



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Wednesday, 08 November, 2023

PRESS RELEASE

Police Custody in Dumfries and Galloway Inspected

Healthcare providers at police custody centres in Dumfries and Galloway have been advised to improve prescribing procedures and the storage, dispensing and administration of medicines.

Concerns were raised during inspections by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) of the primary police custody centres in Stranraer and Dumfries and are detailed in a report, HMICS Custody Inspection - Dumfries and Galloway, which is published today (Wednesday, 08 November).

The third joint onsite inspection by the two scrutiny bodies, it aimed to assess the treatment of, and conditions for, individuals detained in the Dumfries and Galloway region.

Mr Mark Hargreaves, HM Assistant Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, said: "We identified safety issues regarding medicines at both locations where there appeared to be open access to them and limited control measures in place. In line with existing escalation protocols, we brought this to the immediate attention of the health and social care provider.

In recognition of the risk and with an emphasis on seeking suitable permanent solutions, we have requested the completion of an action plan to address these issues within a three month period.

We were also concerned to find that, at times, custody staff at the Dumfries centre had been instructed to prepare blister packs or take stock medications from the store and administer them to detainees. Custody staff should not be asked to do this - it's not considered safe nor acceptable practice and raises patient safety concerns."

Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership is responsible for the delivery of healthcare and forensic medical testing in the two centres which are located within the police stations in Dumfries and Stranraer. There is no immediate access to healthcare staff at either centre and while there is an on call service for Dumfries, Stranraer rarely had onsite healthcare. Forensic physicians, who are all practising GPs with Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine (FFLM) training, provide telephone advice only to Stranraer and do not visit the custody facility.

The review team considered the practice, in Stranraer, for blood pressure monitoring to be performed by untrained police custody staff and the readings given to the on call Forensic Physician via a phone call to pose a significant safety risk and should be stopped.

The joint report highlighted the good service provided by the mental health in-reach team and that detainees were complimentary about custody staff and the clean and suitable condition of the custody centres. It also welcomed the introduction of digital handheld tablets which enabled contemporaneous records to be made of observations and interactions with detainees.

Containing 14 recommendations for Police Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway HSCP, it outlined the need for improvement in the arrangements for detainee observations at the Dumfries centre, describing them as not fit for purpose due to their proximity to the charge bar and resultant lack of privacy.

It also noted that anti-harm clothing was only available in large sizes and not suitable for women or small and average sized detainees. This led to some being in standard clothing but under direct observation which had a disproportionate impact on the detainee and police resources. Since our inspection, we have been advised that progress is being made to address this issue.

Police custody is a high risk area of policing business and, as such, has been subject to considerable scrutiny by HMICS since Police Scotland was established with 11 reports published. These reports remain relevant as Police Scotland continues to address recommendations made. The service has made considerable progress with implementing previous recommendations and improvement actions in respect of custody centres and is working to address those that remain outstanding.

Ends

FOOTNOTE

This inspection, which was unannounced and took place in June 2023, involved a review of the Police Scotland National Custody System (NCS) looking at a sample of 42 custody records from Dumfries and Stranraer custody centres. Interviews were conducted with detainees and staff during the inspection and an assessment was made of the premises, including the quality of the cells, key processes and procedures.

HMICS has developed a custody inspection programme in partnership with HIS which will comprise three joint inspections in 2023-24.

The inspection contributed to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by NPM, an independent body or group of bodies which monitor detainee treatment and conditions. HMICS is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

Ends notes

NOTES TO EDITORS

The HMICS Custody Inspection Report - Dumfries and Galloway is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.scot from 1100hrs, Wednesday, 08 November 2023.

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