



28 April 2009

020 3334 3530

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00.01, 28 APRIL 2009**

**DURHAM POLICE CUSTODY SUITES – WELL MANAGED, BUT CELL CONDITIONS AND HEALTHCARE NEED IMPROVEMENT**

Inspections of police custody suites in Durham confirmed that detention was generally well managed and of a satisfactory standard, but some aspects, in particular the condition of some cells and healthcare, needed to be improved, said Dame Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Denis O'Connor, HM Inspector of Constabulary, publishing a joint inspection report.

This is the fifth in a series of reports of inspections of police custody carried out jointly by the two inspectorates. Inspectors commended the fact that senior managers and the Police Authority were beginning to take a more strategic approach to the oversight of custody. They also found:

- Limited recognition of the needs of particular groups, such as women and juveniles.
- The physical condition of the suites was far from ideal, some with little natural light or poor ventilation. Showers lacked privacy. Standards of cleanliness were generally good. Detainees were provided with a mattress and blankets but not pillows. Food and drinks were provided, but often only on request.
- Staff were generally responsive to need and relationships with detainees were largely good. However, staff would benefit from improved training.
- Improvements were required in aspects of the management of risk. It was of particular concern that the use of cell bells was not routinely explained, and at one station some had been isolated to prevent misuse, which was patently unsafe. More positively, an exit assessment had recently been introduced.
- PACE codes were generally applied consistently and legal rights observed. The central duty solicitor scheme worked well and appropriate medical advice was taken about fitness for interview.
- The level and quality of healthcare was inconsistent, and there was no overall health strategy, governance arrangements or policies. Access to forensic medical examiners was not always timely, though a good 12-hour service was provided by emergency care practitioners. Support for substance users was consistently good, but mental health provision less so. Medicines management was an area of particular weakness across all suites.

The Chief Inspectors concluded:

“This inspection of police custody suites of Durham Constabulary provides an important degree of independent assurance to the public that detention in police custody is generally well managed and of a satisfactory standard. However, we have identified areas where improvement is required, and we make a number of recommendations. We look forward to being able to record significant improvement when we return to re-inspect in due course.”

### **Notes for Editors**

1. The full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 28 April 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>
2. The announced inspection of the Durham Police custody suites was carried out 22-23 September 2008.
3. Durham Constabulary covers County Durham and Darlington Borough. The force is divided into north and south basic command units (BCUs) and has six custody suites with 62 cells designated for the reception of detainees under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984 (PACE). There are a further 47 non-designated cells. All suites were visited, but the inspection focused on those in Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Durham and Peterlee. All four took adults, juveniles and immigration detainees.
4. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Andrew Winstone in the Press Office on 0203 334 3530.