TAYSIDE JOINT POLICE BOARD

AUDIT SUB COMMITTEE

21 December 2007

Report by the Chief Constable No. PB 76/2007

SUBJECT: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CUSTODY CARE AND PRISONER HANDLING – UPDATE REPORT

Abstract: This report provides members of the Audit Sub Committee with an update on the progress of the recommendations produced following the Best Value Review of Custody Care and Prisoner Handling.

1 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 It is recommended that the Audit Sub Committee note the progress of this review, and completion of work to meet the recommendations of the Best Value Review process.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Reference is made to Minute of Meeting of the Audit Sub Committee of 24 March 2006, wherein the Sub Committee approved report number PB20/2006. This detailed the progress made towards implementing the recommendations arising from a Best Value Service Review undertaken into Custody Care and Prisoner Handling within the Force.

2.2 This report provides the Audit Sub Committee with a further update.

3. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

3.1 A total of 67 recommendations arose as a result of the review. From these 67 recommendations, 57 have been completed with 1 recommendation in progress. The other 9 recommendations will not be implemented.

3.2 Of the recommendations not being implemented, 3 related to aspirational facilities that have proved impractical or cost prohibitive to achieve, such as fitting sinks and disabled toilets in cells. A further 5 related to staffing options that have been dealt with through other recommendations, whilst 1 related to weekend courts, which are out with the control of Tayside Police and being trialled nationally.

3.3 The one recommendation still in progress relates to the installation of video and audio recording equipment in interview rooms within the custody suites at Dundee and Arbroath. This was originally delayed pending the rollout of the new computer operating system and renovation works at the relevant custody centres. The value of progressing this work is currently being assessed.
3.4 A considerable number of improvements have been made as a direct result of the review. These improvements relate to staffing, policy, procedures and guidance, training, information technology and infrastructure. The following paragraphs provide a summary of some of the main improvements.

3.5 **Staffing**

3.5.1 In order to improve the health and safety of custody staff and prisoners, it was recommended that wherever possible, no police officer or member of Police Staff should supervise a prisoner without assistance. Additional staff have been employed at all 3 custody suites. Not only does this ensure that staffing levels are more in line with other forces but it has also considerably reduced the number of times that police officers are abstracted from the street to perform custody duties resulting in efficiency savings for the Force.

3.5.2 Where there are pre-planned operations likely to result in a significant increase in the number of prisoners, custody staff are included in the briefing process. This ensures that custody supervisors can make arrangements to increase staffing levels to meet demand.

3.6 **Policy Procedures and Guidance**

3.6.1 A protocol has been agreed so that where female prisoners in Eastern and Western Divisions are likely to be in custody for a prolonged period of time and there is no female Custody Care Assistant available, they can be transferred to the Central Division custody suite where a female Custody Care Assistant is always on duty. This reduces the need to abstract a female officer from operational duties to perform the Custody Care Assistant role resulting in efficiency savings for the Force.

3.6.2 A review was carried out by the Custody Users Group and a representative from the Police Surgeon’s service, into the questions prisoners are asked by the Custody Officer to establish their risk and vulnerability status. As a result the Custody Record form was amended in order to improve the standard of care for prisoners.

3.6.3 Prisoners who have been assessed as being of ‘Low Vulnerability’ are no longer woken every hour. This means that Custody Care Assistants can concentrate on ‘High Vulnerability’ prisoners.

3.6.4 The Custody User Group has carried out a full review of the Prisoner Care Manual. There is also now a process for the continual review and updating of the manual which is discussed at the bi-monthly meeting of the Custody User Group. This includes taking account of national policy and procedural documents as well as issues arising across the country.

3.6.5 The Divisions now have an audit regime for the regular examination of custody records supported by the Inspection Unit, HQ. This ensures that issues are readily identified and addressed. As a result consistency of practice across the force has improved.
3.6.6 Ambient meals (microwaveable) have been introduced. These are less expensive than outsourced food and provide for a variety of choice, leading to less wastage. These meals also provide for a variety of minority ethnic, religious and dietary requirements such as no pork; no beef; vegetarian and vegan. Prisoners arriving outwith normal catering times can now be accommodated and there is no need for police officers to uplift food thereby enhancing their patrol time.

3.7 Training

3.7.1 All Probationary Constables receive awareness training in respect of prisoner care duties as part of their local training course programme. This raises awareness of prisoner care issues.

3.7.2 A new structure is in place to deliver refresher training every three years for all staff trained to perform prisoner care duties. Training is also undertaken during late shift and night shift in an effort to reduce abstractions and this has met with positive comment. As a result, all staff can maintain a level of knowledge, which can also be updated with new practices/procedures and benefits from discussions of recent incidents and trends.

3.8 Information Technology

3.8.1 All three Divisions have adopted the same procedures in relation to the usage of the Custody Record system to ensure standardisation of information recorded and thus allow consistency in the training delivered to custody staff across the Force.

3.8.2 The functionality of the Custody Record system has been enhanced to enable prisoners taken to outlying stations to be recorded directly onto the system. This removes the need for a separate local Apprehension Register and avoids duplication of recording on paper and computer systems.

3.8.3 CCTV has now been installed in all custody areas, including outlying stations, in order to ensure compliance with the HMIC thematic inspection ‘A Fair Cop’. CCTV reduces the opportunity for complaint and provides corroborative evidence for incidents within the custody areas.

3.8.4 Key fob entry systems have been installed in all areas of the custody suites. This improves security. Another benefit is the enhanced safety of staff in the cell area as others coming to their assistance no longer need to obtain keys to enter this area.

3.9 Infrastructure

3.9.1 More observation cells have been created. The new observation cells have been created by replacing the solid door with a glass panel door. In addition 2 observation cells have been created opposite each other allowing a single officer to monitor 2 cells. Previously an officer was required to remain outside an unlocked cell at all times. This has improved the health and safety of both officers and prisoners.
3.9.2 The design of the Charge Bar areas in Central and Eastern Divisions was reviewed to ensure that the continued safety of staff and prisoners is not compromised. Consequently, a new Custody Charge bar has been installed in Eastern Division and work to alter the Central Division Charge Bar design is currently in progress.

3.9.3 Cells at the smallest outlying stations were deemed no longer fit for purpose and have been de-commissioned. Prisoners are taken to the centralised custody suites which ensures a consistent level of care. Whilst additional travelling is incurred in conveying prisoners there is now no need for staff in outlying stations to be engaged in custody care duties. Furthermore, there is no need for continued maintenance of these rooms to ensure they meet the necessary standards for custody purposes.

3.9.4 Furniture in custody areas has, wherever possible, been fixed to reduce risks during any conflict situations.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Many of the recommendations emanating from the review were aimed at improving the levels of care, service provision and health and safety. While some have resulted in costs to the organisation others have realised efficiency savings.

4.2 In some cases efficiency savings have been generated through streamlined working practices however these are difficult to quantify accurately. Some recommendations have resulted in financial savings such as the introduction of cheaper ambient meals while the closure of Forfar custody suite has realised staff savings and improved efficiency. Where definitive savings can be quantified these will be captured as part of our Efficient Government return to the Scottish Government.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 As part of its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, the Force has progressed the recommendations arising out of the Best Value Review of Custody Care and Prisoner Handling.

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NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.