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WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE CUSTODY SUITES – VARIED QUALITY IN SPITE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The quality of police custody suites in West Yorkshire varied even though strategic leadership was sound, said Dame Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, and Denis O'Connor, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the 13 suites in the area.

Inspectors found:

- The quality of accommodation varied from one suite which was well maintained to another which was hardly fit for use (and has since been closed). Showers and toilets were often inadequately screened.
- Strategic leadership was good but findings from custody visits were not always acted on.
- There was poor management of forensic samples and DNA, which needed urgent attention and could undermine prosecutions and public confidence.
- Safety arrangements were generally adequate, although not all staff were issued with cell keys and ligature knives, and detainees were not always instructed in the use of the cell bell.
- PACE was properly adhered to, but insufficient attention was paid to the particular needs of women, children and immigration detainees.
- Healthcare services were poor and some healthcare accommodation was not fit for use. Links with drug referral workers were poor and record-keeping inadequate.

The Chief Inspectors concluded:

“This inspection of a sample of custody suites in West Yorkshire has illustrated a wide range of service quality. Senior managers need to assure themselves that their strategic aspirations are actually delivered on the ground, as this is clearly not always the case. Indeed, some shortfalls reflect a lack of action in response to the force’s own internal monitoring processes.

“This report sets out a number of recommendations for improvement and it is hoped that this will assist the Chief Constable and the Police Authority to develop further the quality of custodial provision in their force.”

Notes for Editors

1. The full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 1 July 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>.
2. The announced inspection of West Yorkshire PCS took place from 27-29 October.
3. West Yorkshire has 13 suites designated under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984 (PACE) for the reception of detainees. These provide up to 250 cells and 52 interview rooms. Limited resources restricted our inspection to a sample of suites: Leeds Bridewell in the City and Holbeck Basic Command Unit (BCU), Stainbeck and Killingbeck in North East Leeds BCU and Bradford South BCU. Short visits were also undertaken to Pudsey, Weetwood and Pontefract.
4. 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 3427.