



Northern Ireland Audit Office

MEDIA RELEASE

Speeding up justice: avoidable delay in the criminal justice system

Mr Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General, today issued his report to the Assembly on *Speeding up justice: avoidable delay in the criminal justice system*. The report examines the delivery of the criminal justice system by the four main justice organisations: the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and the Department of Justice.

Mr Donnelly said, ***“Currently the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland does not deliver value for money. The cost of criminal justice is significantly higher than in England and Wales and cases take considerably longer to complete. This has negative impacts on victims, defendants and witnesses...The only way to address these issues effectively is through developing true partnership working between the police, prosecution, courts and the judiciary within which specific reform projects can be pursued.”***

Key points:

Crown Court cases take over twice as long in **Northern Ireland** as in **England and Wales**



THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON 27th March 2018

- Improving performance in the early stages of investigations is a key lever for improving timeliness. Weaknesses in the early stages of investigations, when the PSNI gathers evidence and the PPS makes a final decision as to whether to prosecute, are a key cause of delay.
- Once cases reach court, progression is frequently punctuated by ineffective and adjourned court hearings. On average, cases are adjourned between 6 and 7 times each. This is despite the fact that there are a number of court hearings prior to a trial that are designed to ensure that it is ready to proceed when listed.
- Just over half of trials proceeded as planned on the first date they were listed (57 per cent in 2016). Ineffective management of cases at court results in victims, defendants, witnesses and staff from criminal justice organisations attending at court for a number of hours but with no actual progress being made on their case.
- Key management and performance information to facilitate effective monitoring and accountability is weak, absent or not used effectively.
- The criminal justice system lacks robust financial information about costs. This impairs its ability to understand the costs and benefits of the reform programme.

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Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on 27 March 2018.
3. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Sean Beattie (028 9025 1091).