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HMCS SEES REAL ACHIEVEMENT IN FIRST YEAR

One year on from its inception, Her Majesty's Courts Service has achieved real improvement in the delivery of courts services to the public according to the first annual report for the new organisation.

Published today, the annual report and accounts 2005/06 recognises the successes of the past year such as increased attendance for Crown Court trials from 78% to 85%. This has contributed to a decrease in ineffective trials by 12%. In addition nationwide enforcement blitzes against unpaid fines known as Operation Payback have led to a national payment rate of 83% - above the target of 81%. In one month alone in London over £60,000 in unpaid fines, costs and compensation was collected and several criminals arrested.

Courts Minister, Harriet Harman said:

"People want to see the courts respected and effective and they want to see the punishment fit the crime. HMCS is working closely with others in the criminal justice system, such as the police, to treat victims better, taking cases through courts more quickly, ensuring court orders are obeyed and sending a message to offenders that crime doesn't pay."

Praising the efforts of staff in achieving success, HMCS Chief Executive, Sir Ron De Witt said:

"It is with considerable satisfaction that we can look back on the first year of

operation as one of real success. It has been a year of challenges – and there are more challenges ahead – but we have made real progress against our targets. Enforcement rates have increased, the percentage of failed trials has dropped and customer satisfaction has improved.

“This is largely down to the dedication of staff to make the new structure work and from our determination to work closely with the judiciary and our other justice system partners to deliver the best possible courts service to the public.

“Looking to the future, there is still work to be done. We will continue to strive to provide a better service, to help to reduce crime, to speed up justice, to protect the vulnerable, to increase public confidence in the system and to enable people to resolve disputes more effectively.”

The report also highlights:

- the establishment of specialist courts such as the 25 dedicated domestic violence courts in England and Wales which provide a safe and sympathetic environment, or the dedicated drugs courts in Leeds and West London which provide continuity for offenders with drug problems;
- the introduction of witness liaison officers in all magistrates’ courts to provide a focal point and better experience for witnesses;
- increased use of witness intermediaries to help protect vulnerable people and enable them to give effective testimony;
- in addition to all Crown Courts, over 75% of magistrates’ courts now have video links for remote testimony;
- pilot mediation schemes in Manchester, Exeter and Reading which are helping to provide a more flexible approach to out-of-court dispute resolution, leading to settlement rates as high as 85% in Manchester; and
- £1million spent on improving facilities for jurors and £3million on improving facilities for victims and witnesses demonstrating HMCS’s commitment to focus on the needs of customers.

Looking to the future, the annual report reiterates HMCS's strategic goal for the next five years of putting courts at the heart of communities, increasing justice for all, transforming service delivery and ensuring respect and confidence in the courts. In order to achieve its principles HMCS has set out five main areas for business change:

- increasing the effectiveness of case management to reduce delays and ineffective trials and make the process of administering justice more efficient;
- modernising service delivery, taking advantage of online and telephone opportunities with standardised systems and effective back-office management;
- simplifying process and procedure to help the public understand the justice system better;
- increasing administration efficiency to roll out best practice and reduce duplication; and
- ensuring compliance and effective enforcement to promote safer opportunities and give the law-abiding public greater confidence.

NOTES

1. Her Majesty's Courts Service brought together, on 1st April 2005, 42 independent magistrates' courts committees and the Court Service into one single organisation for the first time. It is an executive agency of the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA). Its purpose is to deliver justice effectively and efficiently to the public. It is responsible for the management of the civil, family and criminal courts in England and Wales.
2. The annual report and accounts 2005/06 can be downloaded from the HMCS website www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk