



PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 20 February 2006

Thames Valley Criminal Justice Area: Large and complex but succeeding and improving.

The five criminal justice inspectorates have, today, published a joint report on how well the local criminal justice agencies in the Thames Valley area work together to meet the needs of local people, from arrest to the point of sentence. The inspection, undertaken in September 2005, paid particular attention to three areas:

- increasing public confidence
- bringing offenders to justice
- reducing ineffective trials.

Inspectors wanted to know how well the local criminal justice agencies are working together in one of the largest, most complex, criminal justice areas in England & Wales. They also wanted to assess how successfully the Thames Valley Criminal Justice Board (TVCJB) was helping them to work together.

The inspection looked at things from a users perspective, especially that of victims and witnesses.

Findings

The Inspectors made eight recommendations and identified four additional aspects for improvement. Good practice and strengths were also identified. The details can be found in the Summary of Findings near the start of the published full report (a copy of which accompanies this press release). The recommendations include: improvements for witnesses; developments in performance management; greater engagement with the voluntary sector; and improvements to trial management.

In general:

- Relations between the local criminal justice agencies are good and reflect the commitment to working together of the Chief Officers.
- Public confidence in the local criminal justice system was found to be slightly above the national average, although more work is needed to raise this level of confidence further.
- Excellent work around prolific and priority offenders shows that the difficulties of joint working in an area as diverse and complex as the Thames valley can be overcome.
- TVCJB's new approaches to performance management are helping them to develop strategies and find solutions to problems so that the criminal justice agencies can work together ever more effectively.
- Success in one area of the work can lead to pressures in another, as the increased number of cases successfully brought to justice (since autumn 2004) has put pressure on other parts of the criminal justice system. Staff shortages have also had an impact on the ability of the system to cope with the increased workload.
- Domestic Violence cases are given high priority and Inspectors were pleased to see the good work being done in this area. However, trial delays can, potentially, somewhat undermine the good work being done.
- Equality and diversity issues have a high profile but the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies needs to be clarified.
- Performance against government objectives, designed with the user in mind, has improved and is good in most cases.

Overall, Inspectors were pleased to see the work being done by the Thames Valley Criminal Justice Board to help local criminal justice agencies work well together in this complex and diverse part of the country. There is, however, much work to be done.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. 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.
2. This joint inspection, led by HMICA, is the third 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.
3. 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:

4. 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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5. The contact for Thames Valley Criminal Justice Board is:

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

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

CPSI www.hmcpai.gov.uk

Prisons www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison

Probation www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation

Victim support www.victimsupport.org.uk
