

Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary (July 2024)

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Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

The removal of someone's liberties through an arrest comes with strict oversight and processes to ensure the rights and welfare of detainees are upheld. Continuous improvements and reviews are necessary to address emerging challenges and maintain high standards. By focusing on fair treatment of detainees and transparent operational delivery, policing can continue to uphold its commitment to public trust and justice.

In the recent HMICFRS inspection into Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) custody, it's positive to see notable improvements have been observed by the inspectorate across the forces custody delivery. Specifically it was noted around respectful detainee treatment, good support for frontline officers when responding to incidents involving people with mental health conditions, and providing good support for detainees with substance misuse needs. I do recognise that during this inspection, governance and oversight of use of force haven't improved enough. The inspection team identified two causes for concern which require immediate action, and six areas for improvement.

I am satisfied that proactive steps are already being initiated to address these recommendations. The force has been recruiting additional detention officers to fortify resources, reflecting a commitment to ensuring both operational efficiency and detainee welfare. This initiative highlights the swift response of HIOW Constabulary to inspectorate feedback. There remains a significant need to refine custody records and address risks associated with occasional low staffing levels.

HIOW's custody infrastructure is notably advanced, with two out of its four facilities being described as state-of-the-art. These modern facilities are among the best in the country, setting a benchmark for other forces. It is important to acknowledge that such high standards are essential in maintaining the integrity and functionality of police operations while also ensuring the dignity and rights of those in custody. It was noted that the information necessary for oversight is at times either missing or inaccurate. This issue is exacerbated by the incomplete documentation of use of force incidents, where forms are not always completed after every use of force, leading to substantial gaps in the recorded data: *"The constabulary therefore can't assure itself, the police and crime commissioner, or the public that the use of force in custody is always justified, necessary and proportionate. This hasn't improved since our last inspection and is still a cause of concern."* I am confident that the force will ensure this identified cause for concern is addressed immediately and I will seek regular assurances from my Chief Constable on this.

As Police and Crime Commissioner I continue to support my Chief Constable to deliver an excellent customer service across policing in HIOW, to meet the needs of detainees entering our custody suites whilst following due process.

Donna Jones
Police and Crime Commissioner

Response from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary

Both prior to, and since inspection, HIOWC has worked diligently to ensure custody services are of a required standard. The report recognised the force delivers safe detention for the 25,000 people who every year come through our custody suites across our sites in Basingstoke, Portsmouth, Southampton and Newport.

It highlighted our clear governance structures, clean and respectful environment and commented on the quality of our care provision and facilities, including the support of a mental health nurse for those suffering from mental health episodes.

It found custody staff and officers were well trained and equipped to deliver in this important role for our communities, operating in accordance with the College of Policing Code of Practice.

It also noted our custody personnel are polite and treat detainees with respect and dignity, showing empathy and understanding towards them and their circumstances.

Authorisation of detention is proportionate and appropriate, and the inspection reflected positively on the work to divert children and vulnerable adults away from custody.

As in all inspections, there were areas for improvement which we have already responded to as part of our ongoing Custody Improvement Plan. This is tracked through a fortnightly steering group within our Criminal Justice Command and has strategic oversight by the relevant Assistant Chief Constable.

There were no issues identified regarding any inappropriate use of force by officers and staff and this recording process has now been strengthened. Use of force on a detainee is only ever done as a last resort and we have clear guidance, training and scrutiny to ensure when we do apply force, it is proportionate and necessary. This is overseen as part of the force's Policing Powers Board, overseen by the relevant Assistant Chief Constable, and the quarterly Use of Force scrutiny panel attended by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

We welcome the inspection in this important area of policing and continue to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all detainees

Sam De Reya
Deputy Chief Constable

Recommendations:

Recommendation: With immediate effect, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary should scrutinise the use of force in custody to show that it is necessary, justified and proportionate when used. This scrutiny should be based on accurate information and robust quality assurance.

OPCC response: I will immediately seek assurances from my Chief Constable that scrutiny into the use of force in custody is undertaken and outlines necessity that it is justified and proportionate when used.

Recommendation: With immediate effect, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary should mitigate risk to detainees by making sure its risk management and release processes are safe. And it should follow authorised professional practice guidance and the constabulary's own policies.

OPCC response: I will immediately ensure that my Chief Constable has put the necessary practice and processes in place to ensure risk management and release processes are safe, and adhere to professional practice guidance and the constabulary's own policies.