



HMCPsi

HM Crown Prosecution
Service Inspectorate

The Military Court Service

**An inspection by invitation of
the effectiveness and efficiency
of the Military Court Service**

August 2026

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Who we are

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate inspects prosecution services, providing evidence to make the prosecution process better and more accountable.

We have a statutory duty to inspect the work of the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office. By special arrangement, we also share our expertise with other prosecution services in the UK and overseas.

We are independent of the organisations we inspect, and our methods of gathering evidence and reporting are open and transparent. We do not judge or enforce; we inform prosecution services' strategies and activities by presenting evidence of good practice and issues to address. Independent inspections like these help to maintain trust in the prosecution process.

Our vision

We are part of the solution to improving the criminal justice system through high quality inspection.

We have four priorities to enable us to deliver this vision:

- we hold the CPS and SFO to account for what they deliver (we make recommendations that drive improvement)
- victims will be at the heart of inspection (where we can, we will use victim experience in our inspection)
- using our 25 years of experience, we will help public prosecutors improve (their legal casework)
- inspection will identify and spread best practice.

Our values

We act with integrity, creating a culture of respect; drive innovation; pursue ambition; and commit to inclusivity in everything we do.

Contents

1. Chief Inspector's foreword.....	7
2. Summary	11
Key findings	13
Recommendations, good practice and strengths	17
3. Background and context	19
Background	20
Context	27
4. Framework and methodology	28
The inspection framework	29
Methodology	30
5. Systems and processes	32
Key systems and processes	34
Other enabling processes	43
6. Technology and digital enablement.....	45
Technology in court	46
Administrative digital arrangements	51
Overall finding.....	53
7. Staffing structures, resilience and succession planning.....	54
Staffing structure, capacity and resource constraints.....	55
Flexibility and cross-skilling.....	56
Resilience, succession planning and workforce development	57
Overall finding.....	59
8. Court estate and facilities	60
Safety, suitability and user support	61
Overall finding.....	65
9. Stakeholder relationships	66
Stakeholder relationships and communication	67
Understanding and responding to court users' needs	68
Operational engagement and issue resolution	69
Feedback and learning.....	70
Overall finding.....	71

10. Performance, governance and assurance	72
Performance framework and key indicators	73
What the performance data shows	74
Governance and accountability.....	76
Assurance and learning.....	77
Overall finding.....	79

Annexes

Inspection framework.....	80
Glossary.....	86

1. Chief Inspector's foreword

The Military Court Service (MCS) occupies a unique position within the Service Justice System. Although largely unseen by those outside the military justice community, its work is fundamental to ensuring that Service courts are able to operate effectively, fairly and efficiently. From listing cases and constituting Court Martial boards to supporting victims and witnesses, maintaining court facilities and deploying courts overseas, the MCS provides the practical foundations upon which military justice depends.

One of the most striking features of our findings was the quality of leadership and operational oversight within the organisation

This inspection was undertaken at the invitation of the Director of the Military Court Service. Such invitations reflect a commitment to transparency, continuous improvement and independent scrutiny. I welcome the willingness of the MCS to subject itself to external inspection and to seek assurance about the effectiveness and efficiency of the service it provides. This is reflective of a positive

approach and demonstrates a mature organisation with a culture that is open to challenge and improvement.

Overall, we found the MCS to be an effective, well-led and highly regarded organisation. It is staffed by committed and knowledgeable people, who take considerable pride in their work, and who demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility towards court users and the administration of justice. We found a service that consistently delivers high standards of operational support, maintains effective relationships with its stakeholders and responds positively to the challenges associated with operating within a specialist jurisdiction.

One of the most striking features of our findings was the quality of leadership and operational oversight within the organisation. Senior leaders maintain a clear understanding of live court business and have established effective mechanisms for identifying and addressing emerging issues. This strong operational grip has enabled the MCS to continue delivering an effective service despite the challenges that inevitably arise within a small specialist organisation.

An important feature of the MCS's governance arrangements is its accountability within the wider Service Justice System. While the MCS has developed strong internal oversight and operational controls, effective accountability also requires appropriate external scrutiny and challenge.

The Service Justice Board has a key role to play in this regard. As the senior governance body within the Service Justice System, it provides an opportunity to

scrutinise the effectiveness and efficiency of the MCS, consider whether the service is delivering its objectives, and make sure operational performance is subject to independent review and challenge. Our findings identify that this is a gap that the Service Justice Board may wish to consider.

The inspection also identified several areas of notable strength. The MCS has developed effective arrangements to support case progression, helping to make sure cases remain trial-ready and do not drift unnecessarily. Its courtroom and portable court technology are impressive and, in many respects, provide the exemplar for arrangements available elsewhere in the civilian justice system. The ability to establish a fully functioning court in temporary or overseas locations while maintaining high standards of service demonstrates innovation, professionalism and a clear focus on meeting operational need.

the MCS is delivering a high-quality service. However, no organisation should regard good performance as a reason to stand still

Victims and witnesses are also well served by the MCS. We found thoughtful and effective arrangements that provide necessary separation from defendants, security and practical support, both within permanent court centres and when courts are convened in temporary locations. Stakeholders consistently praised the professionalism, accessibility and responsiveness of MCS staff, and the strength

of those relationships contributes significantly to the effective operation of Service courts.

Our findings should give confidence to the Ministry of Defence, the judiciary, justice partners, the Service Justice Board and court users that the MCS is delivering a high-quality service. However, no organisation should regard good performance as a reason to stand still. The recommendations in this report are therefore not a response to any failure or poor performance. Rather, they are intended to help the MCS preserve and strengthen what already works well.

In particular, we identify opportunities to improve resilience through succession planning and workforce development, strengthen assurance arrangements, modernise administrative systems through the planned Military Courts Listing System, and develop a more efficient and transparent approach to Court Martial board nominations. Addressing these issues will help reduce reliance on individual expertise, strengthen organisational resilience and support the long-term future of the MCS.

An inspection of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Military Court Service

This is a positive report about a high-performing organisation that plays a crucial role within the Service Justice System. The MCS benefits from committed staff, effective leadership, strong stakeholder confidence and a clear focus on delivering practical solutions.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to the inspection, including MCS staff and the many stakeholders who shared their experiences and insights.



Anthony Rogers

HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service

2. Summary

2.1. The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 (CPSIA) sets out the statutory basis for His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) and its core role in inspecting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO)¹. The Act also permits HM Chief Inspector to assist other public authorities in support of their operational functions². Where such assistance is requested, it constitutes an inspection by invitation.

The invitation reflected the Director's recognition of the value of independent inspection

2.2. The Military Court Service (MCS) performs a specialist administrative role within the Service Justice System (SJS): ensuring that Service courts are listed, supported and able to operate effectively in the United Kingdom and, where required, overseas. Its work underpins the practical delivery of Service court proceedings for all court users, including defendants, victims, witnesses, board members, advocates and the judiciary.

2.3. Following a period of modernisation and operational development, the Director of the MCS approached HMCPsi to inspect the MCS using our inspection by invitation powers. The invitation reflected the Director's recognition of the value of independent inspection, including HMCPsi's recent inspection by invitation of the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA)³.

2.4. Because our resources were already committed to a full inspection programme in accordance with our statutory duty, we agreed to conduct the inspection on a cost recovery basis. We agreed to assess how effectively the MCS operates and uses its resources to support the efficient delivery of administrative court services within the SJS.

2.5. Overall, we found the MCS to be an effective, responsive and well-regarded service. It has a clear operational purpose, visible leadership, experienced and committed staff, and strong working relationships with the judiciary, advocates, Probation Service, victim and witness support services and other justice partners. Stakeholders consistently described MCS staff as accessible, helpful and solutions-focused.

¹ Following amendment in 2014 to expand the remit to the SFO.

² Section 6(1), *Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000*; UK Government; July 2000.
legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/10/schedule/crossheading/assistance-for-other-public-authorities

³ *The Service Prosecuting Authority follow-up report*; HMCPsi; December 2025.
hmcp.si.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/report/the-service-prosecuting-authority-follow-up-report/

2.6. We found a service, led by the Director, that embraces and pursues improvement through digital innovation. The MCS's in-court digital offer is of the highest quality. The presentation equipment for use in court — including video links, the digital recording and transcription service, and the ability to convene a mobile court virtually anywhere in the world — illustrates the MCS's drive to embrace new technology to provide the best possible service. Its use of digital innovation is exemplary.

2.7. The MCS performs particularly well in areas most immediately visible to court users. Its case progression arrangements drive timely first hearings and trial readiness. Its courtroom and portable court technology is reliable and well supported. Its victim and witness facilities provide effective separation, privacy, special measures and practical support.

2.8. We also found the MCS had a strong operational grip. Senior leaders are personally involved in live court business, use regular meetings and practical controls to manage risks, and maintain an active understanding of current workload, staffing pressures, listing issues and case progression. This leadership model has helped the MCS sustain effective delivery despite the pressures that come with operating as a small, specialist service.

2.9. We make four recommendations. They are intended to help preserve current strengths and reduce future risks, to make sure the MCS maintains its current high quality and effective service.

Key findings

2.10. The MCS has effective systems for the early stages of case progression.

2.11. Cases are received digitally, recorded, allocated and listed through established administrative arrangements, with practical controls that support the target of listing initial Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings (PTPHs) within 42 days of receipt. We heard from staff and stakeholders that these arrangements result in effective PTPH hearings.

2.12. This was supported by the MCS's performance data, which showed that, from quarter 1 of 2025 to the end of quarter 1 of 2026:

- 96.3% of PTPHs were listed within 42 days of receipt
- 94.7% of those hearings were effective.

2.13. Routine legal aid and representation checks, which are done 21 days before the initial PTPH, are an important safeguard against ineffective hearings. Where the checks identify issues with granting legal aid that are likely to affect

the case's progress, the MCS is proactive in listing the case to bring matters back before the court to be resolved. This is good practice because it supports effective first hearings and reduces avoidable delays.

2.14. The MCS has a strong approach to post-PTPH case progression and trial readiness. Court staff proactively monitor compliance with directions, send reminders, chase outstanding actions, and refer matters back to a Judge Advocate if necessary for further formal case management. The MCS effectively coordinates and drives the practical oversight of live cases that helps prevent drift between hearings.

2.15. Assize planning — the process by which the MCS schedules blocks of court sitting time — provides a disciplined framework for managing court business. Planned sitting periods support forward planning, listing discipline and effective use of court time. The arrangements work well within the current operating model, although they are dependent on accurate manual updating.

2.16. Court Martial board administration is critical to the operational effectiveness of the MCS. Boards must have the correct composition to be able to try cases⁴.

2.17. The MCS manages the complexities of board administration carefully and effectively. Between January 2024 and June 2026, only eight trials were ineffective, and we heard that incorrect board composition contributed to just one of those.

Court staff proactively monitor compliance with directions, send reminders, chase outstanding actions, and refer matters back to a Judge Advocate if necessary

2.18. However, the nomination process is resource-intensive for the MCS and depends on timely input from the three Services. There is a credible case for a more consistent, transparent and digitally supported tri-service process.

2.19. Courtroom and portable court technology are clear strengths. The MCS has invested in reliable digital audio recording, video and live link facilities, digital case material, courtroom screens, laptops and portable court capability. These arrangements are effective

⁴ Section 155, *Armed Forces Act 2006*; UK Government; November 2006.
legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/52/section/155

The Armed Forces (Court Martial) rules 2009; UK Government; July 2009.
legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/2041/contents/made

The Armed Forces (Service Court Rules) (Amendment) Rules 2022; UK Government; June 2022.

legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/605/made

and support participation, access to evidence and the effective delivery of hearings in both permanent and temporary court settings.

2.20. We found administrative digital arrangements are less mature. The MCS does not have a single authoritative system for listing, case progression and court administration, relying instead on several systems, spreadsheets, email and manual checks. These arrangements support current delivery but create duplication, make data harder to reconcile and limit the visibility of live court business.

The MCS remains vulnerable to loss of expertise, staff movement, absence and continued reliance on manual systems

2.21. The proposed Military Courts Listing System (MCLS) offers an important opportunity to improve efficiency and resilience.

2.22. The MCS is staffed by committed, knowledgeable and flexible people. Partners, stakeholders and others we engaged with consistently described staff as professional and helpful, and the evidence showed a strong culture of shared responsibility. The principal risk is sustainability, not current performance.

2.23. The MCS remains vulnerable to loss of expertise, staff movement, absence and continued reliance on manual systems. A structured resilience and succession planning framework would help reduce single points of failure.

2.24. Victim and witness provision is another important strength. The permanent court centres provide effective arrangements for separation, privacy, secure movement, special measures and practical support. Our observation of a portable court at Aldergrove showed that the MCS can reproduce important safeguards in a temporary setting — again, adding to the positive experience for victims and witnesses.

2.25. However, we found some broader estate constraints, particularly at Bulford. Here, more limited breakout and consultation space, layout and environmental comfort affected some advocates, staff and board members in larger or more complex hearings.

2.26. Stakeholder relationships and communication are strong. The MCS is regarded as accessible, responsive and solutions-focused, with effective day-to-day communication supporting case progression, trial readiness and practical problem-solving.

2.27. Senior leaders actively use performance information to maintain operational oversight. The MCS performance framework includes relevant

administrative indicators, such as timeliness of initial PTPH listing, trial listing, courtroom usage, Judge Advocate availability and sentencing timeliness.

2.28. There is scope for performance reporting to be used more systematically in wider military governance forums to bring challenge, explain weaker performance, distinguish between issues within and outside the MCS's control, allocate ownership and track follow-up action.

2.29. Governance and assurance arrangements are active and responsive. Senior leaders maintain close oversight of live court business and have routes to escalate issues beyond the MCS's direct control. However, internal assurance activity, feedback, management checks and learning are not consistently recorded in a way that identifies themes, tracks actions and demonstrates sustained improvement. A clear but proportionate assurance framework would strengthen accountability, learning and resilience, as well as supporting succession planning.

2.30. Taken together, our findings show a service delivered by staff who have real pride in the work they do, that is working well and is valued by those who use it. The MCS's strengths lie in practical delivery, committed staff, strong relationships and visible operational leadership.

2.31. Our recommendations are intended to help the MCS protect and enhance those strengths by modernising administrative systems, improving resilience and strengthening assurance.

Recommendations, good practice and strengths

Recommendations
1 The Military Court Service should work with the three Services, relevant Ministry of Defence personnel system owners and policy leads to review board nomination arrangements and develop a consistent, efficient and transparent tri-service process. [Paragraph 5.63]
2 The Military Court Service should progress without undue delay, and within the financial year 2027-28, to the procurement and implementation of a secure, single, authoritative digital court listing and case progression system, the Military Courts Listing System, to reduce risk to the effective delivery of service, replace reliance on spreadsheets and fragmented workflows, and improve operational efficiency and management information across the organisation. [Paragraph 6.42]
3 By the end of February 2027, the Military Court Service should build on, strengthen and formalise its existing resilience and succession planning arrangements through a proportionate, structured framework. This should draw together existing documented procedures, induction arrangements, operational oversight and flexible working practices, and be supported by training needs analysis, skills gap analysis, cross-training, documented deputising arrangements and regular reviews of critical roles and processes, to reduce reliance on key individuals and ensure continuity of effective service delivery. [Paragraph 7.29]
4 By the end of February 2027, the Military Court Service should develop and implement a proportionate assurance framework that strengthens the way audit activity, feedback and learning are consistently recorded, analysed and used. This should include structured dip sampling of key processes and documented follow-up of improvement actions. [Paragraph 10.38]

2.32. We define good practice as an aspect of performance or activity that demonstrates an innovative or creative approach and that leads to a positive change, improved quality or better performance, or represents value for money. Strengths are aspects where the MCS performs particularly well.

Good practice
The routine legal aid and representation checks undertaken by court staff 21 days before the initial Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing date provide an important safeguard against ineffective hearings. [Paragraph 5.19]

Strengths

The Military Court Service has an effective and proactive approach to post-Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing case progression and trial readiness, using reminders, monitoring and follow-up action to reduce the risk of drift and support effective hearings. [Paragraph 5.37]

The Military Court Service's courtroom and portable court technology is reliable, flexible and well supported, enabling effective participation and supporting court delivery across both permanent and temporary locations. [Paragraph 6.26]

The Military Court Service is supported by committed, knowledgeable and flexible staff, with a strong culture of shared responsibility for maintaining effective service delivery. [Paragraph 7.2]

The Military Court Service provides strong victim and witness facilities across its permanent and portable court estate, with effective arrangements for separation, privacy, special measures and practical support. [Paragraph 8.18]

The Military Court Service has strong stakeholder relationships and effective day-to-day communication with the judiciary, advocates, Probation Service and other court users. These relationships support case progression, trial readiness and practical problem-solving across the Service courts. [Paragraph 9.10]

Senior leaders maintain strong operational grip through close oversight of live court business, regular meetings, practical controls and active use of performance information to identify and respond to emerging risks. [Paragraph 10.23]

3. Background and context

Background

3.1. Service law governs discipline and criminal justice within the United Kingdom Armed Forces. It applies primarily to serving personnel but may also extend to certain civilians subject to Service discipline and, in relevant circumstances, former Service personnel. Service jurisdiction is global, meaning offences under Service law can be dealt with whether they occur in the United Kingdom or overseas.

3.2. The Military Court Service (MCS) is the administrative organisation that supports the practical operation of the Service courts within the Service Justice System (SJS). It is part of the Ministry of Defence and was established in its modern form alongside the implementation of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (AFA 2006).

3.3. Because Service courts may need to sit wherever Service jurisdiction is engaged, the MCS must support court delivery at the two permanent military court centres in the United Kingdom and, where required, in temporary or overseas locations. This chapter sets out the legal and organisational context for that role before examining how the MCS is structured, governed and positioned within the wider SJS.

Service Justice System

3.4. The AFA 2006 established a single, unified system of Service law for the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. The SJS, which operates under the AFA 2006, provides the framework through which discipline and criminal conduct in the armed forces are investigated, prosecuted and tried. It mirrors many aspects of the civilian criminal justice system but adapts them to the needs of the military.

3.5. At the centre of the SJS are several distinct organisations with different responsibilities.

- Commanding officers in the Service chains of command have an initial disciplinary role in relation to personnel under their command and can deal with certain less serious offences.
- More serious or contested matters may be referred onwards to the Service Police, who will investigate alleged offences, gather evidence and support case building.
- The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) decides whether cases referred to it by the Service Police should be prosecuted and, if so, conducts the prosecutions, functioning broadly as the Service equivalent of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
- The Office of the Judge Advocate General (OJAG) provides the independent judiciary for Service courts, with civilian Judge Advocates presiding over cases.

3.6. Serious offences, including serious sexual offences, committed by Service personnel within the United Kingdom can be tried either through the criminal justice system or through the SJS. In these cases, the SPA and the CPS (or its equivalent in Scotland or Northern Ireland) discuss which is the most appropriate jurisdiction for each particular case to be tried. This includes consideration of the victim's views on jurisdiction, whether the victim is a Service person or civilian, whether Service or civilian property is involved, and whether the offending took place within an armed forces establishment.

3.7. When such offending occurs overseas, while the criminal justice system has jurisdiction in certain cases by virtue of statutory provision for extraterritorial jurisdiction, it is often more expedient for cases to be dealt with within the SJS, given its global jurisdiction, deployed (or deployable) Service Police investigators and the inevitable Service context.

Service courts

3.8. The Service court jurisdiction combines judicial independence, operational flexibility and practical support for court users in a way that reflects the distinctive context of military justice.

3.9. The Service courts include the Court Martial, the Court Martial Appeal Court, the Service Civilian Court and the Summary Appeal Court.

3.10. The Court Martial was established by the AFA 2006. It has jurisdiction to try any Service offence, including criminal conduct and disciplinary offences, although it predominantly deals with serious cases. It can sit anywhere in the world. It is similar in its sentencing powers and procedure to the civilian Crown Court.

3.11. It is presided over by a civilian Judge Advocate alongside a panel of commissioned military, warrant and OR7 officers (Staff Sergeants in the British Army, Flight Sergeants in the Royal Air Force and Chief Petty Officers in the Royal Navy).

3.12. The panel, known as the board, performs a role broadly similar to that of a jury, but unlike a jury also has a role in determining sentence alongside the Judge Advocate.

3.13. Service personnel found guilty at Court Martial may appeal to the Court Martial Appeal Court (CMAC), which has equivalent powers to the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division). The CMAC typically sits at the Royal Courts of Justice but can occasionally convene at one of the designated military court centres.

3.14. The Service Civilian Court deals with certain offences committed overseas by civilians who are subject to Service discipline, or dependents of Service personnel resident overseas. It has similar powers to a magistrates' court and consists of a Judge Advocate sitting alone.

3.15. The Summary Appeal Court hears appeals from summary hearings conducted by commanding officers. It is conducted by a Judge Advocate accompanied by two Service members and is modelled on an appeal from the magistrates' court to the Crown Court.

Role of the Military Court Service

3.16. The MCS provides the court administration, facilities and practical arrangements required for the Court Martial, Summary Appeal Court and Service Civilian Court to operate effectively. It is therefore an enabling part of the SJS, responsible for making sure Service courts are properly supported, hearings can take place and court users can participate effectively.

3.17. Most court business is organised through assize periods. These are planned blocks of sitting time, usually two weeks, during which hearings, trials and other court business are listed and managed across the Service court estate. We consider the effectiveness of assize planning and its impact on case progression in chapter 5.

3.18. Within that framework, the MCS administers hearings and trials, lists cases, constitutes Court Martial boards in accordance with statutory requirements, and provides the courtrooms, technology and logistical support needed for proceedings to take place. Its responsibilities also include supporting access to hearings, managing court records and case management arrangements, and facilitating the practical requirements of victims, witnesses, advocates and other court users.

3.19. The role of the MCS is therefore broader than venue management or administrative processing alone. It helps to make sure that Service courts are properly constituted, hearings are arranged and supported, and proceedings are conducted in a way that upholds open justice and procedural fairness.

3.20. At the same time, its functions must be exercised within clearly defined boundaries so that administrative responsibilities do not trespass on judicial independence or operational decision-making by others in the system.

3.21. This combination of practical delivery, statutory responsibility and institutional independence makes the MCS a distinctive part of the military justice landscape.

Structure of the Military Court Service

3.22. The MCS works closely with a range of justice partners, including the OJAG and the SPA. It is independent of the Service chains of command and is staffed by Ministry of Defence civil servants.

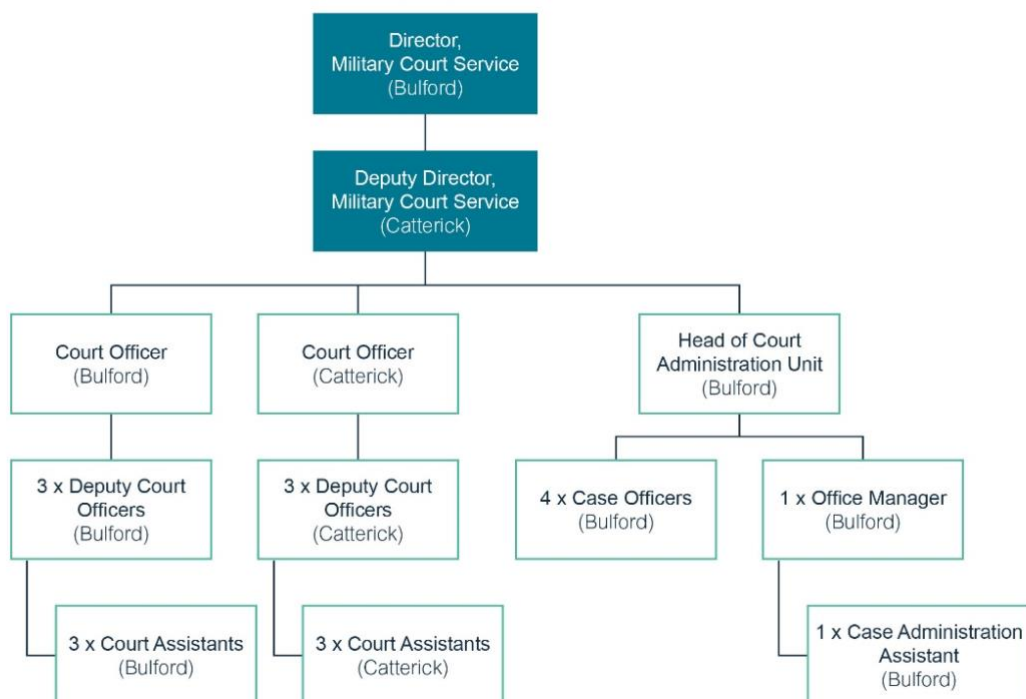
3.23. The MCS operates from two permanent military court centres, located at Bulford in Wiltshire and Catterick in North Yorkshire, each with two courtrooms. It is led by the Director of the MCS, who is appointed by the Defence Council as the Court Administration Officer (CAO).

3.24. The CAO has statutory responsibilities, including giving notice of proceedings and appointing lay members of the Court Martial, which makes the MCS directly accountable for the lawful and proper discharge of key court administration functions. The Director is currently based at Bulford Court Centre.

3.25. The Director is supported by a Deputy Director, currently based at Catterick Court Centre, who contributes to senior operational oversight, organisational management and strategic development.

3.26. Operational delivery is carried out through court-facing roles at both locations and a centralised Court Administration Unit (CAU) located at Bulford Court Centre.

Organisational chart



3.27. At each military court centre there is a court officer, supported by deputy court officers and court assistants. These roles are responsible for preparing and supporting hearings, liaising with court users, operating court technology and progressing court business.

3.28. Deputy court officers and court assistants generally work in pairs: two pairs at each court centre, supporting live court delivery in the two courtrooms for a two-week assize period; and the third pair in the office, preparing for future hearings.

3.29. The organisational chart shows the MCS resource model. At the time of our inspection, the MCS had one deputy court officer vacancy at Catterick.

3.30. The CAU, based at Bulford and led by the head of unit, provides centralised support across both sites. It includes case officers, an office manager and a case administration assistant.

3.31. The CAU handles administrative functions such as opening cases, allocating and first listing of cases to the court centres, selecting and setting up boards, coordinating the preparation of pre-sentence reports, applying for and executing arrest and search warrants, and other tasks⁵.

3.32. At the time of our inspection, the CAU had vacancies in both the office manager role and one of the two case administration assistant posts provided for in its current staffing model.

3.33. Since our inspection, the MCS has successfully recruited an office manager. However, following Ministry of Defence recruitment funding reductions, it is now required to operate with only one case administration assistant.

3.34. The MCS's staffing structure creates a model in which strategic leadership, court operations and administrative support are separated but closely linked. We discuss the impact of the staffing structure in chapter 7.

⁵ These include managing Subject Access Requests, Freedom of Information requests and Parliamentary Questions, recording and publishing official outcomes, processing requests for transcripts and producing official statistics.

Governance

3.35. The MCS is directly accountable for key court administration functions, including listing, court administration and the constitution of Court Martial boards. Its governance arrangements must also preserve the necessary separation between administrative support and judicial decision-making and recognise that some issues affecting court delivery sit outside the MCS's sole control.

3.36. The Director of the MCS is a permanent member of:

- the Service Justice Board (SJB): the principal governance and oversight body for the SJS
- the Service Justice Executive Group (SJEG): a management committee responsible to the SJB, tasked with tracking performance and delivering reforms across the SJS.

3.37. These forums provide routes for accountability, strategic engagement and escalation across the wider SJS, including on matters such as board nomination arrangements, estate constraints, digital investment and wider Service justice reform.

3.38. The MCS also maintains operational governance and engagement arrangements with key partners, including structured liaison with the single Services about board nominations and regular engagement with the judiciary and other court users. These arrangements provide mechanisms for sharing information, identifying practical issues, and escalating matters where resolution requires action beyond day-to-day court administration.

3.39. We consider the effectiveness of these arrangements, including how performance information is scrutinised, how risks are escalated and how assurance activity supports learning and improvement, in chapter 10.

Context

3.40. This inspection focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of the MCS. In that context, we examined how the MCS uses its systems, people, technology, estate, performance information and assurance arrangements to deliver court services for a wide range of users, including defendants, victims and witnesses, legal representatives, board members and the judiciary.

3.41. We also considered the extent to which the MCS is equipped to deliver a service that is both operationally resilient and responsive to the particular demands of the SJS, including the need to operate across different locations in the United Kingdom and overseas.

3.42. Because of the judiciary's independent role in the SJS, judicial decision-making and functions — including the scheduling of hearings beyond the initial administrative listing of a Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing (PTPH) and any judicial decision to change that first listing for PTPH — were not included in this inspection.

3.43. We did speak to Judge Advocates and the Judge Advocate General during our fieldwork, but these interviews focused exclusively on seeking their perspectives on the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided by the MCS.

3.44. We observed a clear boundary between the operation of the MCS, which was in scope, and matters that are the responsibility of the judiciary, which were not.

4. Framework and methodology

The inspection framework

4.1. In line with our methodology, each inspection has an inspection question that allows us to gather evidence in support of our findings.

4.2. The overarching question for this inspection was: How does the Military Court Service (MCS) use its resources and assure itself that it provides an effective and efficient service for all court users?

4.3. As well as the high-level inspection question, we develop underlying inspection criteria to make sure we can test our evidence and findings. In this inspection there were seven inspection criteria:

- How does the MCS use its systems and processes to support effective case progression?
- Are staffing structures, roles and capacity within the MCS suitable to deliver an efficient and effective court service?
- How are digital tools and technology used in court to support an efficient and effective service for court users?
- Are facilities at the court centres providing a safe, secure and supportive environment for victims and witnesses?
- What is the relationship and communication between the MCS and its stakeholders and does this have an impact on its ability to deliver an effective and efficient service?
- How is performance data used and are the key performance indicators in the MCS performance framework effective in ensuring court efficiency and timely case progression?
- How are assurance mechanisms used to monitor and ensure that an effective and efficient service is being delivered to all court users?

4.4. Each criterion has sub-questions supporting the overall aim of the inspection. The full framework for this inspection is set out in annex A.

Methodology

Interviews and focus groups

4.5. We use a variety of methods to gather evidence to enable us to answer the specific inspection question. In this inspection we held interviews and focus groups with MCS staff and relevant stakeholders.

4.6. Inspectors conducted focus groups with court assistants and deputy court officers. Interviews were conducted with court officers, case officers, a case administration assistant within the Court Administration Unit (CAU), the Head of the CAU and the MCS's Director and Deputy Director.

4.7. We also interviewed a range of stakeholders who interact with and work alongside the MCS. Interviews included:

- the Judge Advocate General
- Judge Advocates
- prosecutors from the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA)
- defence practitioners
- tri-service board members
- a probation officer
- a prosecution victim and witness liaison unit manager
- a sexual offence liaison officer
- representatives from Red Scientific who provide victim support.

Document review

4.8. The MCS provided us with documents both before and during the inspection.

4.9. Inspectors were given access to the MCS policy and training guides via Case Center, the MCS case management system, and were able to examine material related to performance data, technology, processes and governance.

Observations

4.10. Inspectors attended the two permanent military court centres at Catterick and Bulford, where they observed Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings, trials and sentences. The lead inspector also visited Aldergrove in Belfast to observe the set-up of a portable court and the start of a week-long trial. During our site visits, we looked at the court facilities and the support available for victims and witnesses.

4.11. Inspectors also observed one of the Director-led daily and weekly meetings. They spent time alongside court staff to observe and understand how they carried out their roles.

4.12. This inspection was led by legal inspector Joanne Milner. She was assisted by legal inspector Rick Khagram. The inspection was supervised by senior legal inspector Colin Darroch, and business service support was provided by Ben Hayter.

5. Systems and processes

5.1. The Military Court Service (MCS) has a wide range of interdependent administrative, operational and support functions that enable the Service courts to operate effectively.

5.2. In cases prosecuted by the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA), the MCS's involvement begins when a case is received from the SPA and continues through:

- listing
- constitution of the Court Martial board
- hearing preparation
- management of directions
- courtroom support
- defence witness arrangements
- post-hearing administration
- where required, the deployment of portable courts.

5.3. The effectiveness and efficiency of the MCS depends not only on the administrative progression of individual cases, but also on the coherence, reliability and consistent application of the wider arrangements that support court delivery.

5.4. These arrangements operate across the court centres, the Court Administration Unit (CAU), court staff and external justice partners. In practice, the MCS relies on formal processes, digital tools and regular operational communication to coordinate activity and maintain momentum across the life of a case.

Key systems and processes

5.5. We found that the MCS has a structured and effective administrative process for receiving, listing and progressing cases, particularly up to and through the Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing (PTPH) stage.

Before the Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing

5.6. The MCS receives new cases digitally from the SPA. These are checked by case officers in the CAU, who look at the case type, defendant details, alleged offence, victim and witness details, location of the alleged offence, legal representation status and any immediate listing requirements.

5.7. They then record the relevant details on the Service Courts Information Management (SCIM) system. SCIM generates a unique reference number for each case, after which the case is allocated to either Bulford or Catterick Court Centre.

5.8. In making that allocation, case officers take account of the workload across the two court centres, rather than relying solely on the geographic location of the alleged offence, defendant, victim and witnesses. This approach reflects the nature of the Service Justice System (SJS) and the need to balance available court capacity, staff resources and assize planning across a small, specialist jurisdiction, rather than assuming that the location of the alleged offence, defendant, victim or witnesses will provide the most efficient listing outcome.

5.9. We were told that geography remains a relevant consideration, but it is not the determining factor where workload considerations indicate that another allocation would better support timely and effective case progression, and help avoid unnecessary delay for the parties involved. Although MCS staff are responsible for the administrative listing of the initial PTPH, the Judge Advocate determines the location of any subsequent trial and/or sentencing hearing.

5.10. The listing of cases is managed within assize periods. These are pre-planned two-weekly blocks of court sitting time within which cases are scheduled and managed. Our court observations and staff walk-throughs showed that assizes are planned at least six weeks ahead, with available PTPH slots identified in advance.

5.11. It is MCS policy that an initial PTPH should be listed within 42 days of receipt of the case from the SPA⁶. To support this, staff record case details on a

⁶ The MCS originally worked to a 28-day target, reflecting the expectation used in the civilian criminal justice system. The target was extended to 42 days to reflect the different operating context of the SJS, including the need to coordinate hearings within

digital case progression sheet, which automatically calculates the 42-day target date. Staff then use assize plans and prosecution calendars to identify a suitable PTPH slot within that period.

5.12. PTPHs are ordinarily listed at the start of the court day, at 9.30am, but staff have the flexibility to create extra hearing slots at 1.30pm where necessary, to avoid delays.

5.13. Listing an initial PTPH within the 42-day target is an important measure of timeliness, but it does not, on its own, show whether the hearing was effective when it took place.

5.14. To support effective first hearings, the MCS introduced a proactive safeguard. Court staff carry out legal aid and representation checks 21 days before the listed PTPH date, supported by automated reminders generated from the case progression sheet. Where representation is not in place, another hearing is usually convened around day 28, often by video link, so that the issue can be addressed before the PTPH.

5.15. Stakeholder evidence supports the value of these arrangements. Prosecutors, defence practitioners and Judge Advocates described the pre-PTPH checks as proactive and effective, helping to prevent avoidable ineffective hearings caused by unresolved legal aid or representation issues.

5.16. Consistent with staff accounts and stakeholder evidence, performance data shows that the MCS maintains strong administrative control over the early stages of case progression.

Period	PTPHs listed within 42 days	PTPHs completed within 42 days
Q1 2025	98.8%	98.8%
Q2 2025	100%	98.8%
Q3 2025	96.1%	95.2%
Q4 2025	88.0%	82.0%
Q1 2026	98.5%	98.5%

5.17. The data shows consistently strong performance overall, although there was some reduction in the fourth quarter of 2025.

assize periods, secure Judge Advocates' availability, accommodate the geographical spread and operational commitments of Service personnel, and allow enough time for the SPA to serve its case evidence and for defence legal aid and representation to be put in place, which is often harder to arrange in the Service context. The revised target is a more realistic administrative measure for the MCS that still supports timely first hearings and avoids ineffective PTPHs.

5.18. We were told this dip was not attributable to a single cause, but reflected a small number of cases being re-listed for different reasons. These included a defendant being deployed overseas, a defendant going absent without leave, and re-listings to allow parties time for discussions about possible pleas. These matters were outside the MCS's control and do not alter our assessment that the MCS has effective administrative controls in place.

5.19. We consider this to be an example of good practice.

Good practice
The routine legal aid and representation checks undertaken by court staff 21 days before the initial Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing date provide an important safeguard against ineffective hearings.

Assize planning and listing effectiveness

5.20. The MCS organises most court business through its assize programme. The programme sets the overall schedule of assize periods for the year across Bulford and Catterick. The detailed working document MCS staff use to manage the business within each period is referred to as the assize plan.

5.21. We found that the assize model supports effective and efficient listing. The use of planned two-week sitting periods gives structure and predictability to court business and enables the MCS to plan ahead in a jurisdiction where participants may be drawn from different Services, locations and operational commitments.

5.22. Staff told us that assizes are planned several weeks in advance, and board planning done around six to eight weeks ahead. This forward planning supports the timely listing of PTPHs, the identification of trial slots and the practical coordination required to make sure hearings can proceed.

5.23. The assize structure also supports single listing of trials. This means the MCS allocates a trial slot to one trial, rather than over-listing multiple trials for the same courtroom and period in the expectation that some will not proceed.

5.24. Single listing means defendants, board members, advocates, victims and witnesses can be more certain that, if the case is ready, it will be heard. It helps reduce avoidable disruption for Service personnel whose attendance at court can take them away from operational duties. The evidence also indicated that, where gaps arise in the assize programme, the MCS was able to use available capacity flexibly by listing other court business, such as sentences and summary appeals.

5.25. There are practical constraints within the assize model. Both court centres stand down for two weeks at Christmas and Easter; and during August, only one court centre sits at a time. These arrangements reduce available sitting capacity during those periods.

5.26. However, the evidence we gathered confirmed that these arrangements reflect the particular operating environment of the SJS, including military leave patterns and the likely availability of board members, defendants, victims and witnesses and other Service personnel. The impact is also mitigated by the lower volume of cases within the SJS compared with the civilian criminal justice system, and by the absence of any backlog of cases in the MCS.

5.27. As a result, even allowing for seasonal reductions in sitting capacity, cases can still generally be tried and concluded within a few months, with an average of 166 days from direction to trial and 34 days from conviction at trial to sentence.

5.28. On the evidence available to us, these sitting arrangements did not appear to undermine efficiency, but they do place greater importance on effective forward planning.

5.29. Overall, we found that the assize programme and planning arrangements supported effective case progression and efficient use of court capacity. The programme provides a disciplined framework for coordinating complex court business and is well suited to the operational demands of the MCS. Its continued effectiveness depends on accurate manual updating, forward planning and active oversight.

5.30. We consider the wider implications of reliance on spreadsheets and the proposed Military Courts Listing System in chapter 6.

After the Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing

5.31. After an effective PTPH, the MCS's focus shifts from securing a timely first hearing to maintaining trial readiness. This includes monitoring compliance with judicial directions, identifying risks to effectiveness and making sure unresolved issues are brought back before a Judge Advocate in time to avoid delays.

5.32. We found that the MCS has a proactive process for monitoring compliance with judicial directions after the PTPH.

5.33. Court staff record key direction dates on the case progression spreadsheet, which generates automated, pre-populated reminder emails to the prosecution and defence three days before each deadline. Where compliance is

still outstanding as a deadline approaches, court staff actively chase the relevant party and, where necessary, refer the matter back to the Judge Advocate. Overdue directions are highlighted on the spreadsheet, providing a clear prompt for follow-up action.

5.34. Court staff are expected to record both the action taken and the outcome. Our walk-throughs showed that this control was operating effectively in practice.

5.35. Stakeholders we interviewed were consistently positive about this aspect of the MCS's case progression work. Prosecutors, defence practitioners and Judge Advocates described the post-PTPH monitoring of directions as proactive, timely and providing a responsive service that they all valued. Several contrasted it favourably with their experience in the civilian criminal justice system, where such follow-up was less consistent or visible.

5.36. These arrangements give the MCS practical oversight of live cases and reduce the risk of drift between hearings. They support listing discipline, improve trial readiness and reduce the likelihood of avoidable delays or ineffective hearings, providing a more reliable service for all court users.

5.37. We consider this proactive approach to post-PTPH case progression to be a strength.

Strength

The Military Court Service has an effective and proactive approach to post-Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing case progression and trial readiness, using reminders, monitoring and follow-up action to reduce the risk of drift and support effective hearings.

5.38. We do, however, recognise that, while this gives the MCS an effective operational grip, it also illustrates the wider resilience on spreadsheet-based manual workarounds that we consider in chapter 6.

5.39. All trial cases are also listed for another case management hearing, usually around four weeks before trial. Conducted by video link and presided over by the trial Judge Advocate, these hearings provide an important final control point before trial.

5.40. The MCS supports this process by:

- maintaining the case progression record
- monitoring compliance with directions
- sending automated and tailored reminders to the parties
- chasing outstanding actions
- checking whether key information, such as witness requirements, special measures, legal representation and estimated trial length remains accurate
- confirming courtroom, board and listing arrangements.

5.41. This gives the trial Judge Advocate an up-to-date administrative picture of compliance, readiness and any unresolved issues before the hearing, so the hearing can focus on matters requiring judicial decisions rather than on establishing basic case information. Where a late guilty plea is indicated, the hearing also allows the Judge Advocate to redirect the matter to plea and sentence rather than leaving an ineffective trial listing in place.

5.42. Although it adds another hearing to the life of a case, we found it to be an effective and proportionate safeguard against ineffective and cracked cases that waste resources and affect military operational deployment. Unlike in the civilian criminal justice system, this hearing is something the MCS can accommodate with limited additional resources, because it is virtual and the SJS manages relatively low caseloads.

5.43. After the hearing, MCS staff update case records, record any new directions, monitor new deadlines, notify relevant parties of changes, amend the assize plan where required and make sure the practical arrangements for the trial are still aligned with the Judge Advocate's directions. These arrangements support judicial case management without intruding on judicial decision-making, reduce the risk of late changes and help make sure cases are ready to proceed effectively on the trial date.

5.44. Performance data supported this assessment, showing that over the period from January 2024 to June 2026, cracked trials accounted for 5.4% of listed trials and ineffective trials for just 2.9%.

Board administration

5.45. Board administration is a legally significant and operationally important part of the MCS's role. Court Martial boards perform a function broadly comparable to a jury, although in some cases they also take part in sentencing with the Judge Advocate. The MCS is responsible for making sure boards are lawfully constituted, properly supported and available so that trials and sentence hearings can proceed as listed.

5.46. This is a complex task. Board composition requirements vary according to the offence, available sentence, defendant's rank and status, and whether civilian lay members may be required. The MCS must also meet gender requirements and make sure those selected are eligible and available. Accuracy matters because errors in board constitution can affect both the legality of proceedings and confidence in the process.

5.47. We found that the MCS administered boards carefully and effectively.

5.48. Nominations are requested from each of the three Services at least six weeks before the relevant assize period. CAU staff then check eligibility, review questionnaires, identify possible conflicts⁷ and compile an eligible pool.

5.49. A Microsoft Copilot prompt produces board and reserve lists for Bulford and Catterick. The prompt applies requirements related to rank, Service, gender and location while avoiding duplicate selection of the same nominee.

5.50. The final board specification is then checked and sent to the relevant court group mailbox: Bulford or Catterick. Court staff contact the selected board members, identify any other conflicts and allocate members to individual courtrooms. Another Copilot prompt is available to support that allocation.

5.51. In the cases we observed, boards attended as expected and there was no evidence that board administration caused hearings to be ineffective. Staff understood the legal and practical importance of the process and checks were built in at different stages.

5.52. Senior leaders have strengthened controls after a recent board constitution issue. This includes an additional court officer check before court

⁷ This 'deconfliction' check requires staff to check each potential board member against the defendant, victim, witnesses, case background, unit or command links, rank and service requirements, prior involvement, availability and any other factor that could affect eligibility, impartiality or lawful board composition. These checks are detailed and case-specific, and require staff to combine information from nomination returns, questionnaires, case papers and service contacts before a final board list can be produced.

notices are published and automated prompts to the Deputy Director and Director before trial or sentence.

5.53. This was a proportionate response to a legally sensitive risk. We consider assurance in more detail in chapter 10.

5.54. Stakeholders also described board selection as timely and effective. This corroborates our observations and supports our assessment that, within the current operating model, the MCS administers boards with enough care to meet operational requirements.

5.55. However, the process is resource-intensive and less efficient or resilient than it could be. It depends on timely and complete nominations from the single Services. Senior MCS leaders described the Royal Navy process as more centralised and system-driven, while Army and Royal Air Force processes are more dispersed and reliant on manual trawls through Service chains of command. This means that CAU case officers sometimes have to chase nominations, manage late or incomplete responses and deal with short-notice changes.

5.56. Where nominations are delayed, the MCS uses pragmatic workarounds, including reserves, extensions, senior-level escalation and adding late nominations to the reserve list.

CAU case officers sometimes have to chase nominations, manage late or incomplete responses and deal with short-notice changes

5.57. These arrangements generally work, and we found no evidence that late nominations had prevented boards being constituted. However, they rely on relationships, goodwill and individual persistence, and place significant and unnecessary pressure on MCS staff to finalise board specifications in time.

5.58. The MCS holds six-monthly tri-service meetings. These provide a useful governance route for discussing recurring issues and practical challenges. Meeting notes showed that late Army nominations had been recognised and that steps were being taken for Headquarters Field Army to oversee the collation of nominations from the 2026 assize programme. This is a positive development and demonstrates that the MCS and the Services are willing to address operational issues collectively.

5.59. Nevertheless, senior MCS leaders recognised that Service nominations both could and should improve. The Royal Navy model for nominations provides a useful comparator because it is more centralised and supported by better

information about eligible personnel and their availability. A more consistent approach across the Army and Royal Air Force could reduce the administrative burden on MCS staff, improve transparency and strengthen resilience — but it would require engagement and resourcing from those Services.

5.60. These factors point to a credible case for reform.

5.61. A more robust model would give the MCS access to a central pool of eligible and available personnel and enable it to select board members through a controlled, auditable and semi-randomised process, comparable in principle to civilian jury selection. This would improve transparency, reduce the administrative burden on the Services and the MCS, and strengthen confidence in the independence and integrity of board selection.

5.62. Such a model would go beyond administrative improvement. It would require policy consideration, including amendment of the Armed Forces Act 2006, and supporting rules to define eligibility, exemptions, data access, selection powers, governance and responsibility for administering the process.

5.63. We therefore make a recommendation to support the development of a more consistent, transparent and resilient tri-service nomination process, while recognising that a fully semi-randomised model would require legislative change.

Recommendation
The Military Court Service should work with the three Services, relevant Ministry of Defence personnel system owners and policy leads to review board nomination arrangements and develop a consistent, efficient and transparent tri-service process.

5.64. There is a related, but separate, policy issue about whether the current eligibility rules create unnecessary constraints on board availability, including the availability of women.

5.65. Any change would require policy and legislative consideration and is beyond the MCS's direct control. Better data on availability, exemptions, late withdrawals and replacement activity would, however, help to inform any future policy discussion.

Other enabling processes

5.66. Alongside these key systems and processes, the MCS relies on several enabling processes that support effective court delivery. These processes are not always as visible as listing or courtroom support, but they are important to efficiency, resilience and the quality of service provided to court users.

Post-hearing administration

5.67. After each hearing, the MCS is responsible for recording the outcome, issuing any required notices or orders, informing relevant parties and updating the case record to reflect future directions or hearing dates.

5.68. We found that staff understood the importance of completing these tasks promptly and accurately. Staff walk-throughs of post-hearing tasks, court observations and case records showed that outcomes and follow-on actions are recorded and communicated effectively. This supports the integrity of the court record and continuity of administration — although the process is dependent on accurate manual updating across several systems.

Warrant and enforcement-related administration

5.69. The MCS has an administrative role in processing court-issued warrants, orders and related documentation. While investigation, prosecution and enforcement sit elsewhere in the SJS, the MCS must make sure that relevant documents are issued promptly, recorded accurately and communicated to the appropriate parties.

5.70. Staff recognised that warrant-related administration can have significant legal implications. The MCS operates an out-of-hours rota covering senior leaders, court staff and relevant CAU staff, and we were told about urgent arrest and search warrant applications being handled outside ordinary working hours.

5.71. These arrangements support effectiveness by showing an awareness of stakeholder demands and ensuring the timely processing of urgent judicial decisions.

Pre-sentence report administration

5.72. Where a pre-sentence report is required, the MCS coordinates the request, makes relevant information available to the Probation Service and reflects report timescales in listing decisions.

5.73. Effective administration of this process supports realistic sentence listing and helps reduce avoidable adjournments.

5.74. Staff and stakeholder evidence indicated that the MCS manages this process effectively. We heard examples of prompt requests after conviction or guilty plea, liaison with the Probation Service about report timescales, and sentence listings being set or adjusted to reflect when reports were expected to be available.

Court records, open justice and access

5.75. Court records and audio management support the integrity of proceedings. Our observations showed that digital audio recording and court record arrangements were reliable. Staff are knowledgeable and confident in maintaining records and supporting access arrangements.

5.76. Open justice and public access are important to the legitimacy and transparency of the SJS courts. The MCS must support access to proceedings while managing the security, safeguarding and operational constraints that can arise on military establishments or in portable court settings.

5.77. We found that the MCS has proportionate arrangements for supporting public and media access.

5.78. Applications under section 85A of the Courts Act 2003⁸ provide a formal mechanism for considering access to proceedings, and staff have desk instructions and follow-up email guidance on the process. Our evidence showed the MCS uses this process, where required, to support public and media access. We also saw evidence that listing information is published, and we observed court lists displayed on foyer noticeboards at both permanent court centres.

⁸ Section 85A, *Courts Act 2003*; UK Government; November 2003.
legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/39/section/85A

6. Technology and digital enablement

6.1. Technology and digital tools are an important part of how the Military Court Service (MCS) supports court delivery across a geographically dispersed jurisdiction. The Director of the MCS has led a programme of technological improvement, particularly in the fixed courtrooms at Bulford and Catterick, but also in the portable courtroom environment.

6.2. In this chapter, we consider two distinct aspects of digital provision:

- courtroom and portable court technology
- the administrative systems used to manage listing, case progression and related court business.

6.3. This distinction is important because, during our inspection, we found different levels of maturity in these areas.

6.4. Courtroom and portable court technology is well developed, high quality, and supports effective participation. By contrast, the administrative digital arrangements behind court delivery are less effective because they are not integrated, requiring staff to rely on a combination of legacy systems, spreadsheets, email and manual checks.

Technology in court

6.5. The clearest evidence of effective digital provision concerns courtroom and portable court technology. Across Bulford, Catterick and the portable court setting, the MCS uses a combination of:

- digital audio recording
- video and live link facilities (which allow witnesses or other participants to take part in proceedings from a separate room or remote location, instead of being present in the courtroom)
- evidential presentation equipment
- multiple courtroom display screens
- digital case material through Case Center, the MCS's digital case management system
- laptops for board members and defendants.

6.6. These are not separate enhancements operating in isolation. Together, they form an integrated courtroom environment that allows hearings to be recorded accurately, evidence to be displayed and followed clearly, participants to join remotely where appropriate, and court users to access the material they need during proceedings.

Video and live link technology also support effective participation and efficient case progression

6.7. Digital audio recording is central to the integrity of the court record. It provides an accurate record of proceedings, allows staff and court users to check what was said where necessary, and supports post-hearing administration.

6.8. The evidence showed that this works reliably in practice.

6.9. At Bulford, we observed a minor issue with the display clock on the recording equipment. Court staff quickly established that the recording itself was unaffected, proceedings began after only a short delay, and the contractor resolved the issue during the lunch adjournment. That incident illustrated both the reliability of the system and the confidence of staff in identifying, escalating and resolving technical problems without materially disrupting court business.

6.10. Video and live link technology also support effective participation and efficient case progression. Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings, other case management hearings and other shorter hearings are conducted remotely where appropriate, reducing unnecessary travel and enabling advocates, defendants and other participants to engage without avoidable disruption.

6.11. This is a practical example of the approach described in the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales's new crime guidance on remote participation in the civilian criminal courts⁹, which is due to be implemented by 1 October 2026. That guidance establishes a clearer and more consistent framework for the use of live links in civilian criminal proceedings, with the aim of supporting efficient case management, reducing delays and improving access to justice.

6.12. Court observations revealed good sound and visual quality, with images and audio fed through courtroom screens so that those in court could follow the hearing. Stakeholders and court staff told us that remote access usually works smoothly and, where, technical issues occur they are generally caused by the

⁹ *New statutory guidance from the Lady Chief Justice on live links in criminal courts*; Courts and Tribunals Judiciary; July 2026.
[judiciary.uk/new-statutory-guidance-from-the-lady-chief-justice-on-live-links-in-criminal-courts/](https://www.judiciary.uk/new-statutory-guidance-from-the-lady-chief-justice-on-live-links-in-criminal-courts/)

equipment or connection of the remote participant rather than by MCS systems. This is important because reliable remote participation helps the MCS maintain momentum between hearings and supports the proactive case progression described in chapter 5.

6.13. Evidential presentation technology is another strong feature. The courtrooms are equipped so that documents, images and other digital material can be presented and viewed clearly by the Judge Advocate, advocates, board members, victims, witnesses and defendants.

6.14. Advocates spoke positively about the practical ease with which evidence could be presented and reviewed. Judge Advocates described the technology as strong, and in some instances “gold standard”, by comparison with their experience of the civilian criminal justice system.

6.15. Case Center is also viewed positively because it gives court users digital access to case material and supports a more efficient way of working than relying solely on hard-copy bundles. It also means material can be added to digital bundles in real time, without the need to adjourn proceedings or re-issue paper bundles. We saw the benefit of this during a sentence hearing, when a report relevant to sentence was released by the Judge Advocate for the board to consider after hearing submissions from the defence.

Judge Advocates described the technology as strong, and in some instances “gold standard”

6.16. Providing board members and defendants with laptops is a particularly practical example of how technology supports effective participation. Board members can access digital papers, follow evidence as it is presented and refer back to material during proceedings, which is especially valuable in

longer or document-heavy cases. Defendants are also better able to follow the evidence, review material with their representatives and understand the basis of the case as it develops in court.

6.17. Our observations supported this assessment. We saw MCS staff give board members clear, practical instructions on the use of laptops and access to digital material before proceedings began. Staff dealt promptly and effectively with queries, which helped minimise disruption and supported board members’ participation from the outset of the hearing.

6.18. The Court Martial must be able to sit away from the permanent court centres, including overseas, while still maintaining the practical safeguards and functionality of a proper courtroom. Documentary material, including the

business continuity plans available through Case Center and evidence from staff, showed that the MCS has built contingency measures into its portable connectivity arrangements to reduce the risk of disruption and maintain continuity of proceedings.

Comparisons with the digital offer in the civilian courts were a consistent theme in the evidence

6.19. The portable court model includes Starlink¹⁰, a dedicated, secure, satellite based internet service, supported by guidance on how it should be set up and used. This gives the MCS another means of securing internet connectivity where local provision may be unavailable, unreliable or operationally unsuitable, and demonstrates effective

investment in making courtroom technology portable, resilient and reliable.

6.20. We found portable court arrangements to be digitally mature and operationally credible.

6.21. As part of the inspection, we travelled to Aldergrove in Belfast to observe MCS staff establishing a portable court in a disused military facility ahead of the start of a week-long trial. Our observations provided direct evidence that the MCS could transport equipment securely, deploy laptops for participants, establish audiovisual and recording arrangements, and put in place the connectivity needed for the court to operate. Staff did checks before the trial began, and the process was organised, practical and well understood.

6.22. The MCS's digital technology, and its people's confidence and ability to use and deploy it effectively and seamlessly, is a significant strength. It supports efficient and effective hearings at Catterick and Bulford and enables remote proceedings to take place elsewhere without reducing the quality or reliability of the court environment.

6.23. Comparisons with the digital offer in the civilian courts were a consistent theme in the evidence. Stakeholders did not simply describe the MCS as having modern equipment; they contrasted its reliability, accessibility and responsiveness with their experience of civilian criminal courts, where ageing estate, variable digital infrastructure, higher volumes and larger backlogs can make it harder to achieve equivalent levels of individual support and technical reliability.

6.24. The MCS benefits from operating at a smaller scale and in a more controlled environment; but the evidence also showed active investment, competent staff and a clear operational focus on making sure technology

¹⁰ Starlink will become Starshield in the coming months.

supports the hearing rather than causing delays. This means that digital tools in the Service courts were not merely available, but embedded into the way hearings were prepared, managed and supported.

6.25. Taken together, the evidence shows that the MCS's courtroom and portable court technology:

- supports the integrity of the court record
- improves access to evidence and case material
- enables remote participation
- strengthens the experience of board members, defendants, victims and witnesses
- allows courts to operate effectively in temporary locations.

6.26. We therefore consider the MCS's courtroom and portable court technology to be, not only a strength, but an exemplar that the civilian justice system should aspire to.

Strength

The Military Court Service's courtroom and portable court technology is reliable, flexible and well supported, enabling effective participation and supporting court delivery across both permanent and temporary locations.

Administrative digital arrangements

6.27. The main digital weakness identified by our inspection was not in the technology used in court, but in the administrative systems that sit behind court delivery.

6.28. These systems support how the MCS receives cases, lists hearings, monitors directions, plans assizes, manages board administration and records key case progression information. They therefore have a direct bearing on the efficiency and consistency of day-to-day court administration.

6.29. At present, the MCS does not operate a single, authoritative digital system for court administration. Staff rely on a combination of:

- the Service Courts Information Management (SCIM) system, to record case information and generate unique reference numbers
- Case Center, to access case papers and supporting documentation
- bespoke Excel-based case progression spreadsheets, to record key dates and generate reminders
- assize plans, to manage listing and court capacity
- Microsoft Outlook and shared mailboxes, to communicate with parties
- manual checking routines, to reconcile information across the various sources.

6.30. The practical effect is that staff must keep several separate records accurate and aligned. A change to a listing, direction date, board requirement or hearing outcome may need to be reflected in more than one place and communicated through separate channels.

6.31. Staff have adapted effectively to this environment. The evidence showed that the current arrangements support day-to-day delivery, made possible by the small size of the organisation.

6.32. However, the tools do not operate as an integrated end-to-end system. This creates duplication, requires repeated data entry and reconciliation, and relies heavily on staff knowledge, discipline and manual coordination.

6.33. This is most evident in the bespoke Excel programme developed and maintained annually by the Director of the MCS. This programme plays a central role in case progression monitoring, assize planning and performance oversight.

6.34. Although it allows the MCS to maintain a strong operational grip, it is also a clear resilience risk, because it depends heavily on the Director's personal knowledge, skills and experience. We were told that no other member of staff currently has the expertise needed to maintain or recreate the programme annually if the Director were to leave. As the Director himself acknowledged, this represents the organisation's "biggest single point of failure".

6.35. We reviewed a business case prepared by the Director of the MCS seeking approval to begin procurement for a Military Courts Listing System (MCLS). This proposed system is intended to end the MCS's reliance on SCIM, spreadsheets and manual workarounds and introduce a secure, single, authoritative platform for court listing, scheduling, case progression and management information.

6.36. If implemented effectively, such a system could address the main administrative weaknesses we identified by providing a single, current view of live court business, reducing duplicate input, and making case status, outstanding actions, listing changes and immediate operational risks more visible to staff and leaders.

6.37. The MCLS could provide automated workflows for case progression, clearer prompts for direction compliance, more reliable recording of listing decisions and changes, and improved reporting, to support day-to-day operational management. If linked to board administration, or supported by a dedicated portal, it could also improve visibility of nomination status, reduce chasing and support more consistent administration of the board process, as discussed in chapter 5.

6.38. The opportunity is therefore not only to replace spreadsheets, but to improve how administrative information is captured, updated and shared within the MCS.

6.39. The benefits will depend on implementation. The MCS will need to make sure any system is secure, reliable, proportionate to the scale of the jurisdiction and capable of supporting both permanent and portable court arrangements. It will also need to document operational requirements clearly, involve staff who use the current processes, and make sure that system ownership, training and support arrangements are clear.

6.40. Subject to those safeguards, the proposed MCLS offers a credible route to improving administrative efficiency, operational visibility and the consistency of court administration.

Overall finding

6.41. While courtroom and portable court technology is a strong feature of the MCS's operating model, the administrative digital arrangements behind court delivery are less developed. Listing, case progression and related court administration remain dependent on fragmented systems, spreadsheets and manual workarounds. This creates avoidable duplication, makes information harder to maintain consistently across different sources and limits the extent to which staff and leaders can rely on a single current view of live court business.

6.42. The proposed MCLS is an important opportunity to integrate key administrative functions, reduce duplication and improve the consistency, visibility and efficiency of court administration. We make a recommendation to support more integrated digital administration.

Recommendation
The Military Court Service should progress without undue delay, and within the financial year 2027-28, to the procurement and implementation of a secure, single, authoritative digital court listing and case progression system, the Military Courts Listing System, to reduce risk to the effective delivery of service, replace reliance on spreadsheets and fragmented workflows, and improve operational efficiency and management information across the organisation.

7. Staffing structures, resilience and succession planning

7.1. The Military Court Service (MCS) is a small, specialist organisation that relies on a committed and experienced workforce to deliver an effective service across its court centres and central administrative functions. This chapter considers whether the MCS has the staffing structure, capacity, skills, cross-cover and succession arrangements needed to sustain that delivery.

7.2. Staff we spoke to were, without exception, dedicated to the work of the MCS and committed to delivering a high standard of service for court users. The evidence, including discussions with senior leaders, showed an organisation that understands its purpose and operational pressures, and takes a pragmatic approach to maintaining delivery despite staffing constraints, turnover and wider resourcing limitations. We identify staff commitment as a strength.

Strength

The Military Court Service is supported by committed, knowledgeable and flexible staff, with a strong culture of shared responsibility for maintaining effective service delivery.

7.3. The staffing model operates flexibly. Court teams, the Court Administration Unit (CAU) and senior leaders work closely together to manage changing operational demands. This flexibility has helped the MCS sustain performance during periods of absence, recruitment delays and fluctuating workload.

7.4. In a small, specialist service, flexibility needs to be supported by clear documentation, structured resilience planning and effective succession arrangements.

Staffing structure, capacity and resource constraints

7.5. The MCS operates with a lean staffing structure. Its court centres must be staffed sufficiently to support hearings, manage boards, assist witnesses, operate technology and maintain the practical running of the court.

7.6. Senior leaders are clear that court-facing operations must remain the priority, as hearings cannot operate effectively without sufficient and suitably trained court staff in place.

7.7. At the same time, the CAU performs a critical role throughout the life of a case. The quality and timeliness of administrative work at the outset underpins effective case progression and initial Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing listing. The CAU is also central to maintaining momentum as cases develop. It is

responsible for board selection arrangements and pre-sentence report administration, as well as several other key MCS administrative responsibilities.

7.8. Our evidence showed that the CAU has previously operated under sustained pressure, with delivery relying at times on goodwill, overtime and the efforts of individual staff. Senior leaders acknowledged that the unit has not historically been at full complement, placing more pressure on managers and staff.

7.9. We were told that the position had improved recently, following recruitment and a reassignment of roles within the CAU. Senior leaders reported increased productivity: some tasks previously concentrated on one person have been redistributed after successful recruitment to the previously vacant office manager role. However, one CAU post has been lost as part of wider Ministry of Defence reductions, and the MCS remains subject to recruitment controls and headcount limits.

7.10. Current arrangements do appear to support effective delivery, and we found no evidence that staffing constraints had caused ineffective hearings, but resilience remains sensitive to changes in workload, absence and future demand.

Flexibility and cross-skilling

7.11. We found evidence of constructive cross-working between court staff and the CAU.

7.12. We were provided with examples of court staff assisting with administrative work during quieter periods, and of senior leaders monitoring workload across teams. The Director described the 11am Monday weekly meetings as an important oversight mechanism, giving senior leaders a clear view of current operational pressures across the organisation. We heard, and observed, that these meetings enable leaders to check where workload is building up, consider immediate pressure points, and assess whether work could be redistributed between teams or individuals. This reflects a pragmatic approach to managing capacity in a small organisation, where staff need to remain flexible and responsive to changing demands.

7.13. Staff spoke positively about the collaborative culture within the MCS. They described a strong sense of shared responsibility for maintaining service delivery and supporting court users.

7.14. However, flexibility is not a substitute for structured workforce planning. Cross-skilling is most effective when staff understand their own roles, the

circumstances in which they may support another function and the limits of what they are expected to do. While the MCS's collaborative culture is a strength, it must be supported by clear expectations, consistent supervision and a shared understanding of priorities when resources are stretched.

7.15. In a small service where staff work flexibly across functions and in different locations, consistent supervision, clear induction and documented procedures are important to maintaining role clarity, supporting staff development and reducing the risk of practice diverging between teams or court centres. This is particularly important because the MCS handles a range of legally significant and operationally sensitive processes, including case progression, board administration, court notices, warrants, portable court arrangements and court support.

7.16. Senior leaders gave an example of management checks identifying practice that had moved away from agreed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which the Deputy Director was addressing through feedback and clarification. This shows active management oversight and a clear expectation that staff should follow SOPs, while exercising appropriate judgement within their roles.

7.17. Clear written guidance also helps new staff understand what is expected, supports consistency and reduces the risk that key tasks depend on individual experience or preference.

7.18. We were told that staff are encouraged to consult relevant SOPs, make decisions within their role and escalate only when necessary. This helps prevent over-reliance on senior leaders, supports staff development and strengthens resilience.

7.19. The wider assurance implications of management checks, dip sampling and learning from errors are considered in chapter 10.

Resilience, succession planning and workforce development

7.20. The MCS has taken positive steps to strengthen organisational resilience and reduce reliance on individual knowledge.

7.21. Senior leaders described the development of comprehensive guides, SOPs, desk instructions and a comprehensive three-week induction programme. We saw evidence of these materials in the documents provided to us. Together, they provide an important foundation for continuity in a small, specialist

organisation where staff movement, absence or promotion can quickly affect capacity and the retention of organisational knowledge.

7.22. We also heard that senior leaders are consciously developing resilience at the leadership level. The Director described exposing the Deputy Director to a wider range of responsibilities, meetings and decision-making to share knowledge and strengthen continuity. Staff were also positive about opportunities to gain experience, take on temporary responsibilities at a higher grade and develop their understanding of different roles within the MCS.

7.23. These arrangements support individual development, help retain organisational knowledge and provide a practical route to prepare staff for future promotion opportunities.

7.24. However, risks remain. As set out in chapter 6, the current spreadsheet-based listing and case progression arrangements create a resilience risk because they depend heavily on individual knowledge. From a workforce perspective, this reinforces the need for succession planning, critical role cover and transfer of expertise. The current arrangements work because experienced staff manage them carefully, but they are less robust as a long-term model for continuity and organisational resilience.

7.25. There is, therefore, scope to bring existing activity together into a more structured resilience and succession planning framework. This does not need to be disproportionate or bureaucratic. It could include:

- a simple skills matrix
- a training needs analysis
- a skills gap analysis
- documented deputising arrangements for critical roles
- regular reviews of SOPs and induction material
- periodic reviews of areas where the organisation is dependent on one person, one role or one system.

7.26. Such an approach would give senior leaders clearer evidence that the MCS understands its resilience risks and is actively managing them.

Overall finding

7.27. The MCS has maintained effective performance despite operating with a small workforce and external constraints on recruitment and headcount. Its delivery is underpinned by dedicated and knowledgeable staff, visible leadership and a collaborative culture in which staff work flexibly to support colleagues and court users. Senior leaders understand the importance of resilience and have taken practical steps to document processes, develop staff and share knowledge.

7.28. The principal risk is sustainability rather than current performance. The MCS remains dependent on experienced individuals, informal knowledge and manual systems that could become vulnerable if key staff leave, demand increases or workload shifts. A more structured approach to resilience, succession planning and critical role coverage would help preserve what works well, reduce single points of failure and embed current knowledge and practice for the future.

7.29. We have therefore framed our recommendation as a proportionate improvement for a high-performing organisation.

Recommendation
By the end of February 2027, the Military Court Service should build on, strengthen and formalise its existing resilience and succession planning arrangements through a proportionate, structured framework. This should draw together existing documented procedures, induction arrangements, operational oversight and flexible working practices, and be supported by training needs analysis, skills gap analysis, cross-training, documented deputising arrangements and regular reviews of critical roles and processes, to reduce reliance on key individuals and ensure continuity of effective service delivery.

8. Court estate and facilities

8.1. The court estate and facilities available to court users are important parts of whether the Military Court Service (MCS) can provide a safe, secure and effective service.

8.2. Our observations at Bulford and Catterick Court Centres, together with the views of staff and stakeholders and the documentary material we reviewed, show a generally positive picture. The permanent court centres are purpose-designed to support the operation of Service courts and, in important respects, they provide a better environment than is often available in the civilian criminal justice system.

8.3. We found well-maintained courtrooms, and effective arrangements for keeping court users separate and enabling them to move safely around the court buildings. The evidence also showed that many of the safeguards available in the permanent estate could be reproduced through portable courts when proceedings need to take place elsewhere.

8.4. However, the estate picture is not uniformly strong. While support for victims and witnesses is generally good, the broader suitability of parts of the estate, particularly at Bulford, is more mixed. Constraints in space, layout and environmental comfort reduce the quality of the experience for some users, especially in larger or more complex hearings.

Safety, suitability and user support

Victim and witness facilities

8.5. The clearest strength in this area is the support available to victims and witnesses.

8.6. Our observations showed that both Bulford and Catterick are well configured to keep victims, witnesses and defendants separate, with separate entrances and exits, distinct prosecution and defence areas, and dedicated accommodation for victims and witnesses.

8.7. Stakeholders who work most closely with vulnerable court users were positive about these arrangements.

8.8. A sexual offence liaison officer described the infrastructure at both centres as excellent for vulnerable victims, highlighting separate access routes, access to outside space in a safe and private way, comfortable suites and provision of refreshments. The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) Victim and Witness Liaison Unit similarly described victim attendance as carefully managed to avoid contact with defendants and cited successful use of reasonable

adjustments such as hearing loops where required. Pre-hearing familiarisation visits can also be arranged around court sitting times, which MCS staff are helpful in coordinating. Red Scientific, a consultancy supporting the Ministry of Defence and providing witness support at court, also reported positive victim and witness feedback regarding court estate and facilities.

8.9. Taken together, this evidence points to a service that is attentive to the practical needs of victims and witnesses and able to provide an estate and environment that is secure, private and supportive.

8.10. We also found good evidence of effective and available facilities for special measures provision, including under section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999¹¹. Staff described these arrangements as established and effective, although their use to date has been limited.

8.11. We saw dedicated vulnerable witness rooms and supporting equipment at both centres. The rooms are comfortable and well-maintained, and the Director and Deputy Director emphasised the importance of keeping them suitable for vulnerable witnesses.

8.12. They also explained that the MCS has procured dedicated Vodafone connectivity for section 28 cases — with flexible deployment and direct fault reporting and maintenance support provided by Vodafone — so that the system does not depend on MODNet, the Ministry of Defence's official IT system. MODNet's strict security policies can make sharing evidence and running modern digital courtrooms very difficult. The Deputy Director gave a concrete example of this arrangement's flexibility, describing how their section 28 recording equipment had been deployed to a witness room at a Crown Court in the Midlands at the request of a vulnerable witness.

8.13. Court staff, advocates and Judges were consistent in describing all special measure arrangements, such as live link, screens and section 28 measures, as reliable and effective in the cases where they had experience of them being used.

¹¹ Section 28, *Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999*; UK Government; July 1999. This allows vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to have their cross-examination and re-examination pre-recorded on video before a trial begins, saving them from the stress of testifying live in court.
legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/23/section/28

8.14. Our observations at Aldergrove showed that the MCS can establish a temporary court environment while retaining key safeguards, including:

- separate access routes
- secure witness accommodation
- separate stairwells
- an accessible lift
- refreshments and suitable working space for court users.

8.15. Although some of the screens at Aldergrove appeared dated, they were functional and had been checked for suitability by the Deputy Director before the trial, demonstrating the attention and care given to victims' needs.

8.16. This all demonstrates that the MCS can efficiently translate its fixed-court operating model into portable court arrangements, including those to facilitate victims and witnesses giving their best evidence, while maintaining the infrastructure and practical support needed for proceedings to be effective.

8.17. Documentary material relating to portable locations included memoranda of understanding for sites in Germany, Cyprus and Aldergrove, which set out practical and environmental requirements in advance: an important control in maintaining standards outside the permanent estate. On the evidence available to us, portable arrangements did not appear to compromise or materially weaken victim and witness support in any significant way.

8.18. We consider the MCS's provision for victims and witnesses across its permanent and portable estate to be a strength.

Strength

The Military Court Service provides strong victim and witness facilities across its permanent and portable court estate, with effective arrangements for separation, privacy, special measures and practical support.

Broader estate suitability and environmental constraints

8.19. While the court estate provides strong support for victims and witnesses, the evidence showed some differences in the amount and configuration of supporting space available across the two permanent court centres.

8.20. This was most evident at Bulford, where several interviewees commented that the space available to advocates and other court users is more limited, following the decision to locate the Court Administration Unit (CAU) in the court building. That decision was taken at senior management level with an understanding that, while it would have some impact on the available space, it also supports closer integration between the CAU, court staff and senior leaders, contributing to effective day-to-day oversight of listing, case progression and board administration.

8.21. Our observations were consistent with what court users who regularly attend both court centres told us. Catterick has separate prosecution and defence wings serving each courtroom, whereas Bulford has only one prosecution wing and one defence wing serving both courtrooms. Some court users described this as less convenient, particularly in longer trials or multi-handed proceedings, and court staff described Bulford's Court 2 as more constrained in six-member board cases.

8.22. While we recognise the difference in available space at the two court centres, we found no evidence that it materially impeded the effective functioning of the court or the efficient conduct of proceedings. In our view, the facilities at Bulford are still substantially better than those commonly available in civilian criminal courts, and the decision to locate the CAU there was a reasonable one in the circumstances.

8.23. Staff also raised concerns about the physical working environment. Bulford court and CAU staff described a lack of air conditioning in some office areas and said that conditions become uncomfortably hot in warmer weather, affecting comfort and concentration.

8.24. Against that, there was some evidence of incremental improvements, including the reinstatement of a tannoy system at Bulford to improve communication with court users and hearing flow, and investment in air conditioning for board member rooms.

Overall finding

8.25. Overall, the MCS court estate supports the effective and efficient delivery of Service court proceedings, and reflects the MCS's continued commitment to providing a safe, professional and well-supported court environment. Victim and witness provision is a clear strength, and portable court arrangements are well developed and operationally credible.

8.26. The main limitations arise at Bulford, where constraints in space, layout and environmental comfort affect the experience of some court users. The decision to locate the CAU there was made in the knowledge that this would create some disparity with Catterick, but we found no evidence this materially affected the effective or efficient conduct of proceedings.

8.27. Senior leaders will want to continue to record, assess and escalate estate risks through appropriate governance routes.

9. Stakeholder relationships

9.1. Stakeholder relationships are central to the Military Court Service's (MCS's) ability to deliver an effective and efficient service. Court delivery depends on timely communication and practical coordination with the judiciary, advocates, Probation Service, board members, victim and witness support services, the single services and other Service Justice System (SJS) partners.

9.2. We have considered how well the MCS communicates with stakeholders, responds to court users' needs, resolves operational issues and uses feedback to support improvement.

Stakeholder relationships and communication

9.3. Stakeholders consistently described MCS staff as professional, responsive and helpful. They regard communication as timely, clear and respectful. This matters in practice because we saw how effective communication supports case progression, trial readiness and the practical delivery of court business.

9.4. Defence practitioners were particularly positive about the support they receive from MCS staff. They described them as accessible, knowledgeable and proactive. They also told us that reminders about directions and deadlines are clear and that MCS systems help make sure key dates are not missed.

9.5. One defence practitioner contrasted the culture within the MCS favourably with their experience in the civilian criminal courts, describing an environment in which defence representatives are treated with dignity and respect.

9.6. We found that communication with the Probation Service is also effective.

9.7. Probation staff told us that MCS staff provide key documents promptly and comprehensively, including the basis of plea, Police National Computer record and military conduct material where required. Probation staff attend MCS daily operational meetings, which supports early identification of cases where pre-sentence reports may be needed, helps avoid unnecessary delays and allows practical issues to be resolved quickly. This is a good example of the MCS using routine operational engagement to support efficient case progression.

9.8. The MCS also maintains regular engagement with the judiciary. At team days and conferences, the Director and Deputy Director update Judge Advocates on matters such as performance, staffing, recruitment and technology

developments. This provides a structured route for sharing information with the judiciary while maintaining the necessary distinction between administrative support and judicial decision-making.

9.9. We observed regular dialogue between Judge Advocates and MCS staff during our court sitting days. This helps make Judge Advocates aware of operational developments that may affect the conduct and support of court business.

9.10. We consider the MCS's stakeholder relationships and day-to-day communication to be a clear strength.

Strength

The Military Court Service has strong stakeholder relationships and effective day-to-day communication with the judiciary, advocates, Probation Service and other court users. These relationships support case progression, trial readiness and practical problem-solving across the Service courts.

Understanding and responding to court users' needs

9.11. We found that the MCS is attentive to the needs of different court users.

9.12. This was particularly apparent in its flexible approach to listing short hearings by video link. Defence practitioners described the ability to conduct mentions and short hearings remotely, including during lunchtime adjournments, as helpful, especially where advocates are required to manage commitments in other courts. This flexibility supports efficiency by reducing unnecessary travel and helping parties participate without avoidable disruption.

9.13. We also saw evidence that the MCS has taken practical steps to support defence practitioners in more specialist cases. The Director has acted as a vetting sponsor for defence practitioners who require security clearance in sensitive cases. This shows an awareness of a potential barrier to effective representation and a willingness to take practical steps to make sure defendants can be represented appropriately.

9.14. The MCS's portable court arrangements depend heavily on stakeholder coordination.

9.15. Our observation at Aldergrove showed that the MCS works effectively with stakeholders to establish temporary court environments that preserve important safeguards for witnesses, advocates and court users. This requires planning, communication and practical problem-solving, and demonstrates the

importance of working with stakeholders in a jurisdiction that must be capable of operating away from its permanent court centres.

Operational engagement and issue resolution

9.16. We found that the MCS has several routes for engaging with stakeholders and resolving operational issues. Daily operational and weekly strategic meetings give senior MCS leaders and relevant participants a regular opportunity to review live court business, identify practical risks and take prompt action. This helps make sure issues are dealt with before they affect hearings.

9.17. Service Court User Group (SCUG) and local Court User Group (CUG) arrangements provide more operational routes for professional users to raise practical issues. The Judge Advocate General chairs the twice-yearly SCUG meetings, while the MCS Deputy Director chairs the twice-yearly CUG meetings. They are usually attended by Judge Advocates, MCS staff, prosecution and defence representatives and a representative from the Armed Forces Criminal Legal Aid Authority.

9.18. The MCS holds six-monthly tri-service meetings with representatives from the single Services to discuss board nominations and related arrangements. These meetings are a useful forum for discussing recurring practical issues, challenges specific to each of the armed forces and possible improvements.

9.19. We consider board administration in detail in chapter 5, but these meetings demonstrate that the MCS has a regular mechanism for engaging with those parts of the SJS on which effective court delivery depends.

9.20. In practice, many operational issues are resolved through direct communication and accessible MCS leadership. That works well in a small, responsive service, but it also means that engagement depends to some extent on individual relationships and local knowledge.

9.21. The Director of the MCS also participates in wider SJS forums, including the Service Justice Board and Service Justice Executive Group. These provide a route for raising cross-system issues that can affect court delivery but sit outside the MCS's sole control, such as board nominations, estate constraints, digital investment and wider Service justice reform.

9.22. We found no evidence of entrenched or unresolved tensions between the MCS and its stakeholders. Where issues had arisen in the past — around boundaries between judicial and administrative roles or broader reform matters,

for example — we were told they had been managed through discussion between the Director of the MCS and the Judge Advocate General rather than being allowed to become embedded. This reflects the maturity of relationships across the system.

Feedback and learning

9.23. The limitation we identified around stakeholder relationships was not the quality or frequency of communication, but the absence of a systematic approach to gathering and using feedback from all court user groups.

9.24. The most developed formal feedback mechanism relates to board members. The MCS has collected feedback from about 1,550 board members over several years, which provides useful information about satisfaction levels and recurring practical issues such as lunches, accommodation and board room comfort.

9.25. There is evidence that this feedback has informed improvements, including the installation of air conditioning in board member rooms at Bulford. This is positive, given the important role board members play in the Court Martial and the need to support their effective participation.

9.26. Feedback arrangements for other court users and stakeholders are less formalised. There is no equivalent systematic process for gathering feedback from victims, witnesses, defendants, advocates, the Probation Service or other professional users.

9.27. Stakeholders told us that they feel able to raise issues directly with senior leaders, and staff described receiving informal comments directly from court users. These informal routes are valuable, but they do not provide the same level of assurance, consistency or organisational learning as a structured feedback process.

9.28. We found no evidence that the absence of a more systematic feedback mechanism has caused significant problems in current service delivery. This is consistent with the wider positive evidence about stakeholder relationships.

9.29. Nevertheless, we observe that a more structured feedback framework would give the MCS stronger evidence about court users' experience, help identify any recurring themes and support continuous improvement.

Overall finding

9.30. Stakeholder relationships and communication are a clear strength of the MCS.

9.31. The evidence showed a professional, responsive and solutions-focused service that is valued by the judiciary, advocates, the Probation Service and other court users. Effective communication supports case progression, trial readiness, practical problem-solving and confidence in the service provided. The MCS's small size and accessible leadership model helps identify issues and resolve them quickly.

9.32. Feedback arrangements are less developed.

9.33. The MCS has useful formal feedback from board members but no equivalent systematic process for other court users, including victims, witnesses, defendants, advocates and professional partners. The current arrangements work because relationships are strong and leaders are accessible, but a more structured approach to feedback would give the MCS stronger evidence about court users' experience, help identify any recurring themes and support continuous improvement.

9.34. This links to the wider assurance and learning issues we consider in chapter 10.

10. Performance, governance and assurance

10.1. Having considered the main operational components of the Military Court Service's (MCS's) work in chapters 5 to 9, this chapter considers whether performance information is meaningful and used to drive accountability and improvement, and whether governance and assurance mechanisms give senior leaders reliable evidence that an effective service is being delivered for all court users.

10.2. Our assessment is based on:

- a review of the MCS's performance framework and quarterly key performance indicator (KPI) reporting
- interviews with senior MCS leaders and staff
- observing operational meetings
- a review of relevant governance and assurance material
- stakeholder evidence gathered across the inspection.

Performance framework and key indicators

10.3. The MCS operates within a specialist jurisdiction where volumes of cases are comparatively low, but where individual cases can be complex, resource-intensive and dependent on coordinated action across several organisations.

10.4. In that context, performance information needs to do more than record activity. It should help senior leaders understand whether cases are progressing efficiently, whether hearings are effective, where risks are emerging and whether improvement activity is having the intended effect.

10.5. The MCS has developed a performance framework which gives senior leaders a structured view of key administrative and operational activity. The framework is overseen by the Director and reported quarterly to the Service Justice Executive Group (SJEG). It measures administrative performance rather than case outcomes, reflecting the need to preserve judicial independence and avoid measuring matters that are not properly within the MCS's remit.

10.6. The KPIs focus on the main points at which the MCS can influence court efficiency and case progression. They include:

- the timeliness with which cases are listed for Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings (PTPHs)
- the listing of sexual offence cases and other cases for trial
- courtroom usage
- Judge Advocates' availability
- the timeliness of sentencing after conviction.

10.7. These are relevant measures because they relate to the administrative tasks that underpin the efficient operation of the Service courts.

10.8. The evidence showed that the Director uses the framework actively to support operational oversight and improvement.

10.9. Performance data is used to identify emerging pressures and inform action. For example, weaker performance against the sentencing timeliness indicator has been identified and is understood to be linked, at least in part, to the practical difficulties of reconvening returning boards for sentence hearings. In response, the Director is gathering evidence from returning board members through a survey, with a view to informing discussion with the Judge Advocate General and the SJEG about whether returning boards remain necessary for sentence cases.

What the performance data shows

10.10. The available data, read alongside stakeholder evidence, supports our assessment that the MCS manages the early stages of case progression effectively.

10.11. PTPH performance was strong overall. The percentage of PTPHs listed within 42 days reached 96.0% across 2025 and 98.5% in quarter 1 of 2026. The number of completed PTPHs also remains high, despite some variation in late 2025. Prosecutors, defence practitioners and Judge Advocates described the MCS as proactive and well organised in its management of PTPHs and directions.

10.12. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative evidence shows that cases are listed promptly and that the supporting administrative controls identified in chapter 5 — including legal aid and representation checks,

automated reminders and active follow-up by court staff — are operating effectively.

10.13. The position is more mixed in relation to the later stages of case progression. Performance against sentencing timeliness indicators is weaker. The evidence suggests that this is often linked to factors outside the MCS's direct control, including advocates' availability, returning boards' requirements and the complexity of cases.

10.14. Data on trial listing efficiency needed careful interpretation. The data shows that the timeliness target for listing sexual offence trials was not met in 2024, 2025 or the year to date in 2026. However, the evidence indicates that missed targets are often linked to factors outside the MCS's direct control, including counsel availability, case complexity or sensitivity, and longer listing windows.

10.15. We also heard that, given low case volumes, a small number of complex cases falling outside target can have a disproportionate effect on headline performance.

10.16. We found that courtroom usage figures should also be treated with caution. These figures do not include the periods at Christmas, Easter and in the summer where listing is either stopped or reduced.

10.17. Even without these periods included, court room utilisation was 64.8% in 2024, 67.5% in 2025 and 63.0% in quarter 1 of 2026.

10.18. These figures appear low, but unused capacity in a low-volume and complex jurisdiction may reflect the need to maintain operational flexibility rather than inefficiency. For example, some capacity is needed to accommodate late changes, support portable court deployment and maintain readiness for cases that depend on military availability, judicial resources, board members and witnesses.

10.19. The Director indicated to us that the MCS could take on more work. That may suggest spare capacity, but the current KPI framework does not distinguish clearly between avoidable under-use, necessary contingency and capacity that is required because of the way the military jurisdiction operates.

Governance and accountability

10.20. The MCS is responsible for key court administration functions, some of which are within its direct control, while others depend on other SJS partners. Clear governance routes are therefore needed to support accountability, escalation and decision-making where issues sit beyond the MCS's immediate control.

10.21. The MCS has active governance arrangements that are closely connected to operational delivery.

10.22. The Director and Deputy Director maintain close oversight of live court business through daily operational meetings, weekly meetings, case progression tools, assize planning documents and performance information. Together, these arrangements give senior leaders a clear and current view of court business, staffing and workload pressures, listing issues and emerging risks, and enable prompt practical action where needed.

10.23. We identify this as a strength.

Strength

Senior leaders maintain strong operational grip through close oversight of live court business, regular meetings, practical controls and active use of performance information to identify and respond to emerging risks.

10.24. The Director's membership of the Service Justice Board (SJB) and SJEG gives the MCS a route into wider SJS governance. This is important because several issues affecting the MCS's efficiency sit beyond its direct control. Examples include board nominations by the single Services, estate constraints, funding for digital systems, judicial availability and wider Service justice reform. The MCS therefore needs governance routes that allow such issues to be escalated, scrutinised and resolved at the appropriate level.

10.25. We found evidence that the MCS uses those routes and were told that the Director submits quarterly KPI data to the SJEG.

10.26. However, we saw limited evidence of how performance data submitted to SJEG is scrutinised, challenged or used to track follow-up action. This does not mean that scrutiny is absent, but the inspection evidence did not clearly show how performance reporting translates into governance challenge, ownership of actions and documented follow-up.

Assurance and learning

10.27. Senior leaders and staff described assurance activity taking place through management oversight, operational checks and responsive action, but it is not always formally structured, recorded or capable of being evidenced.

10.28. There are layered checks in place for court notices, trial result notifications, board composition and case progression activity. Court assistants, deputy court officers, court officers, the Head of the Court Administration Unit, the Deputy Director and the Director of the MCS may all be involved at different stages depending on the nature, sensitivity or complexity of the task. These checks provide important safeguards in a jurisdiction where administrative errors can have legal and operational consequences.

10.29. We saw specific examples of responsive assurance. After a board constitution issue, additional checks were introduced, including a court officer check before court notices are published, and automated prompts to the Deputy Director and Director to check the court notices again before trial or sentence. The MCS also responded to board member feedback by improving facilities, including air conditioning in board member rooms at Bulford. These examples show that the organisation is willing to learn from issues and act on feedback.

These checks provide important safeguards in a jurisdiction where administrative errors can have legal and operational consequences

10.30. However, the limitation we found was that assurance activity is not yet sufficiently formalised or auditable. Spot checks, management oversight and corrective action take place, but there was limited evidence of a consistent framework for recording what has been checked, what has been found, what action is required, who owns that action and whether it has been completed. This makes it

harder for the MCS to demonstrate sustained improvement over time, particularly where the same type of issue may recur.

10.31. The current model also depends heavily on senior leaders' involvement. The Director and Deputy Director are closely engaged in operational detail — which, in a small organisation, supports strong visibility and early intervention. However, in assurance terms, relying on a small number of senior individuals creates a risk if checks, decisions and learning are not consistently recorded and possible for others to follow through. This reinforces the workforce resilience issues identified in chapter 7 and the digital resilience issues identified in chapter 6.

10.32. Some performance information is not yet being used as systematically as it could be to support learning and improvement.

10.33. For example, where trials crack or become ineffective, there is scope for a proportionate review or debrief to identify whether the cause was avoidable, whether it related to a recurring issue and whether any action should be taken. Given the low volume of cracked and ineffective cases, any process would need to be light touch and quarterly or biannual, but it could still help identify patterns over time and strengthen organisational learning.

10.34. A more structured assurance framework would not need to be burdensome. It could include:

- more formalised, periodic dip sampling of case progression records, court notices and board administration
- checks of compliance with Standard Operating Procedures
- checks on data accuracy
- reviews of any feedback themes
- consideration of cracked or ineffective trials.

10.35. The purpose would be to provide a clearer evidence base for consistency, learning and improvement. Such a framework would also help distinguish between issues that require immediate operational action and those that indicate a wider trend, and establish an assurance regime that will be effective even when current leaders leave the service.

Overall finding

10.36. The MCS has strong operational grip and effective internal oversight of live court business. Senior leaders use performance information, regular meetings and practical controls to maintain close oversight of case progression, listings, board readiness and operational risks.

10.37. Governance and assurance arrangements are active and responsive, and they work well as day-to-day operational controls.

10.38. However, a more structured approach to reviewing causes, recording dip sampling, capturing learning and documenting follow-ups would help the MCS show that not only are risks being identified and resolved, but lessons are also being retained, and improvement activity is being sustained over time.

Recommendation
By the end of February 2027, the Military Court Service should develop and implement a proportionate assurance framework that strengthens the way audit activity, feedback and learning are consistently recorded, analysed and used. This should include structured dip sampling of key processes and documented follow-up of improvement actions.

Annex A

Inspection framework

The framework for this inspection consists of an overarching inspection question and seven criteria. There are several sub-criteria for each criterion.

Inspection question

How does the Military Court Service (MCS) use its resources and assure itself that it provides an effective and efficient service for all court users?

Criteria and sub-criteria

1. How does the MCS use its systems and processes to support effective case progression?
 - 1.1 How are cases received and administratively progressed from receipt to first Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing (PTPH)?
 - 1.2 What mechanisms are used to support administrative listing of the first PTPH (including automated prompts and checks on legal representation) and how effective are these?
 - 1.3 Following a PTPH, how is compliance with judicial directions and case progression milestones monitored by the MCS and how effective are these systems?
 - 1.4 Are the assize programme and assize periods planned and managed effectively?
 - 1.5 Do the assize arrangements support or hinder court efficiency?
 - 1.6 Are the systems and processes for selecting and appointing board members effective in supporting timely and efficient case progression?
 - 1.7 Does selection and availability present challenges to efficiency and if so, how is that addressed?
 - 1.8 To what extent is the integrated Military Courts Listing System expected to improve court administration efficiency?

2. Are staffing structures, roles and capacity within the MCS suitable to deliver an efficient and effective court service?
 - 2.1 How does the MCS determine its staffing structure and how does this structure impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service provided to court users?
 - 2.2 Are the current team and management structures and delineation of roles fit for purpose, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined and understood?
 - 2.3 Does the MCS have an appropriate balance of staff between its court centres and/or flexibility to meet the demand at each centre and overseas when utilising portable courts?
 - 2.4 How effectively are vacancies, sickness absence and turnover managed?
 - 2.5 How does the MCS assure itself that staff have the necessary skills, experience and training to deliver an effective court service?
 - 2.6 Is there any impact arising from the centralisation of the Court Administration Unit personnel at Bulford? If so, how is this mitigated?
3. How are digital tools and technology used in court to support an efficient and effective service for court users?
 - 3.1 How effectively are digital audio recording and video/remote links used in court?
 - 3.2 Are the digital tools reliable and fit for purpose across locations, including portable courts?
 - 3.3 To what extent do the digital tools used reduce delay, support timely hearings and improve the experience of court users?
 - 3.4 How are technical issues identified, escalated and resolved?
 - 3.5 What is the MCS's strategic plan around ongoing modernisation and digitisation of its court processes and how will that shape a more efficient and effective service for court users?

4. Are facilities at the court centres providing a safe, secure and supportive environment for victims and witnesses?
 - 4.1 Are the court centre estates/infrastructure suitable to provide a safe and secure environment for victims and witnesses in terms of: provision of separate entrances/exits, provision of comfortable/separate waiting rooms and the ability to provide reasonable adjustments?
 - 4.2 Are portable court arrangements fit for purpose in providing a safe, secure and supportive environment?
 - 4.3 Are court centres suitable for the volume and type of hearings held?
 - 4.4 How well do special measures facilities support victims and witnesses?
 - 4.5 Are there any improvements/enhancements to special measures equipment that the MCS anticipates introducing?
 - 4.6 Is there effective engagement with stakeholders at operational and strategic levels to identify, escalate and resolve barriers that will improve the provision of a safe and supportive court environment for victims and witnesses across all court centres?

5. What is the relationship and communication between the MCS and its stakeholders and does this have any impact on its ability to deliver an effective and efficient service?
 - 5.1 Does the MCS communicate effectively with all key stakeholders, to promote the delivery of an effective and efficient court service to all court users?
 - 5.2 How does the MCS identify, understand and balance the needs of different court users (including victims, witnesses, defendants, judiciary, board members and legal representatives) and what impact does this have on the effectiveness and efficiency of the court service?
 - 5.3 Are there any areas where MCS needs to evolve and strengthen its collaboration with any of its stakeholders?
 - 5.4 Where there are or have been tensions with stakeholders and/or blockages due to lack of alignment, how have these been managed and resolved to reduce any impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the court service provided?
 - 5.5 How does the MCS gather, analyse and use feedback from stakeholders to inform service improvement and strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the court service?
6. How is performance data used and are the key performance indicators in the MCS performance framework effective in assuring court efficiency and timely case progression?
 - 6.1 What are the administrative and operational indicators that form the structured performance framework?
 - 6.2 How is performance data analysed, escalated and acted upon?
 - 6.3 Does the performance framework provide meaningful assurance over court efficiency and case progression?
 - 6.4 How is performance information reported to, scrutinised by and used within governance and leadership forums to drive accountability and improvement?

7. How are assurance mechanisms used to monitor and ensure that an effective and efficient service is being delivered for all court users?
 - 7.1 What governance and assurance mechanisms are in place to monitor and ensure delivery of an efficient and effective service for court users in the military court system?
 - 7.2 Are those governance and assurance mechanisms rigorously complied with?
 - 7.3 How does the MCS prioritise, implement and monitor actions arising from assurance activity, and how does it assure itself that these actions have led to sustained improvements in efficiency or quality service?
 - 7.4 How does leadership within the MCS influence the organisation's ability to provide an efficient and effective court service and make improvements where appropriate?
 - 7.5 How does the MCS use audit activity, feedback and complaints to support learning and continuous improvement?
 - 7.6 To what extent do assurance mechanisms provide senior leaders with reliable, timely and risk-based assurance over court efficiency and service quality?

Annex B

Glossary

Armed Forces Act 2006 (AFA 2006)

The principal legislation establishing a single system of Service law for the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force, including Service offences, summary hearings and Service courts.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Computer technology that can help carry out tasks which would normally need human input, such as sorting information or identifying patterns or helping to produce text.

Assize period

A planned sitting period during which Service court hearings, trials and other court business are listed and managed.

Assize planning

The process by which the Military Court Service schedules planned blocks of court sitting time, usually in two-week blocks, and manages the hearings, trials and other court business to be listed within those periods.

Basis of plea

A short written explanation of what a defendant accepts they did when they plead guilty. Usually used where the defendant does not accept every part of the prosecution's account.

Board member/lay member

A Service person or, where appropriate, civilian specified to sit with the Judge Advocate in the Court Martial. Lay members perform a role broadly comparable to a jury and may also participate in sentencing.

Case Center

The case management system used by the Military Court Service to manage and access court documentation and case material.

Case progression

The administrative and case management activity used to move a case from receipt through hearings, directions, trial readiness, outcome recording and post-hearing action.

Copilot

Microsoft's artificial intelligence tool.

Court Administration Officer (CAO)

The statutory office held by the Director of the Military Court Service, whose responsibilities include giving notice of proceedings and specifying lay members of the Court Martial.

Court Administration Unit (CAU)

The central administrative unit within the Military Court Service that supports case opening, allocation, listing, board administration and other court administration functions.

Court Martial

The standing Service court that tries serious Service offences and criminal conduct offences under Service law.

Court Martial Appeal Court (CMAC)

The court that hears appeals from the Court Martial. It has powers equivalent to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division.

Court notice

A formal notice setting out key information about a Service court hearing, including the date, time, location, type of hearing and those required to attend or participate. In Court Martial cases it will include details relevant to the constitution of the board.

Court user

Any person or organisation using or participating in the Service courts, including defendants, victims, witnesses, board members, advocates, the judiciary, support services, professional users and members of the public or media.

Cracked trial

A trial that does not proceed on the listed trial date because it is no longer needed, for example because a guilty plea is entered or the case is otherwise resolved.

Criminal justice system

The civilian criminal justice system in England and Wales.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

The principal public prosecuting authority for criminal cases in England and Wales.

Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 (CPSIA)

The legislation that sets out the statutory basis for HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and its role in inspecting the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office.

Directions

Instructions or requirements made by the court to manage the progress of a case, including deadlines for the prosecution, defence or other parties to complete specific actions.

His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi)

The independent inspectorate responsible for inspecting the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office, and for carrying out inspections by invitation where appropriate.

Ineffective hearing/ineffective trial

A hearing or trial that cannot proceed as planned on the listed date because something necessary for it to be effective is missing or unresolved.

Joint Personnel Administration

The Ministry of Defence's central personnel administration system, used by the armed forces to hold and manage Service personnel information, including details such as service, rank, unit/posting, availability-related information and other personnel administration records.

Judge Advocate

The legally qualified Judge who presides over Service court proceedings.

Judge Advocate General (JAG)

The senior Judge and head of the service judiciary.

Key performance indicator (KPI)

A measure used to assess performance against a defined aspect of activity, such as timeliness, listing efficiency or use of court capacity.

Military Court Service (MCS)

The organisation that provides administrative support to the Service courts, including the Court Martial, Summary Appeal Court and Service Civilian Court.

Military Courts Listing System (MCLS)

The proposed digital system intended to support court listing, scheduling, case progression and management information within the Military Court Service.

Ministry of Defence

The government department responsible for defence and the armed forces.

MODNet

The Ministry of Defence's corporate information technology network.

Office of the Judge Advocate General (OJAG)

The office that supports the Judge Advocate General and the judiciary of the Service courts.

OR7 officer

A Staff Sergeant in the British Army, Flight Sergeant in the Royal Air Force or Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Navy

Plea and Trial Preparation Hearing (PTPH)

A hearing at which plea, case management, trial preparation and future directions are addressed.

Police National Computer (PNC)

The national police database used to record and access information such as previous convictions and other relevant criminal justice records. A PNC record is the official police computer record of a person's criminal history and related police information, which shows information such as arrests, charges, cautions and convictions.

Portable court

A court established in a temporary or non-permanent location to allow service court proceedings to take place where required, including overseas.

Pre-sentence report

A report prepared to assist the court before sentence, usually addressing the defendant's circumstances, risk and suitability for sentencing options.

Section 28

A special measures provision under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 allowing eligible witnesses to have their cross-examination recorded before trial, instead of appearing in person at court.

Serious Fraud Office (SFO)

The public authority responsible for investigating and prosecuting serious or complex fraud, bribery and corruption.

Service Civilian Court

The Service court that deals with certain offences committed overseas by civilians who are subject to Service discipline.

Service Courts Information Management (SCIM)

The system used by the Military Court Service to record case information and generate unique reference numbers.

Service Justice Board (SJB)

A senior governance forum within the Service Justice System.

Service Justice Executive Group (SJEG)

A senior executive forum supporting oversight and coordination across the Service Justice System.

Service Justice System (SJS)

The system through which discipline and criminal conduct in the armed forces are investigated, prosecuted and tried.

Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA)

The independent prosecuting authority for the armed forces, broadly equivalent to the Crown Prosecution Service in the civilian justice system.

Single Services

The Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force when referred to individually rather than collectively.

Special measures

Arrangements designed to help eligible or vulnerable witnesses give evidence, such as live links, screens or pre-recorded cross-examination.

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

A documented procedure setting out how a task or process should be carried out consistently.

Starlink

A satellite-based connectivity capability used to support secure and resilient internet access for portable court arrangements where local connectivity may be unavailable or unsuitable.

Summary Appeal Court

The Service court that hears appeals from summary hearings conducted by commanding officers.

Summary hearing

A process used by a commanding officer to deal with certain less serious disciplinary or criminal matters involving Service personnel.

Trial result notification

A notification recording the outcome of a trial and relevant post-hearing information.

Tri-service

Relating to the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force collectively.

Unique reference number

A unique case number generated by the Service Courts Information Management system to identify and track a case.

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