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**POLICE CUSTODY IN THE WEST MIDLANDS – GENERALLY POSITIVE,
DESPITE SAFETY CONCERNS**

Police custody facilities in the West Midlands police area were positive in many respects though certain issues, such as safety, required attention, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Dru Sharpling, HM Inspector of Constabulary, publishing the report of a joint inspection into custody suites in the West Midlands.

The inspection was part of a national programme of joint inspections of police custody and covered 17 designated custody suites serving Birmingham West and Central, Birmingham South, Birmingham West, Birmingham North, Wolverhampton Central, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Solihull and Coventry. Additional cells in standby suites were also visited.

Overall, there were some areas of excellent practice. However there were also areas for improvement.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- there was clear strategic leadership, well supported by the police authority, and an active independent custody visitors scheme;
- the recent move to a centralised model had brought greater oversight and improved service delivery;

- staffing levels were good, interactions with detainees were impressive and staff felt valued and empowered;
- health care provision was good, with strong governance, robust medicines management and reasonable waiting times;
- substance misuse services were generally good; and
- partnerships generally worked well.

However, there were some concerns:

- despite significant investment across the custody estate, virtually every cell failed to pass our safety examination as there were numerous ligature points as well as inconsistent health and safety monitoring;
- there was a mixed approach to risk assessment, both on arrival and at the pre-release stage, when only the most vulnerable were assessed;
- data on the use of force was not used effectively to identify trends; and
- there were problems providing appropriate adults for vulnerable detainees.

Nick Hardwick and Dru Sharpling said:

“Overall, this report reflects a positive picture of custody provision in the West Midlands police area, although there are a number of issues which require attention. We believe that this report, and the issues highlighted within our recommendations, will assist the Chief Constable and the police authority to further improve custodial services. We expect them to consider these issues within the wider context of force priorities and resourcing and to provide us with an action plan in due course.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 4 March 2011 at www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons

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 18-27 October 2010.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons (HMIP Press Office) on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1430 Monday to Friday or Sharon Kalina (HMIC Press Office) on 020 7802 1824 if you would like more information or to request an interview.