



PRESS RELEASE

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HMIC REPORT ON CJS - 3 NOVEMBER 2010

The Magistrates' Association welcomes the report published today by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (HMIC) entitled *Stop The Drift - A focus on 21st-century criminal justice*, which states that the justice system is fragmented and that:

Reforms of the system are essential and there is now an opportunity in the current economic climate to show collective leadership (both across the CJS and within policing) to change the traditional approaches of the past.

However magistrates have for some considerable time commented on the lack of co-ordination across the justice system. Indeed our recent response to the proposals to close 103 magistrates' courts (published on 15th Oct this year) referred to this concern and recommended:

a review of the inter-relationships of these three agencies (CPS, Police and HMCS) to ensure continuity, timeliness and more cost effectiveness in the preparation and presentation of cases in court

We are now pleased that HMIC supports our concerns and like the Association believes that there needs to be a single agency or person in charge of the CJS to be accountable for the delivery of effective change.

The report also refers to Out of Court Disposals and in **Figure 1: Offences brought to justice**, indicates that between 28% and 49% of criminal offences are dealt with out of court. Magistrates were also concerned about this inconsistency and the Association conducted its own research under the Freedom of Information Act. It collected data from Police Forces which showed the range was even higher – from 33% - 63%. Our report published in June 2009 showed that an alarming 37,000 offenders were given a simple caution for *assault occasioning actual bodily harm*. As a result of our report the BBC screened a panorama programme on the topic which forced the previous government to institute a full scale review. We have always stated that there should be a coherent set of common sense principles to ensure judicial involvement, transparency and consistency of delivery.

The Association has always welcomed the wider use of new technologies but its limited involvement in the virtual courts' pilot indicates that there are significant operational difficulties and that the pilots did not realise the expected savings as the report states. There needs to be further work and a greater involvement with the judiciary.

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Notes for Editors

2011 will be the 650 anniversary of the institution of the office of Justice of the Peace (JP) and a senior judge recently stated that *its members have served the justice system with distinction ever since*. Currently nearly 29,000 men and women - known as JPs or magistrates - deal with 95% of all criminal cases brought before courts and a significant number of civil matters including family work. Magistrates are not paid for attending court, receiving only modest expenses, subsistence and small recompense for any loss of earnings. They have to attend training, are mentored and regularly appraised and work within guidelines.