



SEPTEMBER 2020

WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

- ▶ This inspection looked at the standard of police custody in Northern Ireland (NI) and the experience of detainees. Adults and children in police custody are called detainees and are held in police station cells until they are released or taken to court.
- ▶ Inspections of police custody in NI are carried out by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) as designated bodies of the UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to carry out visits to places of detention and to monitor the treatment of, and conditions for, detainees in line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment (OPCAT).

WHAT IS THE OPCAT AND THE NPM?

- ▶ The OPCAT is an international human rights treaty that the United Kingdom (UK) Government has agreed to. It is designed to strengthen protection for people who are detained.
- ▶ The OPCAT requires that treaty Governments designate a NPM to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations about the prevention of ill-treatment.
- ▶ In the UK the NPM is made up of 21 visiting or inspecting bodies that visit places of detention including prisons, police custody, immigration detention centres, children's secure accommodation and mental health detention. In NI the NPM bodies who monitor police custody also include the Northern Ireland Policing Board's (NIPB) Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. More details about the UK NPM can be found on the website www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk
- ▶ This is the third inspection of police custody by CJI and RQIA since the NPM was established in 2009.

WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THIS INSPECTION?

- ▶ CJI Inspectors looked at the treatment and conditions in custody as well as strategic arrangements and legal processes. RQIA Inspectors reviewed the health care provision and arrangements in police custody.
- ▶ The inspection used standards for police custody developed by partner inspectorates in England and Wales, adapted for use in NI, to assess the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI's) delivery of police custody and ensure consistency of practice with other UK jurisdictions.

HOW DID YOU CONDUCT THIS INSPECTION?

- ▶ This inspection involved consultation with stakeholders who had an interest in police custody. Surveys of detainees who had experienced police custody, interviews and focus groups with staff working in police custody and visits to operational custody suites were undertaken before the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were introduced.
- ▶ Inspectors assessed data and documentation provided by the PSNI and reviewed 177 custody records.



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WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- ▶ Detainees were generally positive about their experiences of police custody and their treatment by custody staff.
- ▶ Police custody was well managed, with efficient processes for ensuring detainees were not held for long periods of time.
- ▶ Staff were skilled in dealing with vulnerable and challenging detainees.
- ▶ The custody cells were well maintained and conditions detainees were held in were good.
- ▶ A pilot project in Belfast, involving nurses employed to deliver most health care assessments and treatments, was working well and welcomed by police officers and custody staff.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors have made 13 recommendations for improvement including:

At a strategic level (leadership level):

- ▶ Current legislation on the use of bail for children needs to be reformed to ensure children are released from police cells at the earliest opportunity.
- ▶ Discussions with health and social care partners need to restart to address the issue of 'Looked After' children in police custody.
- ▶ The nurse-led model for health care in police custody suites should be rolled out across NI at the earliest opportunity.
- ▶ Systems should be developed for the joint analysis of incidents or complaints about health care and to ensure quality and consistency in the services provided by Forensic Medical Officers.
- ▶ A suitable model to ensure equal access to acute mental health care for people detained in police custody across NI should be agreed.

At an operational level (on the ground level):

- ▶ Further develop monitoring of equality and diversity information from detainees.
- ▶ Take action to improve the consistency of practice across the police custody estate on:
 - cleaning of clinical and non-clinical areas;
 - health care equipment;
 - access to clinical records; and
 - the management of medications.
- ▶ Review current guidance on detainee care plans and reinforce the need for sound decision making and better recording of care plans on the custody record in line with standards, as well as improving the quality of analysis and recording of pre-release risk assessments.

