



PRISONER ESCORT AND COURT CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A follow-up review of inspection recommendations

April 2014



Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
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List of abbreviations

CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
DoJ	Department of Justice
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
JJC	Juvenile Justice Centre
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NICTS	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence (Act)
PECCS	Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
SPAR	Supporting Prisoners at Risk
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency



Chief Inspector's Foreword

The treatment, care and safety of prisoners extends beyond the walls of prisons and if done correctly, can help set the scene for their eventual rehabilitation.

This is a follow-up review to the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) thematic inspection of Prisoner Escort and Court Custody arrangements which was published in October 2010. At that time, there were concerns about the cost effectiveness of the existing arrangements and overall treatment of prisoners as they were being processed to and from custody and court.

CJI made a number of recommendations and identified areas for improvement most of which fell to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and in particular the Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service (PECCS).

This review found that considerable progress has been made by the PECCS, through becoming more cost effective and at the same time, transforming the experience of prisoners. Inspectors particularly welcome the use of dynamic risk assessment to reduce instances of prisoners being handcuffed in cellular vehicles and the separation of female and male prisoners in the majority of cases.

Achieving these changes to the custom and practice which has dominated the culture of the Prison Service is to be applauded. We acknowledge the role played by the PECCS management and suggest that these achievements are a beacon for others to follow in transforming service delivery.

This review was conducted by Stephen Dolan. My sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this work.

Brendan McGuigan
Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

April 2014



Follow-up Review



Introduction

Background to the follow-up review

In October 2010 CJI published the findings of its inspection of the escort and court custody arrangements for prisoners in Northern Ireland¹. Around 18,000 prisoners are escorted to and from courts, prisons, hospitals, police custody, interviews and the juvenile detention centre with a total of over 200,000 people per year moving through the courts system.

During the time of the first inspection there were four providers of escorting and court custody services in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Prison Service Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service (PECCS); the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI); Resource, a private contractor working on behalf of the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC); and G4S, a private contractor working on behalf of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). At that time, the PECCS accounted for 54% of prisoner escorts and the PSNI 38%, Resource and G4S managed the other 8% between them.

In 2010 the PECCS met eight of the 10 standards set by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS), only missing the timeliness target (17% delayed; target 5%) and the target to fully segregate female and males prisoners under escort. Aside from the formal targets, the views of prisoners were surveyed and these gave a less positive assessment of the service. The comfort and cleanliness of custody vans, treatment by escort staff and feelings of safety by prisoners in transit were the main areas highlighted in the survey and in all these cases, the score was more negative when compared with similar service providers in England and Wales.

A business delivery proposal presented by the NIPS secured the contract to provide escort and custody services to the Courts within Northern Ireland with an estimated annual saving of £600,000 compared to a private sector provider. Inspectors saw the absence of an actual market tendering process as a weakness in this business proposal, especially as the high sick absence levels prevalent in the PECCS at the time could eradicate much of the potential saving. A major recommendation of the original report was a market test to confirm the cost effectiveness of the escort and custody service.

The escort and custody services of other agencies were also reviewed as part of the inspection report. The PSNI used full-time officers to escort prisoners to court appearances with indicative savings of £700,000 per annum should PECCS staff perform this duty. There were also potential economies of scale should the escort and custody services provided by Resource and G4S be delivered by a single contractor.

¹ An Inspection of Prisoner Escort and Court Custody arrangements in Northern Ireland; CJI, October 2010.

Changes since the 2010 inspection

Inspectors found there were a number of major positive changes since the last inspection. Chief among these was the use of dynamic risk assessment to reduce instances of prisoners being handcuffed in cellular vehicles. The significance of this development should not be underestimated. The modus operandi of prison officers implanted through policy, procedure and cultural obligation is to handcuff prisoners in transit without exception. A similar success is the separation of female and male prisoners under escort in the majority of cases. This is a good example of innovative management practice in the face of vested custom and practice.

Perhaps the most significant achievement is the new arrangement between the NIPS and the PSNI to supervise and transport Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) prisoners from Musgrave police holding centre to Laganside Court complex in Belfast for court hearings and if necessary, on to prison custody. This one development has resulted in a significant saving to the PSNI by releasing police officers from undertaking court duties to being available for front line policing duties. The PECCS have successfully taken on this extra responsibility with its existing resources.

Another major improvement to the PECCS operation is the imminent restructuring of the PECCS management into four regional hubs that better align service delivery to the NICTS locations. This proposal will remove the restrictions imposed by the current arrangement of deploying staff to a single courthouse and operating all resources from a single base at Maghaberry prison. As well as increasing the resilience of the PECCS to peaks and troughs in demand through greater mobility of staff across a group of courthouses, the regional structure provides flexible leave arrangements for staff.

The service could be further improved with modifications to a number of courthouses and agreement with regard to sharing of services within the wider Department of Justice (DoJ) agencies.

The follow-up review 2014

The NIPS PECCS team were asked to complete a self assessment of their progress against the recommendations in the original report. Inspectors then gathered evidence through analysis of documentation, observation, interviews with stakeholders and structured interviews with management.

A general assessment of developments to date is provided along with an individual assessment of each recommendation. Finally, an overall conclusion of the level of achievement against the recommendations is made. The headline figure is that 13 of 17 recommendations have been achieved, with progress made in the other four. The PECCS management also made very significant headway in implementing seven out of eight areas for improvement identified in the original inspection report.



Progress against recommendations

Recommendation 1

The DoJ should conduct a full market test of escorting and court custody. This should include provision for JJC escorting and custody, PSNI escorting and custody and a sub contract, if necessary, to accommodate UKBA escorting and custody.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

The NIPS has conducted a feasibility study of the cost effectiveness of the PECCS operations and of its value as a shared resource to the wider DoJ family, which indicated that it would be more cost effective to retain it within the NIPS.

The NIPS senior management agree with the recommendation that a single court custody and transport service provider for the DoJ would be more beneficial but that this role could be adequately provided by the PECCS. To this end, a new management structure has been created and a commitment given to strengthening the PECCS group to bring the group staffing level to its operational requirement.

PECCS management are actively seeking ways in which to develop the PECCS as a shared resource for other Justice departments such as the PSNI, JJC and UKBA.

Inspectors' assessment

In the initial inspection two aspects to the proposal to retain the service in-house led to Inspectors querying the value for money assessment. Firstly, the cost of sick absence in 2010 equated to £300,000 per year and negated the projected cost saving in the original business case. Secondly, there was no direct comparison with a private sector bidder to underpin value for money.

Since the initial inspection two major improvements have been made. Firstly, a reduction in sick absence of 1,279 days equating to £200,000 efficiency for the PECCS that has substantially reduced the risk in the original inspection assessment of savings being eradicated. Within this figure, absences due to injuries at work decreased by 70% from 1,438 days to 437 days. Secondly, the PECCS management and the PSNI agreed to the PECCS escorting PSNI prisoners from Musgrave holding centre to Laganside Court complex in Belfast at no additional cost to the PECCS but with a consequent saving to the PSNI. The roll out of other PSNI centralised custody centres including weekend courts will further extend this service.

Taking all these factors into consideration, Inspectors assess that PECCS management have indicated that retaining the PECCS function within the DoJ is cost effective. The point of the original recommendation was to demonstrate value for money and Inspectors assess this as having been demonstrated. Therefore the recommendation is deemed achieved.

As the PECCS develops and expands to become a DoJ-wide service, consideration should be given to substantially improving the infrastructure at the PECCS headquarters, to allow the PECCS team to manage the logistics associated with increased workloads.

Recommendation 2

The PSNI contract out the escorting of prisoners and court custody duties at Special Courts, either as part of a wider contract or through negotiation with the current contractor.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

As the PECCS have already demonstrated they are providing a value for money service at recommendation 1 and the need to contract out is not necessary, the PECCS have already taken responsibility for the transporting of PSNI PACE prisoners from Musgrave police holding centre to Laganside Courts complex in Belfast.

The PECCS is in discussions with the PSNI regarding PECCS coverage of weekend Special Courts and taking charge at Court and transporting of PACE juveniles. The PECCS are keen to hold discussions with other DoJ agencies with similar business needs.

Inspectors' assessment

The PECCS team have agreed new protocols to manage the escorting of prisoners from the PSNI custody suite at Musgrave police holding centre to the Laganside Court complex in Belfast with consequent savings to the PSNI. These should be extended, where appropriate, to include all other DoJ agencies.

In light of the savings delivered to date, the positive comparison with other escorting providers and the reduced cost of sick absence in the PECCS, the original recommendation to deliver cost savings through a contracted-out service is no longer considered necessary.

Recommendation 3

The NICTS should prepare a business case based on a comprehensive estate strategy aimed at developing a NICTS estate that is fit for purpose.

Status: Partially achieved

Agency response

A DoJ-wide estate strategy is under development. The Strategic Investment Board is working alongside the DoJ to formulate an estate strategy including the NICTS Estate.

Consultation with stakeholders identified major work would be required to make all cells wheelchair accessible. It was agreed that given the extremely low numbers of wheelchair bound prisoners who are dealt with by the courts coupled with the prohibitive costs, that the NIPS would manage this at local level.

The NICTS Estates branch has regular contact with NIPS officials to discuss specific concerns raised about the cell area throughout the court estate. To date there has been no issue around wheelchair access.

The PECCS has had regular dialogue with the NICTS Operations Director and other NICTS colleagues on the fabric of the cellular accommodation. Such issues range from the identification and provision of portable water, cleanliness and refurbishment of cells, to security improvements required for the implementation of a 'handcuffing by exception' policy at various courts.

Inspectors' assessment

It is acknowledged that improvements have been made and protocols put in place to overcome some of the obstacles posed by the current courts estate. To reflect the positive actions taken by the NICTS and the PECCS management, the recommendation is deemed partially achieved. There is still some scope to conduct routine maintenance while the estates strategy is developed and implemented. Consideration should be given to prisoner work parties painting custody cells.

Recommendation 4

Prisoners should not routinely travel handcuffed in secure vehicles unless individual assessments demonstrate a high level of risk.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

A 'handcuffing by exception' policy was introduced at all courthouses with a secure vehicle dock. As a result over 60% of prisoners are no longer routinely handcuffed in secure vehicles. A risk assessment was conducted to examine the level or need for cuffing between court custody cells and the courts. The use of video linkage between the Bail Office and the court custody cells is also under consideration.

Inspectors' assessment

The PECCS staff no longer routinely handcuff with individual prisoners being risk assessed. In certain instances the courthouse infrastructure is also security risk assessed and prisoners are handcuffed at a number of venues. However, Inspectors nevertheless regard the recommendation achieved as a risk assessment approach is universally adopted. It is no small achievement to introduce this change of practice. The policies and custom and practice of the Prison Service is to routinely handcuff all prisoners during virtually all movements and initiating a change whereby the majority of prisoners are no longer handcuffed is creditable.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that male and female prisoners are transported separately.

Status: Substantially Achieved

Agency response

Due to the geographical and dispersed nature of the courts, together with the limited size of our vehicle fleet, it is not possible to guarantee that segregation will occur 100% of the time.

However, we have taken the following important measures which should ensure that the likelihood of vehicle sharing will be reduced and in the most recent assessment in December 2013, 84% of females were transported separately:

- *The PECCS have provided two vehicles specially adapted for female use (softer seats, seatbelts and more space);*
- *Where sharing is unavoidable, we have given gender specific policy instruction on best management for the preservation of dignity. Policy provided; and*
- *Where we know females are pregnant, regardless of whether they are remand or PACE productions, every effort will be made to deploy a 'soft' vehicle for transportation.*

We have fully consulted with both Hydebank Wood management and Ash House prisoners' forum (females) on these matters. They have complimented us on our approach and understand the progress that the PECCS is making.

In order to develop a wider understanding of the specialist nature of transporting and supervising prisoners, we held an awareness event for all administration support and policy development staff at Dundonald House, placing our specially adapted vehicle for females on display.

As part of our regionalisation plan we intend to introduce a 'sweeper' system to provide flexibility in the collection of prisoners.

Notwithstanding these improvements, we accept that prisoner transportation will need to be kept under continuous improvement.

Inspectors' assessment

Within the exigencies of the available resources and recognising that in some instances sharing will be unavoidable, this recommendation was viewed as substantially achieved. There were some instances where sharing of vehicles occurred but this has significantly reduced. In November and December 2013, 100% and 84% of females travelled separately. The PECCS management have also introduced improved protocols for the handling of female transport. The consultation exercise with prisoners at Ash House was well received and provided positive feedback to the PECCS team.

Recommendation 6

Staff should explicitly explain to prisoners complaints procedures, how to attract the attention of staff and issue relevant information booklets, including what to do in the case of an accident.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

Staff are instructed to explain these matters to prisoners.

Regarding complaints from prisoners already remanded to prison, or being remanded to prison custody it is explained to prisoners that complaints raised in court areas that cannot be dealt with immediately are referred to their prison establishment to be dealt with there. The PECCS have recently considered the need for a procedure to address complaints from short-term prisoners who come from the body of the court but do not go to prison. This does not often happen but a draft staff procedure for recording any such complaints will be introduced by March 2014.

Furthermore, the NIPS has produced a variety of leaflets (multi-lingual) to provide information and address potential prisoner concerns. These are available in all courthouses.

In relation to vehicle safety, we have put multi-lingual signage into each cellular compartment. The NIPS has also produced an audio safety announcement which was rolled out to the vehicle fleet in January 2014.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors visited the court custody suites and evidenced the multi-lingual information sheets. Prisoner Custody Officers were aware of the requirement to explain safety issues to prisoners. There were safety notices in the vans inspected by Inspectors and the audio safety announcement was also demonstrated to Inspectors. This was an innovative approach and is commended.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that reading materials be allowed in court custody cells in line with the practice in England and Wales.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

Some English language materials are provided in most courts. In addition to English, we provide reading materials in Chinese, Polish and Lithuanian. The PECCS is working with establishments to develop options for allowing prisoners to bring their preferred reading material from prison to read when waiting in court cells.

We also have had community/consular contact and have extended an invitation to officials to visit our court facilities for their own information.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors sampled the reading materials on offer. There was a range of material including foreign language publications. The acquisition of foreign language publications through liaison with the respective Embassies and Consulates represents a significant achievement. Prisoners confirmed that officers made them aware of the reading materials on offer. Officers confirmed they are issued with standing instructions in respect of the distribution of reading materials.

Recommendation 8

The PECCS should establish a minimum standard regarding prisoners' rights to breakfast and additional minor sustenance after six hours in custody.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

Providing breakfast meals is the sole responsibility of prison governors as well as providing a packed lunch. In some cases breakfast foods are left in the prisoner's cell the night before or prisoners are given breakfast in reception areas. In a recent survey by the PECCS most prisoners self reported that they had the opportunity of breakfast before leaving the establishment for court. However, some prisoners (for a variety of reasons) still arrive at reception, without having eaten breakfast.

The PECCS staff check with prisoners before they leave the establishment and report to reception staff instances when prisoners self report that they did not receive breakfast.

The PECCS has developed and implemented operational instructions to provide all prisoners with tea/coffee/juice and biscuits at court. This ensures that prisoners have some sustenance before going into court.

We also provide a hot meal to all PACE prisoners and to prisoners from establishments where six or more hours are likely to elapse between their prison supplied packed lunch and their estimated time of return. Records of this are kept in court areas.

Whilst the PECCS staff at all courts can provide hot drinks and biscuits, not all courts have adequate facilities for the provision of microwave ready meals. We are working with the NICTS in relation to the necessary remedial work.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for the provision of meals to prisoners by the PECCS team and confirmed that prisoners are receiving meals at lunch and also if they are in custody away from their establishment for more than six hours. The provision of hot meals is also a very positive step welcomed by prisoners. The PECCS management have overcome a number of obstacles to achieve this recommendation. A further consequence of this change in procedure is a reduced risk to officers leaving the courthouse to purchase foodstuffs. The meal packs are also lower cost than the sandwich packs previously used.

Recommendation 9

The Self Harm and Suicide Prevention Policy documents should be updated to refer to the Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) processes and the PECCS Senior Prisoner Custody Staff not Maybin staff.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

These revisions have been made.

Furthermore, the PECCS staff have been given policy instruction on the quality assurance processes for SPARS. Senior management can show that remedial actions are taken where necessary.

These actions bring the PECCS into line with IG 03/13 'Safer Custody (SPAR) Monitoring – Management Responsibilities' issued by NIPS (HQ).

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors have reviewed the revisions to the policy documents and the instructions given to the PECCS staff. This recommendation is achieved.

Recommendation 10

Waiting times for those in court custody should be recorded and compared to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) benchmarks.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

The PECCS have checked and can confirm that HMIP has no published benchmark standards for this measurement.

Notwithstanding, the PECCS collects this data, with courts reporting the information to the PECCS Base, thereby enabling decisions to be made on the deployment of sweeper vans and the rerouting of others.

The PECCS also record the waiting times for those in court that are being released. Excessive waiting times are queried.

Inspectors' assessment

Excessive waiting times were not an issue reported by the NICTS. The data collected by the PECCS gave a clear record of the waiting times and no significant problems were identified. In the absence of specific comparators with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) being available, the progress made by the PECCS management was deemed sufficient to record this recommendation as achieved.

Recommendation 11

The PECCS should define maximum operational capacity levels taking into account the requirements of segregation.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

The PECCS have done some preliminary work, devising an algorithm that relates available cell space to the number of categories present.

The PECCS have a maximum fleet of 27 vehicles which can accommodate a total of 178 prisoners at any one time. Ideally, the PECCS would seek to operate up to a maximum of 90% of this capacity, to allow for essential vehicle cleaning and maintenance. The PECCS intends to increase the vehicular cell capacity by a further 20 cells (11%) during 2014.

Cell plans are available for each court cells area which comprises a total of 151 cells. Cell plans ensure that females and juveniles are held separate from adult males in all circumstances. Within the adult male population segregation may also take place depending on security categorisation and other known risk factors.

On average the daily prisoner population held in court custody areas is significantly lower than the total accommodation threshold for the courts areas and only under extreme circumstances (such as G8) would they be reached. Notwithstanding, contingency plans are in place for managing extreme circumstances should prisoner numbers exceed cellular capacity in any court area.

The PECCS and the NICTS senior managers keep cellular capacity and related issues under review.

Inspectors' assessment

The evidence is that the PECCS and the NICTS successfully liaise to match the available cellular capacity to the demands of prisoner numbers. The segregation of various types of prisoners, juveniles and male and female prisoners was adequately managed with no specific issues raised with Inspectors. The additional analysis by the PECCS indicates that loading capacity is adequate. The longer term improvements lie with the DoJ Estate Strategy.

Recommendation 12

The PECCS in consultation with the NICTS and the Office of the Lord Chief Justice should conduct a risk assessment of court custody suites to designate secure and non-secure areas with cuffing only used in the former.

Status: Partially achieved

Agency response

Implemented in respect of courts where there is a secure vehicle dock.

Security risk assessments of court areas have previously been done. However, as previously stated it is our intention, in conjunction with the NICTS, to critically reassess these Risk Assessments with a view to increasing the potential for non-cuffing to be extended to other court areas.

It should be noted that the PECCS staff at each of the courts in consultation with judges, operate local instructions in regard to handcuffing.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors note the improvements in respect of reducing routine cuffing of prisoners. The recommendation is only partially achieved, mostly due to the limitations imposed by the NICTS estate.

Recommendation 13

The PSNI should provide advance warning to the Senior Prisoner Custody Officer of the number of prisoners requiring segregation.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

The PSNI liaison officer at each establishment provides, through the local Security Office, this information for those already detained in prison.

To enable communication of essential information regarding PACE prisoners, bi-monthly meetings between PSNI custody managers and the PECCS have been established to formulate the best means of implementing this protocol.

Inspectors' assessment

The information was being communicated between the PSNI and the PECCS for PACE prisoners. The regular meetings between the custody managers and the PECCS should ensure this continues.

Recommendation 14

It is recommended that the proposed programme of Disability Discrimination Act compliance works includes measures to ensure all cell doors and all toilet doors permit wheelchair access.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

The estate management plan makes provision for wheelchair access to all courthouses except in instances where the structure of the building restricts this. The most recent renewal of the Estate Strategy makes provision for wheelchair access at all courthouses. In the meantime the NICTS Estates Branch has regular contact with NIPS officials to discuss specific concerns raised about the cell area throughout the court estate. To date, there has been no issue around wheelchair access.

The PECCS fulfils its own obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act by having two specially adapted vehicles for wheelchair users.

Inspectors' assessment

Where physically possible, wheelchair access has been implemented and Inspectors viewed the PECCS vehicles fitted for wheelchair access. Other arrangements have been put in place to overcome individual instances where access is restricted. There were no instances of difficulty reported to the Inspectors. The most recent review of the NICTS Estate Strategy includes provision for universal wheelchair access.

Recommendation 15

Higher risk cases should be listed at courts with vehicle parking bays.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

Procedures are in place with the PECCS in relation to Category A prisoners. Liaison between relevant personnel and Agencies continues on a regular basis.

Usually security issues can be quickly resolved following a discussion between the NIPS, the PSNI and the NICTS and there were plenty of recent examples of joint working in a number of very high profile cases.

Joint NIPS/NICTS inspections have taken place and issues such as the location of parked cars and bins which could be used to facilitate an escape were identified and action taken promptly.

Inspectors' assessment

Evidence was provided that in the most recent very high profile cases adequate security measures were implemented. The situation is kept under review and Inspectors were given evidence of the analysis of the allocation of courthouses for higher risk cases.

Recommendation 16

The maximum benefit of video-linking should be realised by assigning a court full-time to video-linked hearings.

Status: Achieved

Agency response

A Magistrates' Court in Laganside is dedicated to video-link bail hearings. Also video-link is used for bail hearings at other court venues and for bail hearings in the High Court. The use of video-links has expanded and 60,000 video-link hearings a year are carried out.

Inspectors' assessment

As far as possible a specific court is dedicated to video-link hearings. Other courts including childrens' court have video-link facilities. High Court appeals are also conducted through video-link. The level of video-link hearings is increasing and Inspectors regard this recommendation as achieved.

Recommendation 17

The PECCS should agree with the NICTS an acceptable tolerance for arrival times at those courts with a 10am start.

Status: Substantially Achieved

Agency response

There is a general acceptance between the NICTS and the PECCS that courts in some areas commence earlier than others, e.g. Laganside Courts generally commence before 10am and outlying courts, e.g. Enniskillen and Londonderry commence at 10:30am. The PECCS actively collect data on prisoner arrival times and investigate instances where 'lates' are reported. For example, in the third business year quarter of 2013-14 there were 10 recorded 'lates' at Belfast courts. This was mostly due to several early morning security incidents causing serious traffic delays and congestion. In these cases, the PECCS Base will alert court managers of anticipated delays.

Notwithstanding, the PECCS accepts the importance of an agreed protocol with the NICTS on court arrival times, balancing this with what is possible in regard to early prisoner unlocks and vehicle deployment.

The PECCS is in consultation with the NICTS on the development of an up-to-date Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will come into effect early in 2014.

The PECCS intend to use this opportunity with the NICTS to include acceptable times for the NICTS to upload 'decisions of court', to enable the PECCS sweeper system to return prisoners to prison custody, or to facilitate their release, as soon as possible.

Inspectors' assessment

The number of late arrivals was low. The NICTS did not raise any specific complaints as the instances of late arrival were due to exceptional circumstances beyond control of the PECCS. The introduction of the MoU will complete implementation of this recommendation.

Areas for Improvement

Although areas for improvement are not formally assessed as part of the follow-up review process, the NIPS have provided an assessment of progress against some of the areas suggested by the Inspectors. Remaining areas for improvement are covered within other area for improvement responses/recommendations with the exception of the area for improvement linked to the UKBA which was not assessed.

1. Prisoners should be offered the option of hot meals.

NIPS Assessment

Hot meals are now being offered to prisoners following Health and Safety assessments and training of personnel.

2. Prisoners in court custody should be offered tea or coffee, risk assessment permitting.

NIPS Assessment

Where facilities permit the preparation of hot food and beverages, prisoners are being offered hot drinks. In the courts where this is not feasible, packaged juice and biscuits are provided.

3. It is recommended the cost and practicalities of offering nicotine substitutes (patches) to prisoners held in custody be assessed.

NIPS Assessment

Advice was sought from the healthcare providers and nicotine patches were not approved by the health authorities. The PECCS management sourced 2mg nicotine replacement therapy lozenges that are approved by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that may be administered under appropriate guidelines.

4. The NIPS should assess the impact on prisoner welfare of the time prisoners spend away from their establishments.

NIPS Assessment

The NIPS is collecting data on waiting times. There is also a survey of prisoners to determine the impact of court processes on their welfare. A specific report was developed that analysed the time moving through reception, waiting time at the Reception and Main Gate. The initial finding is that nearly all prisoners are processed by the PECCS within 30 minutes from Reception.

5. The escort staff should inform prisoners of the procedures in place in the event of an accident.

NIPS Assessment

Multi-lingual language signs have been produced and installed in vehicles since 16 September 2013. An auditory warning and information announcement is played each time prisoners are escorted on a vehicle.

6. All prisoners should be made aware of their entitlements to healthcare when being brought into custody.

NIPS Assessment

Advice has been sought from the healthcare provider. Information leaflets have been issued to courts. The PECCS staff ask prisoners a series of questions before removing them from the Musgrave holding centre which ascertains that they have received any necessary medical attention or medication.

7. All prisoners on medication should be allowed to continue their medication whilst in custody.

NIPS Assessment

No advice from healthcare provider.

8. The PECCS should liaise with manufacturers and prisoner escort providers in England and Wales to determine the health and safety implications of installing seatbelts into cellular vehicles.

NIPS Assessment

The PECCS management ascertained that prisoner transportation vehicles in England and Wales do not have seatbelts to minimise the risk of self harm and suicide. Over the last five years out of 3.5 million prisoners escorted in England and Wales there were less than 0.008% reported traffic accidents². The risk of self harm or suicide is deemed greater than any benefit from the wearing of seatbelts.

² National Offender Management Service statistics provided to the NIPS.



Conclusion

The progress made in delivering the recommendations and the areas for improvement identified in the original report is commendable. Previous inspection reports across a range of Prison Service activities have not met with anywhere near this amount of success. Inspectors conducted fieldwork to confirm the findings of the NIPS self assessment and were satisfied that significant and sustainable improvements have been made. This was made possible by clearly defined objectives, determined leadership and enthusiastic teamwork.

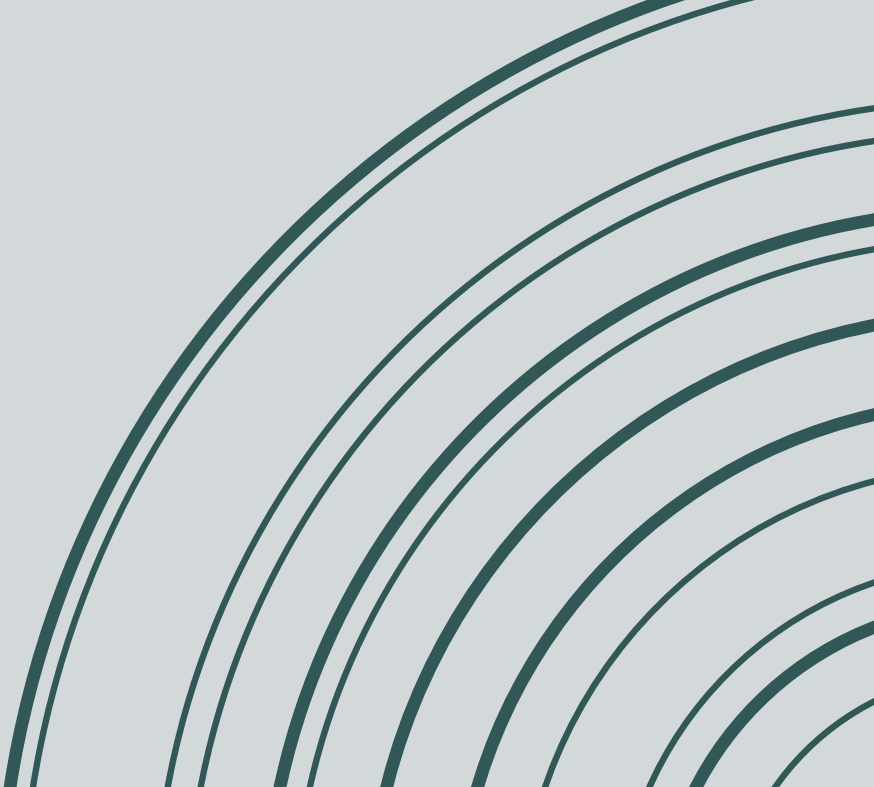
It is noteworthy that the previous practice of double handcuffing prisoners irrespective of risk and not providing hot drinks and meals (where appropriate) to prisoners have ended. Other major achievements were the separate escort facilities provided to a significant majority of female prisoners and the provision of reading materials to prisoners in custody. Putting these changes into place is not a simple matter of arranging resources or timetabling. Rather, the emphatic culture of security within the NIPS, the rigorous standards of service and the aversion to risk arising from previous poor publicity were major obstacles to be overcome.

Alongside these improvements the PECCS management instituted a cleaning schedule for all the vehicles each week-end and Inspectors confirmed the improved cleanliness of the vehicles. Also, the prisoners' fora at Hydebank and Maghaberry prisons gave positive feedback on the condition of the vehicles. For its part the NICTS has committed to a deep cleaning schedule of the court custody cells. The PECCS management also introduced regular quarterly meetings with the PSNI, the NICTS and the Youth Justice Agency aimed at improving conditions for prisoners and disseminating best practice.

This level of achievement should not be underestimated and maintaining these improvements will be a challenge to the service but also a testimony to the changes and improvements that may be wrought through perseverance.

There are further gains to be made. The PSNI are considering directing more policing hours away from court custody functions to front line duties by utilising the expertise of the PECCS team. In consultation with other justice agencies the PECCS is identifying ways in which the court custody operation can be fully utilised as a shared resource. With the support of the DoJ and its agencies, Inspectors would welcome the PECCS operation becoming a single service provider for the wider DoJ within the spirit of the recommendation made in 2010.

In summary, of the 17 recommendations, 13 have been fully achieved, two substantially achieved and two partially achieved. There were eight areas for improvement subject to assessment of which seven were implemented – underscoring Inspectors' very positive assessment in this follow-up review report.



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