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POLICE CUSTODY IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE – MUCH IMPROVED

Police custody provision in Cambridgeshire had improved significantly, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Dru Sharpling, HM Inspector of Constabulary, publishing the report of a follow-up inspection into custody suites in Cambridgeshire.

The inspection was a follow-up to a previous critical inspection in 2008, and part of a national programme of joint inspections of police custody. It covered six custody suites serving Peterborough, Huntingdon, Cambridge, March, Ely and St Neots, as well as King's Lynn in Norfolk, whose cells could be used by Cambridgeshire Police. There had been a great deal of work done strategically to address previous findings and much effort had been made to improve the standard of the custody estate, including safety, general cleanliness and managing graffiti.

Inspectors were also pleased to find that:

- detainees were treated professionally and with respect, and were generally well cared for;
- there was an appropriate balance between progressing cases and the rights and entitlements of detainees;
- there was now a good focus on the safety of detainees;
- primary health provision had improved and care was now timely and of good quality; and

- substance use services were well developed, including for those with a primary problem with alcohol.

However, there were some concerns:

- some staff working in custody were not permanent and some day-to-day management arrangements were confusing;
- staffing levels at Huntingdon were a particular concern, with only one sergeant on duty;
- the specific needs of some vulnerable groups, such as juveniles, required greater focus;
- CCTV was used for the constant observation of very vulnerable detainees, and procedures for rousing detainees under the influence of drugs or alcohol were inconsistent; and
- while improved, there were still many people held in police custody as a place of safety under section 136 of the Mental Health Act.

Nick Hardwick and Dru Sharpling said:

“Overall, provision of police custody in Cambridgeshire was much improved from our previous inspection and, in particular, we noted a much more positive staff culture focused on the welfare of detainees and far more respectful and decent custody facilities. The main weaknesses related to staffing and management arrangements, together with a need for still further improvements to the support for detainees with mental health problems. Notwithstanding the many current challenges facing all police forces, we hope this report will help Cambridgeshire Constabulary and the Police Authority to resolve our remaining concerns and further develop provision.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 28 September 2011 at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/police-cell/index.htm>.
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and rigorously examines the effectiveness of police forces and authorities to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMIC inspects and regulates all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing bodies such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the British Transport Police and HMRC.
4. This joint inspection was carried out from 31 May-3 June 2011.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons (HMIP Press Office) on 020 7035 2123 or 07880 787452 or Ruth Allman (HMIC Press Office) on 020 3513 0600 if you would like more information or to request an interview.