

Articles:

Defendants

Performance

HMCS Standards

Survey Results

Enforcement

New Structure for
HMCS

Public Confidence

Local Criminal
Justice Board

Libra

Useful Website
Addresses

Open Day

Budget

Court Contact
Information

Defendants

Inspection on Services provided

In the last newsletter, it was reported that HM Inspectorate would inspect the Criminal Courts in Durham County to assess the level of services that are provided for defendants.

This inspection took place in May, 2006, and it is very pleasing that the Inspectorate found that facilities provided were very good around the County. There were items of good practice identified and three recommendations were made to improve services. These recommendations were:-

1. That HMCS Durham ensure that, wherever possible, youths and adults are separated when appearing in court and that informal courtrooms are used in accordance with the Youth Court Guidelines 2001.
2. That HMCS Durham review safety and security arrangements at Durham Crown Court and take action to minimise risks for defendants.
3. That HMCS Durham provide information for defendants which meets their diverse needs and seek assurances that defendants receive information prior to attending court.

An Action Plan was produced in order to ensure that the recommendations were implemented and the Inspectorate will carry out a Post Inspection Review to monitor progress in county.

Performance

Performance in county for 2006/07 continues to be very good. An example of performance is shown below, as at the end of July, 2006:-

- Ineffective Trials – Crown Court: 16%
- Ineffective Trials – Magistrates' Courts: 17%
- Enforcement of Financial Penalties: 104%
- Private and Public Law - Children Act Cases dealt with: 69%
- No. of Complaints dealt with in set time: 98%
- Cases starting within Target time (Crown Court): 83%

(Continued on the next page)

Copies of the Area Performance reports are displayed in County buildings but if you would like to see a copy please contact Caroline Crampsey direct on 0191 3751827 or e-mail:

Caroline.crampsey@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

The data on the previous page shows that there was a dip in performance in relation to ineffective trials in the Crown Court but we are confident that, in view of action being taken, performance will be within target soon.

HMCS Standards

HMCS has produced standards in relation to the operation of all staff, the condition of buildings and the level of service provided. These are displayed on our notice boards and it would be extremely helpful to receive your views on whether they are of assistance to you. Are they easily understood, meaningful and meet your needs? Is there anything additional that you would like included?

Please contact any member of staff or, alternatively, contact Caroline Crampsey direct. We would be delighted to hear from you, so that we can continue to improve the quality of information and data provided.

Survey Results

Work continues at a pace to prepare for the Charter Mark assessment, later in the year. The County is working to Charter Mark standards and is continually trying to improve the quality and way we deliver our services. HMCS has introduced new ways of communicating and wants to hear your views. We have introduced "You said, We did" posters in public areas, detailing what we have done in response to your comments and suggestions for improvement. Here are some examples of the improvements we have made as a result:

- More notice boards have been ordered for some of the Magistrates' Courts waiting areas so that court lists can be displayed.
- We have introduced block listing at intervals to try to ensure that more people will be heard closer to their scheduled time.
- Reception staff in the Magistrates' Courts now wander among customers keeping them informed of when they are likely to be called into court.
- We now have a soundproof interview room at Darlington County Court.

- Staff now present in all of our offices to take telephone calls between 9am and 5pm.
- Customers can authorise the Magistrates' Courts to take set amounts from credit/debit cards until their fine is paid in full.
- A 24 hour automated telephone line is to be introduced in the near future at the Fines and Enforcement office.

Comment books are now provided at all Courts – please let us know what you think. We welcome your views and comments.

Enforcement

On 1st April, 2006, Phillips became the authorized Bailiffs for the enforcement of financial penalties imposed by the Magistrates' Courts.

There is good liaison and co-operation between Magistrates' Courts staff and Phillips and recent months have seen an increase in the payment rate at Magistrates' Courts. It is still early days in the contract but signs are very encouraging that more financial penalties imposed will be collected. We are above target regarding the county payment rate.

New Structure for HMCS

Work is well underway to introduce a new structure for HMCS on 1st April, 2007. The current Durham, Northumbria and Cleveland HMCS Areas will join together to form a new North East Area.

New management structures are necessary to operate the new structure and appointments of Chief Officers will be made in September/October, 2006. New management structures will be released shortly thereafter to ensure that the new structure is in place and operates by the end of the financial year.

If you would like more information on the structure and how it may impact on the services we deliver, please contact Royston Dent on 0191 3844455.

Public Confidence

HMCS is aware of the part it can play to improve the confidence of the community. As a result, the service will be more proactive in publicising good news stories and successes within the Service, with the intention of giving a balanced view of work and progress being made in county.

Local Criminal Justice Board

HMCS is one of seven criminal justice agencies that make up the Durham Local Criminal Justice Board. The Board works to help co-ordinate work in the county and also addresses performance to ensure that agencies work together to provide the best level of service possible.

The Board has recently reorganised the way that it deals with its business and has now introduced a number of Delivery Groups, tasked with planning and delivering improvements. The new Board structure also provides checks and balances and challenges agencies to make sure that works are delivered within agreed timescales.

The LCJB was set up three years ago to encourage criminal justice agencies to work together and the Board is directly responsible to the National Criminal Justice Board for local delivery of national targets set by the Government.

Libra

On the 10th July 2006, the Magistrates' Courts in County Durham went live on 'Libra', the new national computer system for England & Wales. Durham is the fourth Area to go live with the new system and is classed as a 'proving area' to ensure the system functions correctly prior to be rolled out nationally.

Libra is now the primary case management system for all civil and criminal proceedings heard within the six Magistrates' Courts in County Durham. Libra will continue to be enhanced over the coming months and years to provide a modern IT system to all courts within England & Wales.

Useful Website addresses

You can find out more about Her Majesty's Courts Service and other related organisations on the Internet.

Her Majesty's Courts Service

www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk

From our website you can download forms and leaflets, find the addresses of County, Crown and Magistrates' Courts and read the latest news from HM Courts Service. For some Courts, you can even view a live Court list in real time.

Other websites from HM Courts Service:

Money Claims On-line

www.moneyclaim.gov.uk

Online Forms Pilot

www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/countycourtformsonline

There are also many websites related to the work of HM Courts Service:

Department for Constitutional Affairs

www.dca.gov.uk

Civil Procedure Rules (CPR)

www.dca.gov.uk/civil/procrules_fin

Civil Justice Council

www.adr.civiljusticecouncil.gov.uk

XHIBIT

www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/onlineservices/xhibit

Criminal Justice System

www.cjsonline.gov.uk

Local criminal Justice Board

www.lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/durhamanddarlington

Open Day

On 25th November, 2006, an Open Day will be held at Bishop Auckland Magistrates' Court. Mock Courts - involving children from a local school - will take place during the day and the Courts Board will hold its public meeting from 11.30am to 1.00pm.

Other agencies will also participate in the event and this will be an opportunity for staff in other agencies and the public to see the working of a Court and gain information/ask questions on how business is conducted.

It will be a good opportunity to express your views on the operation of the Courts and the Criminal Justice System. Please try to come along. The day starts at 10.00am and runs till 4.00pm. Refreshments are available throughout the day.

Budget

A major efficiency programme is taking place over the next two years and the Durham Area must contribute to meeting the financial challenges faced by HMCS. Durham delivered savings of 4.3% in 2005/6 and we are expected to make a further 2% saving this financial year.

This will be challenging but due to a structured efficiency plan and the commitment to deliver value

for money this area is on track to achieve these further savings in 2006/7.

Monthly Finance Reports are prepared for the Region, the Area management Board and the Courts Board to reflect and address the up to date financial picture.

The measure of success will be to share our resources with other areas to ensure the Regional spend is within budget whilst still providing an effective and efficient service.

Court Contact Information

Below is a list of contact information for courts and offices within the Durham Area, which includes telephone numbers, and also some email addresses. For further information, i.e. court addresses, locations, the type of work we do etc, please visit the HMCS website, located at:

www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk

Durham Crown Court:

Telephone: 0191 386 6714

(Public counter opening times: 10 am until 4 pm Monday to Friday)

Bishop Auckland County Court:

Telephone: 01388 660251

(Public counter opening times: 10 am until 4 pm Monday to Friday)

Consett County Court:

Telephone: 01207 502854

(Public counter opening times: 10 am until 4 pm Monday to Friday)

Darlington County Court:

Telephone: 01325 463224

(Public counter opening times: 10 am until 4 pm Monday to Friday)

Email: darlington.cty.sm@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

Durham County Court:

Telephone: 0191 386 5941 (Public counter opening times: 10 am until 4pm Monday to Friday)

The following offices do not operate a public counter service, but have telephone lines open to the public from 9 am until 5 pm Monday to Friday (Excluding public holidays):

North Durham Magistrates' Court Office

(servicing Chester-le-Street Central Admin Office)

Telephone: 0191 387 0700

Email: DU-Durhammcnorthenq@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

Courts sit at Durham, Consett and Peterlee.

South Durham Magistrates' Court Office

(servicing Newton Aycliffe Central Admin Office)

Telephone: 01325 318114

Email: Du-DurhamMcSouthEnq@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

Courts sit at Newton Aycliffe, Darlington and Bishop Auckland.

Fines & Enforcement Office:

Telephone: 01325 376600

Email: Du-Durhammcfinance@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

Centralised Magistrates' Courts Listing Team:

Telephone: 01325 327693

Email: Du-durhammclisting@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

Durham Area Director's Office:

Telephone: 0191 384 4455