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ISLINGTON BCU: PROFESSIONAL BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENTS

The Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers and Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, today published a joint inspection report into the Islington Basic Command Unit (BCU). This is the second of a series of inspections into police custody suites.

Islington BCU contains two custody suites, providing a total of 32 cells that can hold a mix of adults, juveniles and immigration detainees.

The report found

- Custody staff were implementing the PACE codes rigorously and consistently, with effective supervision from trained staff. However, no constables were custody specialists, which could lead to inconsistency
- There were procedures to reduce risk and effective handovers, but risk assessments were reliant on information from the Police National Computer or what detainees told staff. Staff tended to be risk-averse, rather than using an individualised approach.
- Both suites were reasonably clean, but cells did not have hand-washing facilities or access to drinking water, and there was an inconsistent approach to information about amenities, for example showers or toilet paper
- Detainees were informed of their rights and treated courteously, but there was insufficient privacy when potentially confidential issues were raised at custody desks, and no specific policies for children or women

- Healthcare services were reasonable, but clinical governance was poor, as was record-keeping. There were good mental health and drugs services.
- There was insufficient oversight by the UK Border Agency of the detainees held on their behalf in custody suites, and no specific operating standards or instructions for these detainees.

Anne Owers and Sir Ronnie Flanagan said:

“This second joint inspection of police custody suites in a London Borough provides important independent assurance that most aspects of police detention in Islington are conducted professionally and with care. The report identifies a number of areas where further improvements are needed and it is hoped that this will assist the Borough Commander and the Metropolitan Police’s Custody Directorate to move further towards best practice.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A full copy of the joint report into Islington BCU is available from <http://inspectrates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>
2. These joint inspections form a key part of the joint work programme for the criminal justice inspectorates, agreed with Ministers, and arise from the UK’s international obligation to ensure the regular independent inspection of all places of detention.
3. The Metropolitan Police Service has 76 custody suites designated under PACE for the reception of detainees.
4. The joint inspection took place between 19 – 23 May 2008.
5. Anne Owers is available for media interviews. Please call 0203 334 3526 to arrange an interview.

