



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 hrs on 30 May 2007**

### **West Midlands Criminal Justice Area - Raising Public Confidence in the Criminal Justice System**

The Chief Inspectors of the Criminal Justice Inspectorates have today published their joint report on the West Midlands Criminal Justice Area.

Inspectors found that the Board has a strong and clear focus on achieving the Area's high-level, key performance targets. The West Midlands Area achieved its key public service agreement targets in 2005/06 and most key targets were forecast to be achieved in 2006/07 also. Most supporting targets are also being met, with the exception of the time between arrest and sentence for persistent young offenders. The Area has also engaged in many national pilots, including, recently, the Coventry test of the Simple, Speedy, Summary Justice initiative prior to national roll out. The Board has been slower to give a strategic lead on some policy and quality of service matters, including public confidence, equality and diversity, and the Victims' Code, though public confidence in the Area CJS has increased markedly since 2003.

Selected performance headlines included the following:

- Increasing public confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in bringing offenders to justice: from a low baseline of 32% in March 2003, public confidence in the West Midlands Area stood at 42% for the 12 months to September 2006, compared with the England and Wales average of 43%;

- Offences brought to justice: were 75, 338 in the 12 months to September 2006, ahead of the Board's 2006/07 target of 70,000;
- Ineffective trial rate: in the magistrates' court this averaged 19.3% in the three months to September 2006, better than the Board's 2006/07 target of 20%; in the Crown Court, the ineffective trial rate averaged 7.4% in the three months to September 2006, better than the Board's target to reduce the rate to 12% in the final quarter of 2006/07;
- Persistent Young Offenders: in August-October 2006 (3 month rolling figure), arrest to sentence in the West Midlands Area took 84 days on average, compared with the national target of 71 days;
- Fine enforcement: performance was good, at 103.4% in the year to September 2006, compared with the Area's target of 80%;
- Enforcement of community penalties: the Area reported the average number of working days from breach to resolution of case as 29 days (average for three months to September 2006) compared with the target of 35 days; the percentage of breaches resolved within 25 working days was reported as 74%, compared with the target of 50%. However, the good performance recorded by COMET is misleading because it reflects the prompt withdrawal of many summonses. Inspectors' analysis of a selection of files for concluded breach cases (excluding those where summonses were withdrawn) showed that, for youth cases, West Midlands met both national targets, while, for adult cases, only the target percentage of cases concluded within 25 days was met.

Other main findings by the inspectorate included:

- Members of the Board see public confidence as important, and the Board has a range of communications activities. But work towards a joint confidence strategy was still in its early stages. The Board needs to link together its work on public confidence, equality and diversity, communications and community engagement. A number of internal and external partners, at Area and local level, would welcome clearer leadership from the Board on these issues.

- The Board has wide-ranging membership, with the core criminal justice agencies joined by several associate members. Agencies work together increasingly effectively, but sometimes take initiatives which affect others without consulting first. The Board has set up working groups and achieved much on this basis, but the groups vary in effectiveness and accountability.
- Area commitment to high level performance is strong. However, the Board does not always look sufficiently behind the headlines at the reasons for local variations in policy implementation and performance.
- The statutory charging scheme is in place throughout the Area but the quality and timeliness of police case file building, and CPS and police processes to monitor this, need to be improved. The number of committals to the Crown Court discharged because the prosecution is not ready to proceed by the date fixed by the magistrates' court, though much reduced since poor performance in 2001, needs to be further improved.
- The Coventry Magistrates' Court test of the national Simple, Speedy, Summary Justice initiative was implemented successfully and with good cooperation. However, at the time of the inspection, some dips in performance and challenges had arisen on ineffective trials and witness non-attendance. Now that all the pilots have been evaluated, the Board needs to ensure that the necessary conditions for successful introduction of the initiative can be established Area-wide before rolling it out.
- The Board has piloted and rolled out a range of initiatives to improve services to victims and witnesses. These services can be further strengthened by the Board monitoring Area-wide compliance with the Victims' Code, and building on its good and growing relationship with Victim Support.

Eddie Bloomfield, Chief Inspector of the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration, said:

*"This report recognises the commitment and achievements of the West Midlands Criminal Justice Board, as well as identifying a number of challenges and areas for future improvement. The Area has succeeded in meeting most of the targets set for it by government. I am confident that the*

*Board will build on its clear commitment to improvement and address the aspects of performance identified in this report in order to strengthen its performance further for the future'*

An executive summary of the Report is attached to this notice, also on an embargoed basis. For further information, please contact Tim Paviour on Tel: 0117 959 8200 or e-mail: [Tim.Paviour@hmica.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Tim.Paviour@hmica.gsi.gov.uk)

END

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The joint inspection of West Midlands was the last in a programme of three joint inspections undertaken by the criminal justice inspectorates in the 2006/07 year.
2. Joint inspection complements a range of measures initiated by the Government to develop cohesion and better co-ordinated working arrangements amongst criminal justice agencies to ensure that the criminal justice system operates in a holistic manner.
3. Public Service Agreement (PSA) between HM Treasury and the relevant organisations sets out the expectations that the Government has for criminal justice agencies at a local and national level. Inspection against PSA targets enables the criminal justice inspectorates to assess the effectiveness of relationships between the organisations responsible for delivering criminal justice.
4. The establishment of Local Criminal Justice Boards on a non-statutory basis from 1 April 2003 make it possible for the first time to undertake a detailed diagnostic look at how agencies work together to deliver justice. The framework for inspection addresses issues of corporate governance arrangements and the strategies and policies in place to ensure that there are effective inter-agency arrangements in place from the point of charge through to the passing of sentence.
5. The inspection is carried out under the auspices of the Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group. The group comprises the Chief Inspectors of the Inspectorates of Constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, Court Administration, Probation and Prisons. On this occasion the inspection was also assisted by Victim Support quality and standards department. HM Inspectorate of Court Administration was the lead inspectorate for the West Midlands joint inspection.
6. The West Midlands Criminal Justice Board comprises:

The full members of the Board:

- Chief Crown Prosecutor, West Midlands (Current Chair)
- Chief Officer, West Midlands Probation Area (Chair 2005 - 2007)
- Assistant Chief Constable, West Midlands Police
- Area Director, HM Courts Service, West Midlands
- Head of Regional Development, HM Prisons Service
- Regional Manager, Youth Justice Board (joined the Board in December 2006)

The associate members:

- Criminal Defence Services Manager, Legal Services Commission
- Director, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership
- Performance Adviser, Office for Criminal Justice Reform

The visiting members:

- Recorder of Birmingham
- Chairman, Birmingham Law Society Criminal Justice Committee
- Chief Executive Officer, Victim Support West Midlands
- Community Cohesion Officer, Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

7. The contact for West Midlands Criminal Justice Board is:

Rebecca Morris  
 Communications Officer  
 West Midlands Criminal Justice Board  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Temple Court  
 35 Bull Street  
 Birmingham B4 6JW  
 Tel: 0121 250 6168  
 Fax: 0121 250 6159  
 Email: [Rebecca.morris@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Rebecca.morris@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk)

8. The contact for HMICA is:

Tim Paviour  
 Publications & Web  
 HMICA  
 Block 2, Government Buildings  
 Burghill Road  
 Westbury on Trym  
 Bristol BS10 6EZ

9. The websites of the partners on this inspection are as follows:

HMI Constabulary	<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 Court Administration	<a href="http://www.hmica.gov.uk/">www.hmica.gov.uk/</a>
HMI Prisons	<a href="http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/">www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/</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>

\*\*\*\*\*