

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE VISIT TO CJI OFFICES

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee visited CJI offices on February 22, 2005. This is the summary of CJI's role and work presented to them.

1. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) was established under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. It derives from a recommendation of the Criminal Justice Review which flowed from the Good Friday Agreement. It is thus an integral part of the settlement designed to secure peace in the context of power-sharing.

2. As such, its remit relates to public confidence in the even-handedness of the criminal justice system, not just to its efficiency (though the two are complementary).

3. CJI is responsible for inspecting almost all the agencies of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, with a few omissions (principally the Courts). It also inspects a number of agencies which are more marginally involved with criminal justice.

4. CJI operates in partnership with the specialist Inspectorates from England and Wales: HM Inspectorates of Constabulary, the CPS, Prisons and Probation. Most of these act as CJI's agents in relation to Northern Ireland, but HMIC has a more complicated relationship since it has its own statutory remit to inspect the PSNI.

5. The thrust of CJI's work is improvement not blame. It is not a

'naming and shaming' Inspectorate. It aims to work *with* the agencies through a process which starts with self-assessment and proceeds through dialogue and eventual agreement.

6. To achieve coherence in the inspection of diverse agencies CJI uses an overarching framework known as the 'common core'. The framework highlights openness and accountability; partnership with others in the CJS; promotion of equality and human rights; learning; and the delivery of results, including value for money.

7. CJI is asked to propose its own programme of work to the Secretary of State. It does that on the basis of wide consultation with the CJ agencies, local politicians, community groups, voluntary organisations and interested academics. The programme includes both thematic reviews and inspections of individual agencies.

8. Inspections completed to date include Magilligan Prison, the Management of Sex Offenders, Imprisonment of Women, the Juvenile Justice Centre, Forensics, State Pathology and the Treatment of Victims and Witnesses. Reports are submitted to the Secretary of State and then placed in the Library of the House.

9. CJI currently has a Chief Inspector, a Deputy Chief, a Head of Research and Communication, a Business Manager, four Inspectors, two Assistant Inspectors and six support staff. It also has to pay other Inspectorates and experts who assist on specific inspections. The total budget will be about £1¹/₂ million a year.

10. CJI believes that it can contribute usefully to the aims of the Agreement even in an uncertain political environment. There are steps that could be taken to streamline its remit in the light of experience next time there is a legislative opportunity.