

1 December 2015 020 3681 2775

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**NATIONAL PREVENTIVE MECHANISM PUBLISHES ANNUAL REPORT INTO UK DETENTION: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT A CONCERN**

Inspectors and monitors of prisons and other detention facilities across the UK today published the first national account of the use of solitary confinement and isolation in every type of custody across the UK. They warned that the use of solitary confinement and isolation was often unacknowledged as it was called by so many different names, and so was inconsistent and too often involved poor regimes and inadequate safeguards.

Twenty independent inspectorates that monitor all prisons, police custody, immigration detention, secure mental hospitals and other forms of detention in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (known as the National Preventive Mechanism or NPM) work together to deliver the UK’s UN treaty obligations to prevent detainees being mistreated in custody.

The findings were a major part of the UK NPM’s sixth annual report, which also gave an overview of its work monitoring detention in prisons, police custody, court cells, customs custody facilities, children’s secure accommodation, immigration, military and mental health facilities.

On behalf of the 20 members of the UK NPM, Chief Inspector of Prisons Nick Hardwick said:

“In many cases, detainees are isolated legitimately to prevent harm or provide a calm environment that is in their best interest. However, prolonged solitary confinement or isolation can also have a detrimental effect on a detainee’s mental health, exacerbate behaviour problems and increase the risks of their ill-treatment. It is already clear that poor governance, inconsistent practice and a soothing terminology allow some individuals to be held in solitary confinement for long periods without adequate safeguards - and that includes some of the most vulnerable people in detention, such as children and mentally ill people.”

NPM members monitored and inspected solitary confinement and isolation throughout 2014/15 and developed a picture of practices across a range of establishments. Solitary confinement and isolation went under many names: separation, single unlock, loss of association, basic, group separation, time out, low stimulus, intensive care suite, single-person wards, confined to room, duty of care - all of these isolated detainees and in some instances amounted to solitary confinement.

The report found that some of this euphemistic terminology created a risk of obscuring the seriousness of the practices and the need for rigorous monitoring and governance. All these processes involve individuals locked up on their own for long periods with limited contact with other detainees or staff.

The review shows that it would be possible for two men with identical mental health needs, disruptive behaviour and self-harm risks to be held in very different conditions, depending where they ended up:

* a man in a prison segregation unit might be locked in a dirty cell for 23 hours a day with no activity apart from a radio to listen to and very limited human contact;
* a man with identical characteristics might also be isolated in a secure hospital, where he would be kept in his own room, allowed as many of his own things as possible and visited regularly by staff and health professionals who would help him reintegrate;
* a boy of 16 in a young offender institution might be disciplined by being confined in an adult segregation unit for some days; and
* the same boy in a secure training centre might be confined in his own room for a few hours for the same behaviour.

The NPM is made up of 20 independent bodies with powers to inspect regularly all places of detention. Being part of the NPM brings into their remit the clear purpose of preventing ill-treatment of anyone deprived of their liberty. The NPM was established in 2009 by the UK government to meet its UN treaty obligations and is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Through regular, independent monitoring of places of detention – conducted through thousands of visits every year – the NPM plays a key role in preventing ill-treatment in detention.

The NPM used a widely accepted international definition of solitary confinement for this work. This definition has now been adopted in new UN prison rules, known as ‘The Mandela Rules’. Over the next year NPM members will use these findings and the new Mandela Rules to develop consistent monitoring standards to reduce the use of solitary confinement and prevent them from being ill treated.

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the annual report can be found on NPM website from 1 December 2015 at <http://www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk>
2. **Isolation** - The physical isolation of individuals who are confined to cells/rooms for disciplinary, protective, preventive or administrative reasons, or who by virtue of the physical environment or regime find themselves largely isolated from others. Restrictions on social contacts and available stimuli are greater than for the general detainee population.   
   **Solitary confinement** - The physical isolation of individuals who are confined to cells/rooms for more than 22 hours a day. Meaningful contact with others is reduced to a minimum and there is a quantitative or qualitative reduction in stimuli. Available stimuli and occasional social contacts are seldom freely chosen, generally monotonous and often not empathetic.
3. The UK’s National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) was established in March 2009 under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). A United Nations (UN) treaty, OPCAT was ratified by the UK in 2003. OPCAT requires the UK to have in place a ‘national preventive mechanism’ to visit all places of detention and monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees.
4. The NPM consists of 20 existing bodies throughout the UK, which are independent and have the right regularly to monitor places of detention. It is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
5. The 20 bodies who make up the NPM are:   
   *England and Wales*

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

Children’s Commissioner for England (CCE)  
Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP)  
Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)  
Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW)  
Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB)  
Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)

Lay Observers (LO)

Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Service and Skills (Ofsted)

*Northern Ireland*

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI)

Independent Monitoring Boards (Northern Ireland) (IMBNI)

Northern Ireland Policing Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme (NIPBICVS)

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

*Scotland* Care Inspectorate (CI)

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS)

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS)

Independent Custody Visitors Scotland (ICVS)  
 Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (MWCS)

Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC)

1. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons press office on 020 3681 2775 or 07880 787452 if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick. You may also contact Emma Mackintosh, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales’ press office on 0300 062 8975. You may also contact Meloney McVeigh, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, on 02890 765742. You may also contact Jenifer Johnston, Scottish Human Rights Commission, on 07467 447425.