



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 00.01hrs Wednesday 11 November 2009

Inspectors find significant progress in assistance provided to bereaved families by Coroners Service

The Coroners Service for Northern Ireland (CSNI) has been praised in an inspection report published today (Wednesday 11 November) for the progress it has made during the last 18 months to improve the service it provides to bereaved families.

The follow-up review carried out on behalf of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) assessed the progress made by the CSNI to implement recommendations made following its initial inspection in 2007.

"When HMICA Inspectors initially examined the work of the Coroners Service they recommended improvements could be made surrounding the information provided to bereaved families," said Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.

"They also urged the CSNI - which is part of the Northern Ireland Court Service - to develop more effective performance management systems and support arrangements," he said.

"This review shows that management and staff within the CSNI took on board the recommendations made by Inspectors to improve their organization, and have worked to deliver significant improvement especially in relation to how the service engages with bereaved families," said Dr Maguire.

Eddie Bloomfield, Chief Inspector with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration said: "The Coroner's Liaison Officers perform a pivotal role in a sensitive manner by establishing and maintaining contact with bereaved families who have cases being handled by the Coroners Service.

"They also work closely with other CSNI staff to ensure bereaved families are fully supported, their needs are identified in a timely manner, and information which may be heard at an inquest is already known to families in the period running up to an inquest," he added.

Inspectors commended the service for appointing a Medical Officer to assist the work of the CSNI.

“The Medical Officer has enabled the CSNI to develop a greater relationship with General Practitioners and to raise awareness of the role it performs and the procedures which should be followed. This appointment has also meant the content of post-mortem reports can be explained to bereaved families in language that is easy to understand,” said Mr Bloomfield.

“This has complimented the work being undertaken by the Coroner’s Liaison Officers and other staff to develop good working relationships with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and its Family Liaison Officer in particular,” he added.

“Inspectors also found evidence of a real determination within the CSNI to work professionally and proactively with key partner agencies such as the PSNI and the State Pathology Department to minimise delays in relation to post-mortem reports and police statements and to improve current performance levels,” continued Dr Maguire.

The positive work being undertaken to support bereaved families was backed up by the development of standardised processes and procedures which were consistently applied by members of staff who were fully trained and supported in their roles. Performance management systems were also being used effectively to monitor and manage performance within the organisation.

“Without doubt the biggest achievement of the CSNI in the last 18 months is that bereaved families now have the support and information they need to get through this difficult and emotional process,” said Dr Maguire.

“The staff of the CSNI are exemplary in their approach and it is the personality and character of the individuals themselves which make this service one that the Northern Ireland Court Service can be proud of,” concluded the Chief Inspectors.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The review was carried out by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Court Administration in England and Wales under the delegated authority of the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.
- The review was conducted between May 2008, 18 months after HMICA published its original inspection report on the CSNI.
- Copies of the original inspection report can be viewed or downloaded by following the link and clicking on the relevant report <http://www.hmica.gov.uk/NICtSrep.htm>

Notes end

For further information or to arrange an interview with Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, please contact Meloney McVeigh on 028 90 258013 or 07966681324.