

# **CROWN COURT ANNUAL REPORTS 2000/01**

## **Foreward by Ian Magee**

We are moving towards a modernised Crown Court for the 21st Century. Over the next year we are piloting improved technology in 20 Crown Court centres up and down the country. However, we want a court that not only makes the best of new technology, but does so in a way that enables us to deliver a better quality of service, and a better quality of justice, because that is what the public are entitled to expect. The Annual Report will help us to drive up performance across all Crown Court centres, as well as providing the public with valuable information about how their local Court is performing.

The information in the report is produced annually by the Court Service based on manual and electronic information provided by all Crown Court Centres.

The table to this report shows the performance of all Crown Court centres in England and Wales against eight key performance measures. Court centres are listed alphabetically in the table to the report; a combined London Group figure is also included.

The eight measures and definitions of what they record are set out below: -

**KPI3 (timeliness)**

- This is calculated using the number of trials disposed of within 16 weeks + the number of sentences dealt with in 10 weeks + the number of appeals dealt with in 14 weeks all divided by the total number of trials, sentences and appeals disposed of (this will also include the "Narey - Sent for Trial" target as of April 2001).

**Average Waiting Time (weeks)**

- Average waiting time is calculated using the waiting time, in weeks, for each hearing and dividing it by the number of committals for trial disposed of.

**Percentage of committals outstanding over 16 weeks**

- Determined as the number of committals still outstanding after 16 weeks divided by the total number of trials outstanding.

**Disposal Rate**

- The disposal rate is the total number of cases disposed of (i.e. effectively dealt with) divided by the total number of days sat by a court. For example a court sitting for 20 days and disposing of 20 cases would have a disposal rate of one.

**Courtroom Usage (hours)**

- This records the average number of hours sat in court divided by the number of days sat. It does not include time spent in chambers.

**Cracked Trial Rate**

- The broad cracked trial rate is the number of cracked trials divided by the number of disposals. A cracked trial is any case that is dealt with on the day a trial was scheduled to take place without the trial needing to go ahead. This will include cases where the defendant changes his plea to guilty, or pleads to a lesser charge on the day of the trial. It does not include cases where the defendant pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing before the court.
- One initiative, originally piloted at Preston Crown Court in 1997, to assist in combating this, is Joint Performance Management (JPM). JPM is where the Crown Court together with other agencies, e.g. CPS and Police, look at each case that cracked and try to find solutions to overcome this for future cases. However, there have been mixed responses from the Crown Courts, as to how effective this has been. One particular court has confirmed that this has been very effective in reducing their broad cracked trial rates to considerably below the national average. Another has confirmed that after a lot of extra work undertaken has had no significant effect. Most courts however, have said that results were mixed.

### **Ineffective trial rate**

- The ineffective trial rate is the number of ineffective trials divided by the number of cases listed for trial. An ineffective trial is a case that is unable to proceed to trial, on the day the trial was due to commence. Reasons for ineffective trials may include witnesses or defendants not attending and lack of available courtroom time. As this indicator records the number of listed cases that do not commence, it includes cases that subsequently have an effective hearing at a later date. Courts report that the appointment of Case Progression Officers, the use of Floating Trials and JPM has contributed in reducing their ineffective trial rate figures.

### **Days jurors sit as a % of attendance and non attendance**

- The number of Juror Sitting days divided by the sum of the Total Juror Attendance days and the Total Non-Attendance days determines this figure.

The report should not be treated as a league table, as the performance of individual courts is influenced by many factors including geographical locations, type of cases dealt with and organisation of work between court centres across groups.

Courts near to major ports and airports e.g. Canterbury, Isleworth and Croydon will have a high percentage of Customs and Excise cases, and courts in major city centres will have a higher proportion of serious crime. Courts with a large number of long, complex cases e.g. Central Criminal Court will be able to deal with fewer cases per courtroom than courts who mainly deal with straightforward, shorter criminal matters. As complex cases generally require more preparation time before they are ready for trial the average waiting times are likely to be longer at these courts.

Workload in the London group of courts is distributed between Crown Court centres in accordance with the directions of the Senior Presiding Judge in order to ensure that the most effective listing practice across the group as a whole is followed. As a consequence this means that the workload of some court centres, most notably the Central Criminal Court is heavily weighted towards the most high profile and complex criminal cases, thereby greatly affecting the disposal rate at the court. For this reason the performance of London courts should not be looked at in isolation from each other.

Resident Judges and Court Managers at all Court centres are asked by the Senior Presiding Judge and the Chief Executive of the Court Service to comment on the figures for their courts and to show what efforts are being made to improve performance against targets in future years. The responses received and the joint approaches to tackling areas of poor performance demonstrate the courts and judiciary working together to good effect.