

Joint Inspection calls for better joint working to improve prisoner escorts and court custody

The Chief Inspectors of Court Administration (HMICA) and HMI Prisons have today published the report of a thematic review of court custody and prisoner escort arrangements across England and Wales . The report identifies the need for better joint working, in particular to address late arrivals of prisoners in court and late returns to prisons, and to improve some court holding areas.

The review was conducted in January and February 2005, to consider whether:

- The treatment and conditions experienced by prisoners, and other court users, in court custody are decent, respectful, safe and secure
- The diverse needs of those being held are met
- The operation of court custody supports the efficient administration of justice.

Inspectors found a very mixed picture. They were pleased to find that custody staff are generally caring and compassionate towards the prisoners in their care. The standard of accommodation is improving, although some very poor facilities remain.

Late arrivals at court and late returns to prison are a continuing problem, which affects the safety of prisoners, as well as the welfare of custody staff, and court business. This problem got worse following the introduction of new escort contracts in August 2004 and requires better joint working. Inspectors were concerned that women, young adults and children suffer the most because of the greater distances they travel and that prison video links are less likely to be used for these groups.

The report makes eight recommendations. They include:

- a custody users' charter, agreed by all parties, to set out minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners in court custody
- more investment, and better monitoring arrangements for court custody facilities
- joint working to reduce late arrivals in court and late returns to

prison

- compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act
- better use of prison video links, especially for women and young people

In their Foreword to the report, the Chief Inspectors said:

"We are concerned that unless the National Offender Management Service, the contractors and Her Majesty's Courts Service work together to identify and implement system-wide improvements to escort and custody, the levels of performance that could be achieved will not be realised."

"We are pleased that the agencies are developing a joint action plan in response to our recommendations. Inspectors will monitor progress and aim to report formally in 18 months' time. We hope that the report proves a catalyst for multi-agency working, towards achieving a common goal of an efficient system with prisoner welfare and the business of the courts at its heart."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

- The joint inspection was undertaken by MCSI Inspection of Court Services (MCSI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons,
- MCSI became Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration (HMICA) with effect from 1 April 2005 .
- Inspection reports are public documents. Copies of HMICA's publications, including annual reports and thematic reviews, may be obtained from:

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

- The website of HMI Prisons may viewed at:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprisons/index/html

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