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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**22 MAY 2006**

### **Northumbria Criminal Justice Area: Performance Strategy and Public Confidence**

The five criminal justice inspectorates have, today, published a joint report on how well the local criminal justice agencies in the Northumbria Area work together to meet the needs of local people, from arrest to the point of sentence. The inspection, undertaken in January 2006, paid particular attention to three aspects:

- increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS)
- bringing offenders to justice
- reducing ineffective trials.

Inspectors looked at how well the local criminal justice agencies and other partners are working together in Northumbria. This Area comprises two counties – the large and sparsely populated Northumberland, and the metropolitan Tyne and Wear. Each presents different challenges to the body<sup>1</sup> responsible for service delivery across the Area – the Northumbria Criminal Justice Board (CJB).

The inspection looked at things from a user's perspective, including that of people attending court as victims or witnesses of crime, and defendants in criminal cases.

#### **Findings**

Inspectors made five recommendations and identified six further aspects for improvement. Good practice and strengths were also identified. The details can be found in the Executive Summary near the start of the published full report (a copy of which accompanies this press release). The recommendations are concerned with:

- developing a joint agency strategy to work towards improving public confidence in the CJS
- strengthening the ways of engaging with community groups, to improve the quality of service delivery

- building on, and spreading, good practice in performance management, to bring further improvement
- ensuring that the Effective Trial Management Programme is consistently implemented and applied
- ensuring that that needs of witnesses are assessed, prioritised and met effectively.

In general, Inspectors found that the Chief Officers in Northumbria have concentrated their strategy on performance, with some improving results. This has meant less focus on wider strategic issues, such as confidence and community engagement, which the Board is now beginning to address. It also needs to develop the contribution that its external partners – such as Government Office North East and the Legal Services Commission – can bring to the wider agenda.

Northumbria CJB has achieved good performance in some areas – particularly in its handling of cases involving persistent young offenders. It has also been proactive in devising its own local strategies to reduce prolific offending, ahead of the national initiatives<sup>2</sup>. The police and CPS work well together in certain specialist types of case.. Protocols are now being developed to ensure that sensitive cases are given priority.

Although there has been some progress in reducing ineffective trials (ie, those that do not go ahead on the day planned), good performance is not always sustained. Where good practices exist, they need to be systematically analysed and shared across the Area.

The Witness Care Units in Northumbria try to provide a full service to all types of witness, but limited resources mean that facilities and service provision are not always adequate. There also needs to be better training for staff in Witness Care Units, to identify their appropriate responsibilities and standardise the service across the Area. Some witnesses interviewed were disappointed at the way they received information about their case, whereas others experienced a better level of service.

Inspectors generally found that defendants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. But more support could be provided for those experiencing problems with drugs, alcohol or mental health.

Overall, Inspectors were pleased to see some good work being done by the Northumbria Criminal Justice Board to help local criminal justice agencies work well together in this part of

the country. There is, however, much work to be done, particularly with confidence and community engagement.

## E N D S

### Notes for Editors

1. Local Criminal Justice Boards operate on a non-statutory basis and formally came into existence on 1 April 2003. They are responsible for delivering targets at local level to support the achievement of national objectives to improve the criminal justice system.
2. On 30 March 2004, the Prime Minister announced a new strategy to reduce the harm which prolific and other priority offenders cause to our communities and to themselves. Such offenders are a relatively small number of people who cause a disproportionate amount of crime, disorder and mayhem in our communities, damaging people's confidence and increasing feelings of unease and the fear of crime.

The strategy has three complementary parts:

- **Prevent and deter** – to stop people (overwhelmingly, young people) engaging in offending behaviours and graduating into prolific offenders
  - **Catch and convict** – actively tackling those who are already prolific offenders
  - **Rehabilitate and resettle** – working with identified prolific offenders to stop their offending by offering a range of supportive interventions; offenders will be offered the opportunity of rehabilitation or face a very swift return to the courts.
3. The joint inspection was undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of: Constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, Prisons, Probation and Court Administration, in conjunction with the Victim Support Quality & Standards Department.
  4. This joint inspection, led by HMICA, is the fifth of a series of six joint inspections planned for 2005/06. This represents a significant increase in joint inspection activity and reflects our strong commitment to working together to improve case management and to increase public confidence in the criminal justice system.
  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.

#### Contacts:

6. Inspection reports are public documents. The HMICA contact for press enquiries and for further copies of this and HMICA's other publications, including annual reports and thematic reviews, is:

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Or via our website at [www.hmica.gov.uk](http://www.hmica.gov.uk)

7. The contact for Northumbria Criminal Justice Board is:

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

HMIC	<a href="http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic">www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic</a>
HMCPsi	<a href="http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk">www.hmcp.si.gov.uk</a>
HMI Prisons	<a href="http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison.s">www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison.s</a>
HMI Probation	<a href="http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation">www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation</a>
Victim support	<a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk">www.victimsupport.org.uk</a>

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