



Ms Zoe Billingham
HM Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
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15 May 2020

Dear Zoe

HMICFRS and HMIP – Unannounced Inspection of Police Custody

I write in respect of the recently published findings for Sussex Police in the joint Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) unannounced inspection visit to police custody. I welcome the opportunity to comment on the report and have carefully studied its findings and recommendations.

I am pleased that the inspection report recognised the emphasis that Sussex Police places on understanding and protecting vulnerable people and the effort that continues to be made to divert young people from custody, utilising a range of community resolutions and early intervention options to achieve this. It was also highlighted that frontline officers are "well supported" by Street Triage to avoid some detentions under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 by finding more appropriate health-based solutions.

The report confirmed that police officers and staff in custody "were patient and positive with detainees" and that "most interactions were clear, courteous and reassuring" to meet the diverse needs of detainees. This included recognition for the improvements that have been made to aspects of care for female detainees, detainees practising a religion and those detainees with disabilities, in particular.

I am reassured that Inspectors recognised that the Force was "open to feedback and external scrutiny" from my "effective" Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme – with volunteers performing unannounced visits to check on the welfare of detainees. I am delighted to confirm that the Scheme in Sussex successfully achieved 'Platinum' status for the Quality Assurance Framework awarded by the Independent Custody Visitor Association (ICVA) in May 2019. This was the highest possible award for safeguarding those individuals who are detained in police custody and was one of only two presented to ICV schemes throughout England and Wales.

I am also pleased to confirm that Sussex Police is currently in the process of undertaking a countywide improvement plan to ensure that custody facilities are fit for the future, with several suggested improvements to physical conditions already incorporated into this work. In particular, Hastings Custody Centre was reopened in September 2019 following the successful completion of a two-year £1.6m refurbishment project to update and improve the detention facility to Home Office standards, with further works set to commence shortly at the custody facilities in Crawley.



The three other sites – Brighton, Eastbourne and Worthing – are each supported by Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and changes to this agreement were required before any improvement work could start at these facilities which caused some delays to the process. From an operational perspective, it is also not possible to close more than one of the custody suites at any time which, together with the renegotiation of the PFI contract, has impacted on the timescales that these improvements can be progressed within. I am satisfied that remedial actions have been undertaken at each site to mitigate some of the smaller issues emphasised by the report in the meantime.

The inspection report highlighted five causes of concern and recommendations, including four that were present and identified during the previous joint inspection in 2016. I am disappointed with the lack of progress made regarding the previous recommendations for improvement and it is clear from the report that a number of key areas still require action. It is imperative that the custody procedures and protocols used by Sussex Police comply with legislation, that data is reliable, physical conditions meet the required standards and that oversight is consistent in respect of the use of force.

However, I am more reassured now that immediately after the inspection in November 2019, a working group was established to address each of these findings and that many of these areas have already been rectified, with the remainder due to be completed imminently. I will be discussing the progress made to address these recommendations and areas for improvement with the Chief Constable at a future webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meetings.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Bourne', written in a cursive style.

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner