



31 JANUARY 2007

Meeting Defendants' Needs

Today sees the publication of a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) on the quality of service for defendants in the criminal courts in England and Wales. ***Meeting Defendants' Needs*** is an overview of the findings from inspections of ten Court Areas, carried out from November 2005 to July 2006. For each inspection, we published a summary of our findings in the form of a Public Information Booklet.

This overview report draws out the themes and trends we identified across the whole inspection programme. It also reviews current national approaches to the processing of defendants. The report makes four formal recommendations to Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS), along with suggestions for further action, to improve the way defendants are treated in the courts. The response of HMCS, outlining how our recommendations will be implemented, is included as an Annex to the report.

Inspectors were impressed with the quality of service provided by frontline staff, who were observed to treat defendants with courtesy, patience and respect, often in stressful situations. We saw many examples of staff going out of their way to help defendants, by explaining aspects of court procedure, or helping them to fill out forms.

HMCS is committed to treating defendants fairly and appropriately. But, in corporate terms, it is less effective at taking account of defendants than of other groups of court user. The particular areas for improvement that Inspectors identified are:

- The safety and security of defendants and other people within court premises
- Waiting times for defendants on the day of their court hearing
- Helping defendants, administratively, to understand and participate in their court hearings
- Ensuring that HMCS specifically considers the impact on defendants when taking key decisions, developing policies and introducing new initiatives.

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. Inspection reports are public documents. Copies of **HMICA's publications**, including annual reports and thematic reviews, may be obtained from:

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