



PRESS RELEASE

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Devon & Cornwall Criminal Justice Area - Responding to the Challenge

The Chief Inspectors of the Criminal Justice Inspectorates have today published their joint report on the Devon & Cornwall Criminal Justice Area.

Inspectors found that the criminal justice agencies are working well together to achieve their key performance targets. All agencies also contribute to achieving the Boards objectives and there is a commitment to securing improvement of all aspects of performance.

Devon & Cornwall is meeting all key public service agreements targets set by the Board except the public confidence measure. All supporting targets, for example, the time between arrest and sentence for persistent young offenders, sanction detections, and enforcement of community sentences, are also being met.

- The Area has a target to bring 29,227 offenders to justice by March 2007; performance up to September 2006 recorded that 31,922 offences had been brought to justice so that the target had already been exceeded.
- The ineffective trial rate in the Crown Court (i.e. the proportion of cases listed for contested hearing which did not proceed) was 6.5% against a target of 16.5%. In the magistrates' courts, the performance for the first half of 2006 / 2007 is better than target at 15% against 18%.
- In 2005 / 2006 failed to meet its target to increase public confidence measure of bringing offenders to justice. Area performance was 44% against a target of 48% and national performance of 44.4%.

Other main findings by the inspectorate included: at a strategic level, the lack of statutory authority for local criminal justice boards could limit its ability to translate strategic intent into

effective change at an operational level. This was most obvious when considering how the police Basic Command Units adopted board priorities.

- The benefit of the Statutory Charging Scheme was beginning to be realised although the number of cases discontinued in the magistrates' courts after a pre-charge decision by the CPS needs to be reduced. There is also a need to increase the number of cases where advice by CPS lawyers to the police is given on a face to face basis.
- Overall, the needs of victims and witnesses were being met, although the quality and timeliness of information passing between the police and CPS about the needs of vulnerable and intimidated adult witnesses needed to be improved. At some court centres the facilities for victims and witnesses required improvement.
- There were good working arrangements between the relevant agencies to ensure that the targets for the enforcement of community and penalties were met. The Area's performance was significantly better than that found nationally. Performance could be improved further if more priority were given to executing warrants when offenders failed to answer bail.
- The structure of the Board's Sub-Groups which support the delivery of its objectives needs to be clarified. The piloting of a Plymouth Local Delivery Group cuts across the remit of other sub-groups and has resulted in confusion about where responsibility for delivery rests at operational level.

The inspectors also noted that the size of the Devon & Cornwall Criminal Justice Area raises issues for the local criminal justice agencies and Criminal Justice Board that are not faced by most. They recognised that the distances between major business centres impacts on resource times and can create difficulties for the administration of justice, for example the time taken for victims and witnesses and defendants to get to court.

Stephen Wooler, CB Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, said:

“This report recognises the commitment and determination of the Devon & Cornwall Criminal Justice Board in seeking to improve the justice system despite having to contend with difficulties not faced elsewhere. It has succeeded in meeting most of its targets. I am confident that the Board will build on its sound foundations and address the aspects of performance

identified in this report as requiring improvement in order to strengthen its performance further for the future”

An executive summary of the Report is attached to this notice, also on an embargoed basis. For further information, please contact Andreas Harding on Tel: 020 7210 1143 or Tel: 07901 856348; e-mail: Andreas.Harding@cps.gsi.gov.uk.