



Dear Colleague,

As you know the Office for Criminal Justice Reform is a trilateral organisation working to the Justice Secretary, Home Secretary and Attorney General. We joined Home Office colleagues in welcoming Alan Johnson to Marsham Street as the new Home Secretary.

Looking back, my personal 'highlight' since the last Alert was without a doubt, the launch of this year's Justice Awards campaign. Many of you were able to come along to Marsham Street on Thursday 14 May to hear the Attorney General and myself encouraging everyone working in the criminal justice system to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of staff and volunteers by nominating them for an award. One of the great things about the evening was having the opportunity to meet and chat to so many of you so early into my appointment. I hope these opportunities are frequent and that you may even invite me to your own significant events.

As part of my induction I have been meeting lots of people. But for me there's nothing better than spending real time with people who are delivering services so that we can understand the pressures and realities on the ground. I have therefore asked every member of OCJR to 'go back to the floor' and gain some direct operational experience of the CJS. I'd welcome any opportunities for my staff to spend time in your organisations - so let us know if you can help. I will be spending the first week of August in a Crown and Magistrates Court to get a better understanding of court processing and what more can be done to support victims and witnesses.



Sharon White  
Chief Executive, OCJR

## The Justice Awards - showcasing excellence in the criminal justice system

This year's Justice Awards campaign is well underway following its launch by the Attorney General on 14 May.

With staff engagement being a top priority, the Attorney urged stakeholders and sponsors to use their communication channels and powers of persuasion to make this year's campaign the most successful yet.

The awards are a perfect opportunity to recognise outstanding achievement by staff and volunteers across the CJS. Organisations, teams and individuals benefit through winning, with positive local press coverage being particularly good at raising public confidence. Even going through the nomination process uncovers inspiring work and enables us to showcase best practice.

As the campaign progresses it is hoped that we see all agencies equally engaged, highlighting their own achievements and successful cross agency working.

For further information visit the [Justice Awards website](#) or contact the campaign team at [justiceawards@cjs.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:justiceawards@cjs.gsi.gov.uk).

Campaign materials can be found [here](#). The nomination period runs until 27th July.

## Virtual courts pilot scheme is launched

The first virtual court pilot scheme was announced by the Prime Minister on 12 May and officially launched by Justice Secretary Jack Straw on 27 May. The pilot aims to ensure a speedier and more effective justice system.

Speaking at the first Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership conference, the Prime Minister announced the initiative as part of a new crime strategy. The Virtual Courts scheme involves defendants having their cases heard at a magistrates' court, via secure video link from a police station, within hours of being charged and, if a defendant pleads guilty, could see sentencing handed down on the same day.

One of the schemes first hearings took place four hours after the defendant was charged with drink driving. The defendant pleaded guilty and was sentenced at the end of the hearing which lasted 20 minutes.

The pilot could save £2.2 million over the coming year, with a potential roll out across England and Wales delivering benefits in excess of £10 million a year, as well freeing up police and magistrates' courts time and making important improvements to the service given to victims and witnesses.

The one-year Virtual Courts pilot will initially link Charing Cross Police Station in central London to Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court, with a further 14 police stations across London to join the pilot in the summer. A second pilot will run in North Kent from mid-June.

## Ready to respond to the 'Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice' Green Paper

Some 200 responses have been received on the 'Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice' Green Paper consultation which closes on 31 July. Don't miss your chance to have your say on the Government's vision of a criminal justice service that is 'effective, delivers justice for all, has the interests of victims and witnesses at its heart and inspires the trust and confidence of the people it serves.' [Click here to leave your comments.](#)

## The human trafficking National Referral Mechanism is working

On 1 April the UK implemented the Council of Europe Convention against human trafficking. The creation of a multi-agency National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to improve identification and protection of trafficking victims has ensured that there has been a wide ranging and consistent flow of referrals into the NRM from a diverse group of agencies. The early indications are that new arrangements to identify and support victims of trafficking are working as expected and victim numbers are within the projected range. In April 35 referrals were made to competent authorities, namely via United Kingdom Border Agency (51%) and the police (34%). The majority of referrals were in relation to sexual exploitation (49%), with high numbers of referrals also relating to domestic servitude (20%) and labour exploitation (17%). A large proportion of referrals were for individuals under the age of 18 (26%), however the 21-30 age range had the highest number of referrals. [Click here for more information.](#)

Guidance on how to refer to victims through the National Referral Mechanism can be found [here](#).

Victims of human trafficking that are participating in the criminal justice system can also be granted temporary residence following procedures set out in [Home Office Notice 2/2006](#).

The comprehensive victim-centred UK Action Plan on Human Trafficking is currently being updated. The action plan tackles trafficking across four key areas of: prevention; investigation/law enforcement/and prosecution; providing protection and assistance to adult victims of trafficking; and child victims. Consultations with stakeholders across all four key areas are due to take place in June 2009.

## Reappointment of Commissioners of the Criminal Cases Review Commission

On 19 May the Lord Chancellor announced the reappointments of Alastair MacGregor QC and Penelope Barrett as Commissioners of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). The CCRC is an independent executive non-departmental public body, established by the Criminal Appeal Act 1995, to take responsibility for reviewing possible miscarriages of justice in England Wales and Northern Ireland. It was set up on 1 January 1997. Their reappointments are for five years from 24 May and 7 June respectively.

Alastair MacGregor has been a Commissioner of the Criminal Cases Review Commission since 2004 and Deputy Chairman since 2006. After working for some years in the fields of criminal law and general civil litigation, his practice, both as a junior and as a silk was concerned mainly with the investigation and resolution of complex commercial disputes.

Penelope Barrett was called to the Bar in 1982. Before appointment as a Commissioner in 2004, she practised as a criminal defence barrister. Her range of work included dealing with murder, kidnap, large scale drug importations, armed robbery, organised handling of high value stolen goods and serious sexual offences. She maintained a special interest in defending young people and the mentally disordered accused of serious crime.

## Contact us

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If you have any feedback or other comments, please [email us](#).

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