



21 JULY 2006

Derbyshire Courts in the Spotlight

The first inspection of the criminal courts in Derbyshire since Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) was formed on 1 April 2005, took place in May and June 2006. A Public Information Booklet entitled ***How good is the service provided for defendants by the Courts Service in Derbyshire?*** has been published today. Inspectors looked at:

- What kind of facilities are provided at the courthouses
- Whether the information given to defendants is helpful
- How well people are treated when they come to court
- How long people have to wait at court; and
- Whether the needs of all types of defendants are taken into account.

Inspectors visited the six courthouses dealing with criminal cases and were disappointed to find that, overall, the service provided to defendants is less than satisfactory. But we do give credit for the plans that Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) in Derbyshire has for improvements. We also report on things that were very good – such as the new magistrates' courts at Chesterfield and Derby, which are well designed, with comfortable facilities for all court users. We were also pleased to see the efforts that had been made to improve older courthouses – such as Derby Combined Court and Ilkeston Magistrates' Court – so that they can better meet the needs of defendants and other people who use the courts.

We were particularly disappointed at the conditions we found at Glossop Magistrates' Court. The building is in a poor state of repair, with some safety and security issues, only small waiting areas where parties from both sides of a case have to sit together, no refreshment facilities, no public telephone and no toilet accessible to people in wheelchairs. We have recommended that HMCS should bring this courthouse up to acceptable standards of comfort, safety and security by the end of this year, or stop using it.

Defendants told Inspectors that they were well treated by court staff, with respect and courtesy – and we saw this happening. But we found that HMCS does not always find out what defendants need before they come to court – such as whether they don't speak English, and need an interpreter, or can't easily manage stairs. Without this kind of information – and the right training to make staff aware of the diverse needs of defendants – HMCS cannot provide the kind of service to defendants and their witnesses that we would like to see. We have made a recommendation about this.

Once a defendant reaches court, there can be a long wait before the case is heard. It can be difficult for defendants to find out what is happening, and how long they will have to wait there. The Area has customer service officers at all its courthouses, and plans more training for its staff to help them give a better service to all court users. HMCS is also working hard with other agencies – such as the police and the Crown Prosecution Service – to reduce the time before cases come to trial.

We think that HMCS in Derbyshire wants to improve its service, and are pleased that the management team has agreed to make changes where we have asked for improvements. We shall continue to monitor its progress over the next 18 months.

Comment from the Derbyshire Area

Mrs Linda Mayhew, Area Director for Derbyshire, replies:

“Whilst we are naturally disappointed with the overall finding, we are pleased that the Inspectors have recognised that the plans we have in place, once implemented, will significantly improve the experience of defendants at courts throughout Derbyshire.

We are committed to recognising and meeting all of our customers' diverse needs.”

E N D S

Notes for Editors

1. **HMICA:** HMICA is an independent inspectorate. Being independent means we report direct to Ministers about what services are like for those who have to come to court. We will praise good ideas and ways of working but we will also say when things are not working well. If necessary, we ask for improvements to be made. We look at how well the Crown, county and magistrates' courts are managed. We check if the people who use the courts are given good service. We do **not** inspect or comment on judicial decisions.
2. **HMCS:** The purpose of Her Majesty's Courts Service is to deliver justice efficiently and effectively. It administers the civil, family and criminal courts in England and Wales. This covers Crown, county and magistrates' courts.
3. This inspection forms part of a series of inspections of HMCS Areas looking at the quality of service provided to defendants and their witnesses in the criminal courts. After each Area inspection a public information booklet will be published which will give local people information about the service provided. Following the series of Area inspections, an overview report on the way defendants are treated by HMCS will be produced.
4. 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

Tel: 0117 959 8203 / 8200

Email: lori.buckley@hmica.gsi.gov.uk

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

HMCS Derbyshire Area Contact:

Mr P Ashcroft
Southern Derbyshire Magistrates' Court, St Mary's Gate, Derby
Tel: 01332 333003