



KEY FACTS

POLICE CUSTODY

THE DETENTION OF PERSONS IN POLICE CUSTODY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF
INSPECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

JULY 2025



KEY FACTS

WHAT IS A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW AND WHY DO CJI DO THEM?

- Follow-Up Reviews are carried out by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) Inspectors to assess if and how accepted recommendations have been implemented by inspected organisations.
- The timing of Follow-Up Reviews is at the discretion of the Chief Inspector following careful consideration.
- They allow inspected organisations to demonstrate the improvements they have made and provide organisations and the public with an independent assessment of the progress they have made.



WHAT WAS THIS FOLLOW-UP REVIEW ABOUT?

- In 2020, CJI and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) published an Inspection Report looking at the detention of men, women and children held in the custody of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).
 - This Follow-Up Review of Police Custody looked at the PSNI's action and progress to implement the five Strategic and seven Operational Recommendations and six Areas for Improvement made in 2020, and what the Department of Justice (DoJ) had done to implement one Strategic Recommendation.
 - This Review contributes to CJI and RQIA's responsibilities as members of the United Kingdom National Preventive Mechanism (UK NPM) to independently inspect and monitor places of detention.
- The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) Independent Custody Visiting Scheme, that is also a UK NPM member body, also contributed to the Review.
- The Northern Ireland Policing Board's Human Rights Advisor and Team accompanied the Inspection Team during visits to Police Custody suites.
 - Inspectors spoke to PSNI custody policy and health care leads and staff, stakeholders with an interest in police custody and those individuals held in custody during our custody suite visits as part of fieldwork and evidence gathering for the Follow-Up Review.
 - We also spoke to the DoJ lead official for the Strategic Recommendation relating to the reform of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Order 1989 and the Codes of Practice required for children and their right to bail.



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WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2020 POLICE CUSTODY INSPECTION?

Our previous inspection found:

- Detainees were generally positive about their experiences of police custody and their treatment by custody staff. Staff were skilled in dealing with vulnerable and challenging detainees.
- Police custody was well managed, with efficient processes for ensuring detainees were not held for long periods of time. Legislation on the use of bail for children needed to be reformed to ensure children are released from police cells at the earliest opportunity.
- The custody cells were well maintained, and conditions detainees were held in were good.
- A pilot project in Belfast, involving nurses employed to deliver most health care assessments and treatments, was working well and was welcomed by Police Officers and custody staff. Inspectors recommended this approach was rolled-out to all custody suites.



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WHAT DID YOU FIND DURING THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW?

- Legislative reform required to address the alternatives to custody for children has progressed but when an Act is made, these provisions are unlikely to be implemented for years. This is disappointing.
- The nurse-led model for health care had been rolled out to other police custody suites, ensuring three-quarters of all detainees had access to a Custody Nurse, but despite significant efforts from police and health partners, there were delays in implementing the nurse-led model in all the PSNI custody suites in Northern Ireland.
- Feedback on the nurse-led service, where it was available, was positive and it continued to be well delivered.
- Action taken to address Forensic Medical Officer clinical governance or systems implemented to address health care service delivery and practice concerns was limited.
- The mix of nurse-led and Forensic Medical Officer services resulted in an inconsistent approach to health care delivery, inequitable access to health or medical care and insufficient Forensic Medical Officer response times on some occasions. This had resulted in significant risks to detainees, staff and public safety in the custody suites without a nurse-led service.
- Work was ongoing to improve the quality of care plans and pre-release risk assessments for detainees. These are areas that need long-term focus and oversight.

Progress against the previous Inspection recommendations

Inspectors found the following progress had been made against the Inspection Recommendations:

2020 Police Custody Inspection Recommendations



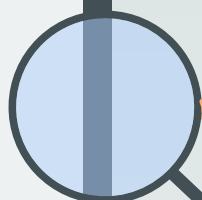
1 Strategic Recommendation
2 Areas for Improvement



4 Strategic Recommendations
2 Operational Recommendations
2 Areas for Improvement



1 Strategic Recommendation
5 Operational Recommendations
2 Areas for Improvement

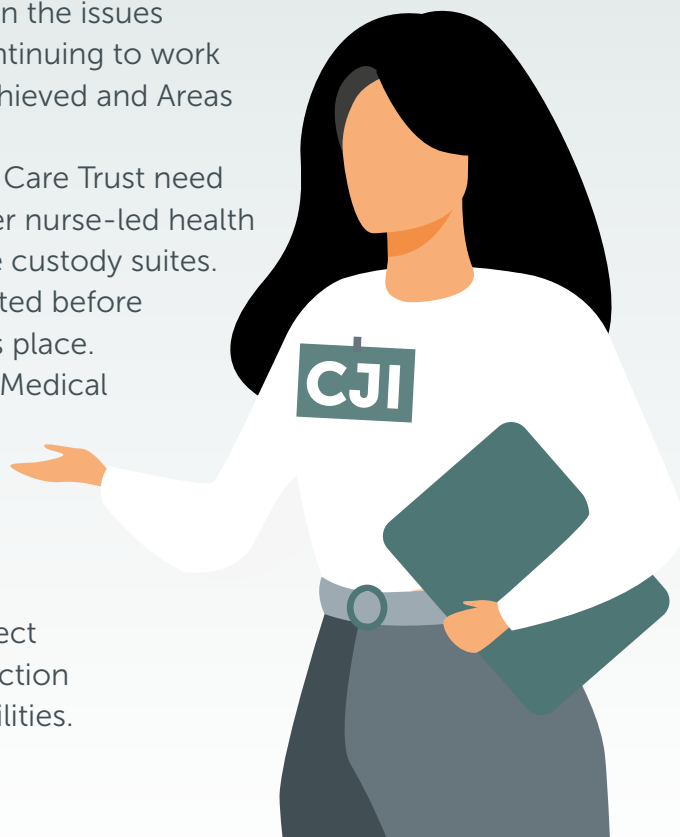




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WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- Inspectors want to see the PSNI focusing on the issues identified in this Follow-Up Review and continuing to work to ensure all recommendations are fully achieved and Areas for Improvement addressed.
- The PSNI and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust need to continue to work in partnership to deliver nurse-led health care provision in all Northern Ireland police custody suites. Inspectors hope this will be fully implemented before the next inspection of Police Custody takes place.
- The PSNI needs to address future Forensic Medical Officer service provision.
- The PSNI needs to remain committed to training, development and quality assurance processes for staff working in police custody to mitigate risks.
- CJI and RQIA Inspectors will return to inspect police custody as part of a future CJI Inspection Programme to fulfil our UK NPM responsibilities.



If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

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