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GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE CUSTODY – WELL MANAGED, BUT SOME ASPECTS OF RISK AND SAFETY NEED ATTENTION

Inspections of police custody suites in Gloucestershire confirmed that detention was in general well managed, but some aspects, in particular the approach to managing risk and safety, needed further attention, said Dame Anne Owers, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Jane Stichbury, HM Inspector of Constabulary, publishing a joint inspection report.

This is the fourth in a series of reports of inspections of police custody carried out jointly by the two inspectorates, and the first to look at a force outside London. Inspectors commended the fact that the Chief Constable and the Police Authority had given significant attention to custody, and that there were specialist custody sergeants and detention officers. They also found:

- There were generally good relationships between the staff and detainees, the cells were clean and no detainees had to share cells however the suites had poor natural light and design, some cramped conditions, and not all cells had integral sanitation. . . .
- As in other suites, the design and layout of the custody sergeants' desks made confidential discussion difficult; this is to be raised with Home Office officials responsible for design guides.
- On some occasions, custody staff appeared risk averse and insensitive: for example, a teenage girl was forcibly restrained while ties were cut off her blouse as an alleged suicide risk, but without an adequate risk assessment to justify this action.

- Some approaches to safety were inconsistent; inspectors were particularly concerned that some cell call bells were muted by staff.
- Statutory codes of practice were consistently and rigorously applied, and individual detainees' rights were respected, but there was too little awareness of the particular needs of women and children, and delays in finding appropriate adults to accompany juveniles,
- Healthcare provision was satisfactory, with good management of records and clinical governance. There were some gaps in the coverage of mental health and drug services, though both were adequate.

Anne Owers said:

“This independent inspection of police custody suites in Gloucestershire provides an important degree of assurance to the public that, in most respects, detention in police custody is well managed and satisfactory.

“Nevertheless, there are some criticisms and the report sets out a number of areas for improvement. In this way it is hoped that the Chief Constable will be assisted to improve provision further.”

Notes for Editors

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 10 February 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>.
2. The announced inspection of Gloucester police custody suites was carried out from 21-22 July 2008.
3. Gloucestershire Constabulary covers a largely rural area made up of three basic command units (BCUs) - Gloucester, Cheltenham and Stroud. Each BCU contains a custody suite designated for the reception of detainees under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984.
4. There are a total of 47 cells (not counting three court holding cells at Stroud).
5. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Nicole Valentinuzzi in the Press Office on 0203 334 3547.