

JOINT INSPECTION BUSINESS PLAN

2025–27

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Introduction

This plan sets out the programme of criminal justice joint inspections for 2025–27 in which two or more of our inspectorates will be working together. Such collaboration allows us to examine issues of importance to the public that cut across agency boundaries, and which therefore might not be examined in the separate inspections of individual agencies.

This plan outlines the joint inspection programme. It doesn't include core inspections by individual inspectorates which cover every area in England and Wales over a period of several years.

As independent inspectorates, we provide the public with assurance but also benefit those agencies and partnerships subject to scrutiny. All our reports are published in full and where appropriate we return to review progress against the recommendations and concerns we raised. We also recognise and take account of recent and projected changes in the criminal justice landscape, as well as the changing nature of crime and offending.

From our consultation process, we received positive and constructive comments on our proposed areas of focus for joint inspections, as well as suggestions for new areas. We have carefully considered all responses and assessed them against risks to the public and available resources.

Our joint programme for 2025–27 represents an examination of areas of critical importance across a wide span of criminal justice activity. We hope that those whose work we inspect will continue to respond positively to our reports, resulting in improved practice across the criminal justice system.

Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL	HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
Anthony Rogers	HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service (HMCPSP)
Martin Jones CBE	HM Chief Inspector of Probation (HMI Probation)
Charlie Taylor	HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMI Prisons)

A. The context to our programme

1. The landscape for joint inspection

- 1.1. The long history of collaborative working between the criminal justice inspectorates – of Constabulary, Crown Prosecution Service, Prisons and Probation – was placed on a statutory footing by the Police and Justice Act 2006.
- 1.2. This Act established an obligation to publish a joint inspection programme, and to include collaboration with other inspectorates or public authorities – for example with the Care Quality Commission, Ofsted, Estyn and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales. This business plan also encompasses joint work where such bodies will be working with more than one of the criminal justice inspectorates.

2. Our focus

- 2.1. In joint inspections, we work together to address issues that involve more than one criminal justice agency, and that have a direct impact on the public who use the criminal justice system. Working together produces a more rounded examination of issues that cut across the criminal justice system and allows us to achieve more than if just one inspectorate worked alone.
- 2.2. We support democratic accountability, local transparency and efforts to reduce bureaucracy. Joint inspection particularly provides a unique focus on:
 - systemic issues within the criminal justice system as a whole;
 - identifying and reducing unnecessary cost in the system;
 - addressing risks and public safety;
 - the system from end to end and the role individual agencies play;
 - universal issues, standards and constraints within the criminal justice system; and
 - public reassurance and confidence.

2.3. Our main areas of joint focus relate to four aspects of the work carried out by those we inspect:

- **community safety:** involving police, probation and youth offending services;
- **bringing offenders to justice:** police, Crown Prosecution Service, courts;
- **management of people under criminal justice supervision:** probation, prisons and youth offending services; and
- **custodial conditions:** prisons, police, courts and immigration services.

2.4. In addition, in all our inspections we have regard to three cross-cutting issues that are fundamental to the success and effectiveness of the criminal justice system:

- **the quality of victim and witness experiences;**
- **active promotion of equality and diversity;** and
- **achieving value for money and efficiency.**

2.5. We have increased our focus on outcomes and the user experience. We also rely heavily on stakeholder consultation on priorities when deciding the overall balance of our joint inspection programme.

2.6. We aim to achieve an appropriately balanced programme each year. This allows us to examine the criminal justice system across all the above areas of focus, accepting that the degree of engagement with each will vary according to relevant priorities.

3. Our approach

3.1. We work within a rolling two-year programme. We set priorities at the start of the period but react flexibly to changing circumstances and reprioritise as necessary. Any potential inspections highlighted for year two of our programme may later be brought forward or otherwise amended to meet such changed circumstances.

3.2. In addition, new work may be commissioned in-year, sometimes at short notice. When this occurs, we reassess the programme and reprioritise as appropriate, to make the best use of resources.

- 3.3. Each work stream – whether a full inspection, a scoping study (an inquiry to identify the focus and scope for a future inspection) or a spotlight report – has a nominated ‘lead inspectorate’. Others either support or otherwise contribute. All criminal justice joint inspection work is ‘singly led but jointly owned’. This means that while the lead inspectorate is responsible for management, support, inspection methodology, report authoring and publication, the supporting inspectorates provide inspection team members and resources, make written contributions, and agree and have responsibility for the final report and any recommendations.
- 3.4. This approach has allowed us to avoid creating additional support structures or bureaucracy. It also reduces training requirements for inspection staff. We have developed a joint methodology and carry out shared training when appropriate, to further reduce costs and duplication.

4. Deciding the programme

- 4.1. Before finalising the joint programme, Chief Inspectors carry out an extensive process of consultation with key stakeholders, other inspectorates and government. This consultation helps to identify any overlaps or potential synergies with the proposed work of other bodies, and to prioritise the individual work streams that are included in the final programme. We were pleased to receive all contributions and have considered each in detail before finalising our programme.
- 4.2. Once the above considerations are completed, Chief Inspectors finalise the programme. We set out the programme for 2025–27 in detail in [Section B](#).

B. Joint inspection programme for 2025–27

The overall proposed programme includes:

- **continuing commitments:** ongoing work from previously published programmes; and
- **new work:** inspections and other work arising from our business planning process, which may be in the early stages of scoping.

Continuing commitments: joint thematic inspections

The following joint thematic inspections started in 2023–25 and will be completed in 2025–27:

- **Prosecution case building:** This inspection has been carried forward from the 2021–23 business plan. It now has a specific focus on the culture and communications between the police and Crown Prosecution Service and how these affect building strong cases. It will also consider how this partnership work affects victims. The inspection will share inspection resources and evidence with the HMICFRS thematic inspection on crime investigations.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMCPSI
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMICFRS
 - Expected publication: 2025.
- **Joint inspection of youth out-of-court disposals:** This inspection will focus on the effectiveness of work to divert children from the criminal justice system, including interventions that address children’s needs, make sure of their safety and that of the community, and reduce offending.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMI Probation
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMICFRS
 - Expected publication: 2025.

Programme of new work for 2025–27

This section of the plan focuses on:

- a) joint thematic inspections – one-off inspections that examine a cross-cutting criminal justice theme and lead to one joint report; and
- b) other joint work, not including inspections.

a) Joint thematic inspections

We will consider including a victim focus in our work, either formally within the scope of inspections or by promoting improvements in the wider criminal justice system.

There are five inspections planned:

- **Experiences of victims of child sexual abuse of the criminal justice system:** The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has recommended a joint inspection of compliance with the Victims' Code in relation to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. This will include looking at the experiences of victims.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMICFRS
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMCPSI, HMI Probation
 - Expected publication: 2026–27.
- **Knife-related crime:** The exact scope and focus of this inspection are to be developed.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMICFRS
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMI Probation
 - Expected publication: 2026–27.
- **Offenders with drug and alcohol addictions:** An inspection of how well the criminal justice system is optimising the recovery of offenders in its care.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMI Prisons
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMI Probation, HMICFRS
 - Expected publication: 2026–27.

- **Operation Soteria:** The second phase of our work to assess the progression and outcome of cases of rape and serious sexual offences that have been investigated and charged using the principles and tools developed through Operation Soteria.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMICFRS
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMCPSP
 - Expected publication: 2026–27.
- **Young Witness Protocol:** An inspection of how well the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and HM Courts & Tribunals Service expedite cases involving witnesses aged under ten years in accordance with the 2015 Young Witness Protocol.
 - Lead inspectorate: HMCPSP
 - Other inspectorates involved: HMICFRS
 - Expected publication: 2026–27.

b) Other joint work

Other work planned during 2025–27 includes the following:

- **Spotlight reports:** These will be published reports based on topics of relevance across the youth and adult criminal justice system. They will draw on existing inspection evidence derived from either joint or single agency work to provide an overview of different themes within the criminal justice system.

The first spotlight report will examine how the police and the Crown Prosecution Service communicate with victims, highlighting examples of positive practice and joint working and where improvements are needed.

- **Joint inspection framework:** We will continue to review and develop how we collaborate on joint inspections, as well as how we share information to work together intelligently.

Annex A

The 10 principles of inspection

The principles of inspection in this policy statement place the following expectations on inspection providers and on the departments sponsoring them.

1. The **purpose of improvement**. There should be an explicit concern on the part of inspectors to contribute to the improvement of the service being inspected. This should guide the focus, method, reporting and follow-up of inspection. In framing recommendations, an inspector should recognise good performance and address any failure appropriately. Inspection should aim to generate data and intelligence that enable departments more quickly to calibrate the progress of reform in their sectors and make appropriate adjustments.
2. A **focus on outcomes**, which means considering service provision to users of the services rather than concentrating on internal management arrangements.
3. A **user perspective**. Inspection should have a clear focus on the experience of those for whom the service is provided, as well as on internal management arrangements. Inspection should encourage innovation and diversity and not be solely compliance-based.
4. **Proportionate to risk**. Over time, inspectors should modify the extent of future inspection according to the quality of performance by the service provider. For example, good performers should undergo less inspection, so that resources are concentrated on areas of greatest risk.
5. Inspectors should encourage rigorous **self-assessment** by managers. Inspectors should challenge the results of managers' self-assessments, take them into account in the inspection process, and provide a comparative benchmark.
6. Inspectors should use **impartial evidence**. Evidence, whether quantitative or qualitative, should be validated and credible.
7. Inspectors should **disclose the criteria** they use to form judgments.
8. Inspectors should be **open about their processes**, willing to take any complaints seriously, and able to demonstrate a robust quality assurance process.

9. Inspectors should have regard to **value for money**, their own included.
10. Inspectors should **continually learn from experience**, to become increasingly effective. This can be done by assessing their own impact on the service provider's ability to improve, and by sharing best practice with other inspectorates.

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