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**CHESHIRE PROBATION AREA –
PUBLICATION BY HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION OF THE FIRST EVER
OFFENDER MANAGEMENT INSPECTION REPORT**

A report published today by Her Majesty's Probation Inspectorate shows that Cheshire Probation Area has many strengths but there is a need for improvement in some important aspects of its work.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

“The Cheshire Area Senior Management Team and board are clearly committed to service improvement and have invested resources well in the last year to support this. Offender management is well developed at both local and regional levels supported by an impressive range of partnership arrangements. Positive relationships between the probation area and local prisons also make it possible to work jointly to reduce reoffending. Some elements of Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements however need to be strengthened and the area was already working to improve the assessment and management of risk of harm in some cases.”

The report's main findings are:

- Reports contributed positively to the sentencing process.
- Constructive interventions were found to encourage offenders to accept responsibility for their offending, however there were significant gaps in provision to address need, particularly in relation to alcohol misuse.
- Achievement of sentencing objectives was strong in most cases and resources allocated had been consistent with the assessed risk of harm and likelihood of reoffending.
- The resources invested by the board in the Performance and Quality Assurance Unit produced demonstrable benefits in an impressive approach to monitoring, evaluation and review to improve performance.
- Assessment, planning and review of risk of harm was too often late and work with offenders on victims issues was underdeveloped.

The publication today of the Cheshire OMI report is significant as it marks the completion of the first ever Offender Management Inspection. This is the new core programme to inspect the management of offenders from the start to end of their community or custodial sentence under the auspices of NOMS. This work is currently being coordinated by the National Probation Service and we are therefore inspecting by probation area. Developed and delivered by HM Inspectorate of Probation with the assistance of HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the OMI programme inspects the newly-implemented arrangements already in place in the Probation Service under the NOMS Offender Management Model.

The OMI programme began in May 2006. All 42 probation areas are being inspected during a three-year cycle, with areas being inspected in regional groupings. We envisage that this programme will form a significant part of the work of the new single Inspectorate for Justice, Community Safety and Custody as it begins its work from 2007-08.

Areas are being inspected on how well they have met defined inspection criteria focusing on:

- Assessment & Sentence Planning
- Implementation of Interventions
- Achievement & Monitoring of Outcomes
- Leadership & Strategic Planning

As the implementation of the Offender Management Model in the custodial setting has not yet taken place, it is not possible at present to inspect offender management in its fullest sense. One of the key aims of the model is the “end-to-end” management of offenders, through and beyond a prison sentence. At this stage we are visiting a prison during each inspection to ascertain the nature of their preparations for offender management implementation; ultimately we shall extend our methodology to the scrutiny of prison casework. This element of inspection design is already in place and can be activated as soon as offender management in both settings is better established.

Our focus remains on the quality of service-delivery to offenders and gives careful attention to Risk of Harm work. If we have serious concerns about the quality of Risk of Harm work we shall re-inspect using a specially-tailored inspection package which will also be made available to Probation areas as a self-assessment process. This will have the added advantage of potentially giving an ongoing focus to this important aspect of work.

Our reports include sections on:

- Service Users’ Perspective – offenders, victims, sentencers
- Risk of Harm work, with a new scoring system which gives areas a clear view of the quality of their delivery in protecting the public
- Offender Management Arrangements – in the community and in custody

This is a forward-looking inspection scrutinising work with offenders under new offender management arrangements already in existence in the National Probation Service, and is set to extend to cover the full remit of offender management.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Offender Management Inspection of Cheshire took place in May 2006.
2. The Offender Management Inspection programme started in May 2006. All probation areas comprising the National Probation Service for England and Wales are being inspected over a three year cycle, with areas in the same region visited within the space of a few months to facilitate comparisons in performance. This enables the Inspectorate to identify and promote effective work with offenders and disseminate information about good practice. Further information on the OMI programme – including the criteria used for inspection – are on the HM Inspectorate of Probation website <http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspection-programmes.html/>
3. Probation areas are assessed on how well they have met defined inspection criteria. These address the quality of the assessments and interventions carried out with offenders, and the initial outcomes of the interventions, both in relation to criminogenic factors such as employment, accommodation and substance misuse, and also whether there has been any reduction in the risk of harm and the risk of re-offending. Overall management of the area is also inspected to see how well it supports good offender management.
4. A key focus of the Cheshire inspection was the area's management of a representative sample of 100 cases from most categories of orders and licences which commenced approximately six months previously. This included high risk of harm offenders and Prolific & other Priority Offenders.