

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC EMERGENCY**

**LIAISON VISITS – PRISONS AND COURT CUSTODY UNITS**



**REPORT ON A LIAISON VISIT TO COURT CUSTODY UNIT AT  
AYR SHERIFF COURT**

**Thursday, 29 October 2020**

## CONTENTS

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	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction and background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Standards, commentary and quality indicators that apply</b>	<b>4</b>
Standard 1: Lawful and transparent use of custody	<b>4</b>
Standard 2: Decency, dignity, respect and equality	<b>6</b>
Standard 4: Effective, courteous and humane exercise of authority	<b>8</b>
Standard 6: Health, wellbeing and medical treatment	<b>9</b>
<b>Annex A</b> Acronyms	<b>10</b>

## Introduction and Background

This report is part of a programme of liaison visits to Court Custody Units (CCUs), carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS), during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. These visits will contribute 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 or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitor the treatment of and conditions for detention. HMIPS is one of 21 bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

In these challenging times, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland (HMCIPS) acknowledges that there will be a need for amendments to the daily routines and regimes in Scotland's CCUs in order to keep people safe. HMCIPS has made it clear, however, that "protective measures must never result in inhuman or degrading treatment of persons deprived of their liberty", and she will continue to report to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the treatment and conditions in which custodies are held, in line with HMIPS's [Standards for Inspecting and Monitoring Prisons in Scotland](#).

In recognition of the pressures imposed by COVID-19, HMIPS have developed an adapted methodology to their usual full inspection process; the [Liaison Visits Framework - Prison and Court Custody Units](#) that will be applied during this emergency.

HMIPS has developed an algorithm that is populated by weekly information sharing with the CCUs, that helps to provide intelligence to inform the scheduling of visits. More information can be found at [Liaison Visits Framework - Prison and Court Custody Units](#).

## Process

HMIPS will contact each of the GEOAmeY Court Managers on a weekly basis to confirm numbers attending, with a focus on understanding the CCU response to COVID-19. A Log of those calls will be maintained. Where it is deemed appropriate, through telephone calls, information received from GEOAmeY, or results from the risk based HMIPS Liaison Data Algorithm, HMIPS will conduct a one day liaison visit to one of the CCUs.

Liaison visits to CCUs, will have the following functions:

- to ensure scrutiny of CCUs continue and are grounded in human rights, looking at the treatment and conditions of those held in detention;
- to offer support to the CCU management and staff;
- to provide assurance to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), NHS GEOAmeY and Scottish Court and Tribunals Service (SCTS) response to the COVID-19 pandemic for those in custody;
- to garner intelligence and information to make informed decisions on future HMIPS priorities; and
- to identify Good Practice that can be shared.

HMIPS assimilates information prior to the liaison visits to select the CCU to be visited and to contribute to the focus of the visit, and consequently develop evidence-based findings utilising a number of different techniques. These include:

- calls to the CCU Manager prior to the visit;
- obtaining information and documents from the SCTS and the court inspected;
- shadowing and observing staff as they perform their duties within the CCU;
- interviewing custodies and staff on a one-to-one basis;
- inspecting a wide range of facilities impacting on both custodies and staff; and
- reviewing policies, procedures and performance reports.

The information gathered facilitates the compilation of a report into the CCU against the modified standards used. A written record of the evidence gathered is produced by those undertaking the visit consisting of a detailed narrative against each of the standard's inspected.

A log of recommendations and good practice arising from the liaison visit is completed and stored in our secure Electronic Records Document Management (eRDM) filing system.

Liaison visits will be undertaken in most cases by two HMIPS staff, the Inspector of Prisons and the Operations Manager who normally undertake CCU inspections, but may be accompanied by other members of staff from HMIPS.

The full inspections and our COVID-19 adapted liaison visit methodology are informed by a set of Standards as set out in our document [Standards for Inspecting Court Custody Provision in Scotland](#), published March 2017, and reviewed in January 2020. This report is set out to reflect the performance against these Standards.

These Standards contribute positively to the effective scrutiny of court custody provision in Scotland, designed to both encourage continuous improvement in the quality of care and custody of people held in court cells and to provide assurance.

Published CCU liaison visit reports provide assurance to Ministers, key stakeholders, and the wider public that inspections are conducted in line with a framework that is consistent, and that assessments are made against appropriate criteria.

This adapted inspection methodology developed in response to COVID-19 will be kept under continual review and as soon as it is safe and reasonable to do so, full CCU inspections will recommence.

Findings from any CCU Liaison Visits and issues that are highlighted from weekly CCU telephone calls, will be reported to:

1. the Cabinet Secretary for Justice; and
2. the Scottish Government Justice Directorate, GEOAmev, Police Scotland, the SPS, and SCTS for information and action.

HMIPS will ensure all relevant parties are kept informed and any good practice or recommendations identified will be logged and progress monitored.

The visit team for this inspection was Calum McCarthy and Graeme Neill.

*Wendy Sinclair-Gieben*

**Wendy Sinclair-Gieben**

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

22 December 2020

## STANDARDS, COMMENTARY AND QUALITY INDICATORS

### STANDARD 1 - LAWFUL AND TRANSPARENT USE OF CUSTODY

The custody service provider (“the provider”) complies with administrative and procedural requirements of the law and takes appropriate action in response to the findings and recommendations of official bodies that exercise supervisory jurisdiction over it.

#### Commentary

The provider ensures that all prisoners are lawfully detained. Each prisoner’s time in custody is accurately calculated; they are properly classified and allocated to cells appropriately. The provider cooperates fully with agencies which have powers to investigate matters in the custody areas.

#### Quality Indicators inspected

##### **1.2 Personal Escort Record (PER) forms are accurately populated and all relevant sections are completed.**

Inspectors observed that on arrival at the CCU reception desk, the custody was asked to confirm their name and date of birth, which was compared against their PER and computer record. When staff were satisfied that their identity had been confirmed, a photograph was taken of the custody and added to the GEOAmeY IT system before the custody was placed in a cell.

On checking the GEOAmeY IT system it was seen that there was a record of custodies being offered hand sanitiser on arrival at the CCU and a record of custodies being asked questions in respect of COVID-19. These questions covered general health and safety and ensured awareness of the Scottish Government’s physical distancing rules and formed part of the Cell Sharing Risk Assessment (CSRA).

A PER form was examined by Inspectors, and found to have been completed correctly and accurately, documenting the custodies classification, vulnerabilities, medical issues, dependencies and if an interpreter was required.

It was noted that all further information pertaining to the custody, generated whilst within the CCU, was recorded by staff on the GEOAmeY IT system, unless the custody was on constant observation when the PER form was updated by the observing staff member.

##### **1.3 A Cell Sharing Risk Assessment (CSRA) is carried out on arrival, taking account of individual characteristics (including gender, vulnerability, security risk, state of mental health or personal medical condition) and individuals are then allocated to an appropriate cell.**

At the time of the visit, Ayr Sheriff Court was operating as one of the country’s hub courts and were not accepting additional custodies from other Sheriff Courts.

The CCU is situated in the Sheriff Court and Justice of the Peace Court building, which was constructed in 1818 and the CCU construction and layout was still fit-for-purpose. The CCU was clean and in good condition, and routes leading to and from the courts were secure and not encroaching into any public areas.

No police custodies have arrived at Ayr Sheriff court since the implementation of the COVID-19 restrictions, all have appeared via a video link facility. Some SPS custodies are still required to attend the CCU, but good communication and working relationships between the agencies keep this number to a minimum, ensuring better management of risk and cell allocation within the CCU and as such this restricted the movement of people and promoted physical distancing.

## **STANDARD 2 - DECENCY, DIGNITY, RESPECT AND EQUALITY**

**The custody areas should meet the basic requirements of decency and all prisoners within custody areas are treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.**

### **Commentary**

**All custody areas should be of adequate size for the number of persons they are used to detain, well maintained, clean and hygienic and have adequate lighting. Each prisoner should have access to toilets, be provided with necessary toiletries, and offered a nutritious meal. These needs should be met in ways that promote each prisoner's sense of personal and cultural identity and self-respect.**

### Quality Indicators inspected

#### **2.1 The custody areas should be appropriately equipped and constructed for their intended use and be maintained to an appropriate standard.**

GEOAmev advice posters relating to COVID-19 were clearly displayed within the CCU arrival area and the staff rest areas, and physical distancing markers were clearly visible on the floor of the CCU.

All staff were observed to be maintaining physical distancing rules whilst standing in the CCU. When not dealing with custodies they were observed not to be wearing gloves or masks.

Inspectors were informed that one member of staff wore full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kit including goggles, a mask, gloves and an apron and they were tasked with searching custodies as they arrived at the CCU, this was observed by the Inspectors.

There was adequate PPE equipment within the CCU including hand sanitiser, masks, goggles, gloves and aprons.

The CCU had seven cells and all were operational.

One custody court was running on the day of the visit.

There was one custody present in the CCU at the time of the inspection, from HMP Kilmarnock.

Staff were aware that single occupancy cells were the priority. It was seen by Inspectors that cell number two, three and seven were of a size to safely accommodate a single custody due to the two metre physical distancing rule, and floor marking clearly reflected this. It was noted that cells number one, four, five and six could hold two custodies, if absolutely necessary and again was clearly marked

to enforce this. Any decisions regarding cell occupancy were recorded on any CSRA in respect of COVID-19 considerations.

## **2.2 Good levels of cleanliness and hygiene are observed throughout the custody areas ensuring procedures for the prevention and control of infection are followed.**

The CCU had two toilets and the soap and towel dispensers were fixed to the wall outside the toilets. There was a sanitary products advice poster in the toilets and at the reception desk. If female custodies required sanitary products a female member of staff would facilitate this and disposals.

The toilet areas were very clean and in good order.

It was noted that the CCU was part of a daily cleaning rota by a dedicated SCTS cleaner who attended each afternoon. All floors and toilets were cleaned with particular attention to handles and work surfaces. Staff regularly cleaned cuffs, keys and search wands.

It was noted that any cells used by a custody were marked by CCU staff to alert SCTS cleaners, who ensured it received a deep clean.

It was seen that hand sanitiser was offered to custodies on arrival, when leaving their cells, using the toilets, or when leaving and returning to the CCU.

## **STANDARD 4 - EFFECTIVE, COURTEOUS AND HUMANE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY**

**The implementation of security and supervisory duties is balanced by courteous and humane treatment of custodies in the CCU.**

### **Commentary**

**Procedures relating to perimeter, entry and exit security, and the personal safety, searching, supervision and escorting of custodies are implemented effectively. The level of security and supervision is proportionate to the risks presented at any given time.**

### Quality Indicators inspected

#### **4.2 The systems and procedures for the movement, transfer and release of custodies are implemented effectively and courteously.**

Inspectors observed a custody arriving at the CCU who was handcuffed to a member of the Court Custody Vehicle (CCV) staff whilst walking from the CCV. This was clearly a requirement following an assessment of risk associated with transferring custodies into the CCU from the CCV, as the CCV is required to park out in the street and not in a secure or sterile area. It was seen that the staff member wore gloves and a mask.

The process in place for taking custodies from the CCU to appear in court was for the custody to be handcuffed to a member of staff. Inspectors were informed that all staff wore gloves and masks when escorting custodies and custodies were given the option of wearing a mask.

Staff controlled the movement of custodies through the CCU to ensure only one was out of the cells at a time. If there was an overlap, custodies were kept well apart and returned to their cells without delay.

Staff were aware of the need to wear full PPE when dealing with any custody displaying or reporting COVID-19 symptoms.

#### **4.3 The systems and procedures for access and egress of visitors to the CCU are implemented effectively and courteously. There is adequate accommodation to facilitate such visitors.**

Visitors, including legal representatives and agency workers, had not entered the CCU since the COVID-19 measures were put in place. Any contact with custodies was always through a glass partition in one of the four interview rooms accessed by legal representatives from outside the CCU. Staff cleaned the interview rooms on the CCU side between visits with antiseptic wipes.

## **STANDARD 6 - HEALTH, WELLBEING AND MEDICAL TREATMENT**

**All reasonable steps are taken to ensure the health and wellbeing of custodies while in the CCU, and appropriate and timeous medical treatment is available when required.**

### **Commentary**

**Where it is necessary to do so, custodies should receive treatment that takes account of all relevant NHS standards, guidelines and evidence-based treatments.**

Staff were able to communicate the process in place for a custody attending the CCU with COVID-19 symptoms and for a custody developing such symptoms whilst in the CCU.

ScotNurse had not been required to attend the CCU in recent months.

The CCU Team Manger informed Inspectors that on release, all custodies that required to use public transport to return to their home address were provided with face masks and directed to the Sheriff Clerk by CCU staff to obtain a travel warrant.

**ACRONYMS**

CCU	Court Custody Unit
CCV	Court Custody Vehicle
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSRA	Cell Sharing Risk Assessment
HM	Her Majesty's
HMCIPS	HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland
HMIPS	HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
PER	Prisoner Escort Record
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SCTS	Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service
SPS	Scottish Prison Service



HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland is a member of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism, a group of organisations that independently monitor all places of detention to meet the requirements of international human rights law.

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