from 1 April 2005.
3. This joint inspection, led by MCSI/HMICA, is the third of a series looking at individual criminal justice areas.
4. Victim Support is also publishing a separate report giving detailed findings on the Services to Victims and Witnesses in North Yorkshire. In addition to the findings of the joint inspection, their report notes victims' and witnesses' needs for more information, and fewer adjournments and delays in dealing with their cases.
5. Victim Support is the national charity for people affected by crime. Staff and volunteers offer free and confidential information and support at affiliated local charities, the Witness Service and Victim Supportline (0845 30 30 900). See website/ contact details below.
6. Inspection reports are public documents. Copies of HMICA's publications, including annual reports and thematic reviews, may be obtained from:

Lori Buckley, Publications Manager, HMICA
Block 2 Government Buildings, Burghill Road, Westbury-on-Trym,
Bristol BS10 6EZ

Or via our website at: www.hmica.gov.uk

The websites of our partners on this inspection are as follows:

HMIC www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/hmic.htm

CPSI www.hmcpsi.gov.uk

Prisons

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprisons

Probation

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/probation/inspprob

Victim support www.victimsupport.org.uk