



Life in prison: The first 24 hours in prison

A findings paper

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

November 2015

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Introduction

- I.1** This findings paper is part of a series which focuses on daily life in prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) holding young adults aged 18 to 21 years. The series explores particular topics that are regularly reported to us as concerns during our routine inspections, or which merit detailed and specific examination. We hope these findings papers will be of interest to practitioners as well as providing the public with an insight into the reality of life in prison; and be used to encourage further discussion. We expect that the findings and good practice detailed in this paper will support the development of prison services.
- I.2** This findings paper summarises literature surrounding reception and the first 24 hours in prison. It draws on evidence from recent inspections of local prisons undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) and survey data from inspection reports published between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015. This data is aggregated and overall responses for the year are presented. Comments from confidential prisoner surveys, conducted as part of the inspection process, are also included in this report; these quotes are not ascribed to individual prisons or inspection reports. The paper focuses on adult men and women held in local prisons and young adults held in local YOIs and the experiences they have in their first 24 hours at an establishment.

Background

- I.3** Each year a large number of people come into contact with the prison system: in the three months between July and September 2014, more than 26,000¹ people entered the prison estate for the first time after being remanded in custody by the courts. As the start of the journey through a prison or YOI, the reception and subsequent induction process is extremely important.
- I.4** An individual can arrive at a prison or YOI after being remanded in custody by the courts, or after being transferred from another prison or YOI after sentencing. All prisoners will experience imprisonment at a local prison² at some point during their detention. Local prisons are very busy and have a very large number of receptions each year; our inspection of HMP Pentonville (2015), found that it had, on average, 100 movements to or from court or other prisons every day and an average of 90 new prisoners a week³. In comparison a training prison⁴ receives, on average, 15 new prisoners a week.
- I.5** Arrival at a prison can be a daunting experience, even for those who have been in prison before⁵. Those experiencing prison for the first time are particularly likely to be distressed and fearful⁶, so it is important that they are given adequate support and reassurance. Population pressures may lead to prisoners being displaced from their local area and sent away from their support networks and families, increasing the importance of enhanced

¹ Ministry of Justice (2015) *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin, England and Wales: July to September 2014*

² Establishments which serve the needs of their local courts, receiving remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners prior to their transfer to other establishments.

³ HMI Prisons (2015) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Pentonville*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

⁴ Establishments which hold sentenced prisoners who are enrolled in prison jobs and educational programmes to aid rehabilitation.

⁵ HMI Prisons (2013) *HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2012–13*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.26

⁶ Jacobson, J., Edgar, K. and Loucks, N. (2007) *There When You Need Them Most: Pact's First Night in Custody Services*, Prison Reform Trust, p.59

support from staff. Although the first 24 hours in prison can be extremely stressful for some individuals, anxiety can be reduced by 'respectful treatment from officers, timely and accessible information, and opportunities to resolve urgent practical problems'⁷.

1.6 The 2007 Corston report described the reaction of women in prison for the first time:

'Women recounted the stress that came from newly encountering the prison environment. Crowding, noise and the threatening atmosphere were the immediate factors. They recounted their alarm and concern at finding themselves sharing cells with women with mental health problems and who self-harmed; being frightened and unprepared when confronted with women who were suffering severe drug withdrawal or seizures'.⁸

Inspections have found improvement in reception arrangements in women's prisons since the Corston report was published but the shock and distress of women entering the prison system and the consequent critical need for support remains.

1.7 In the first few days of imprisonment prisoners are particularly vulnerable⁹ and the risk of suicide is high during this time. Figures released by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) state that 10% of the self-inflicted deaths he investigated between 2007 and 2013 had taken place during an individual's first three days in custody¹⁰. The PPO case study below shows how important it is for individuals to be given adequate support and risk assessment in their first 24 hours at an establishment.

PPO case study

Upon arrival at the prison, Mr E told staff that he suffered from mental health problems and had issues with alcohol abuse. His records indicated previous self-harm in custody and that he had a number of risk factors but despite this he was not made subject to self-harm and suicide monitoring procedures. Staff did not sufficiently assess the risks he posed; he was located on a standard wing rather than one offering enhanced specialist support and he was found hanging in his cell the morning after his arrival.¹¹

1.8 HMI Prisons' influential thematic on suicide in prisons¹² highlighted the importance of effective prison reception processes in reducing suicide and self-harm among newly received prisoners. Other studies have also found that an individual's experience of their first 24 hours in prison is extremely important¹³.

1.9 Prior to arriving at a prison prisoners will have been detained in a court, for sometimes long periods. Our inspections of court custody raise repeated concerns about the conditions of court cells. This can be a time of great apprehension and fear of the unknown for detainees, especially those who have not been into prison before, as often they are told very little about what to expect when they get to the prison. They will then be escorted to the prison in an escort van. HMI Prisons' recent thematic on transfers and escorts in the criminal justice system¹⁴ raised concerns about the safety and decency of some escort arrangements,

⁷ Ibid, p.60

⁸ Baroness Jean Corston (2007) *The Corston Report*, London: the Home Office, p.29

⁹ HMI Prisons (2012) *HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2011-12*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.26

¹⁰ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2014) *Learning from PPO Investigations: Risk factors in self-inflicted deaths in prisons*, p.12

¹¹ Ibid, p.21

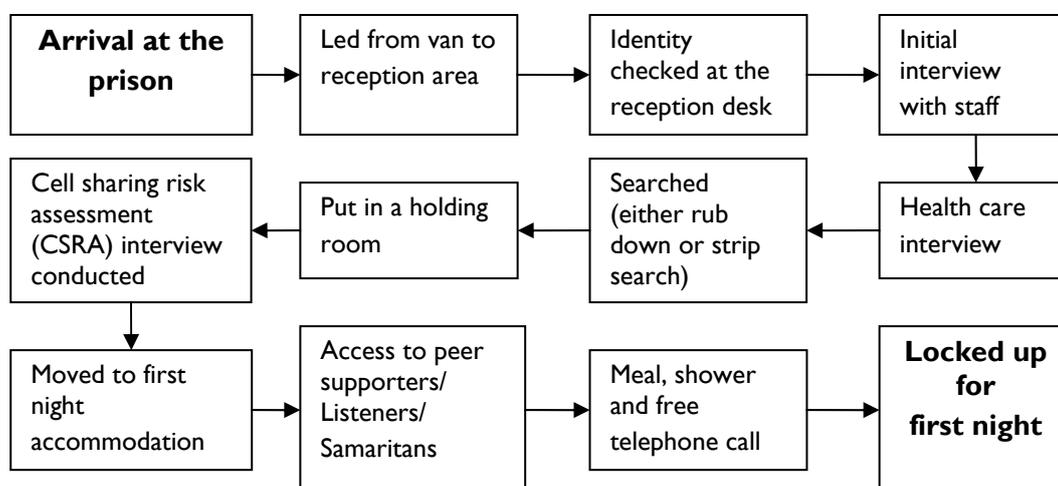
¹² HMI Prisons (1999) *Suicide is Everyone's Concern*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

¹³ Jacobson, J., Edgar, K. and Loucks, N. (2007) *There When You Need Them Most: Pact's First Night in Custody Services*, Prison Reform Trust, p.iii

¹⁴ HMI Prisons (2014) *Transfers and Escorts within the Criminal Justice System*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

including the transport of men, women and children in the same vehicles, the lack of toilet breaks and the absence of seat belts.

- I.10** Although the reception process is different in every prison, an individual's typical first experiences in prison may follow the following pattern:



- I.11** A 'cell sharing risk assessment' (CSRA) to assess the individual's risks to and from others are an important part of the reception process. They were introduced in response to the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek by his cell mate in Feltham Young Offender Institution in 2000. An Inquiry by Mr Justice Keith into the circumstances of the murder was published in 2006¹⁵. In 2014 the Inspectorate published a thematic review of the progress that had been made since the Inquiry. It summarised the Inquiry's concerns about cell sharing risk assessments as:

*'The Inquiry found that, in the absence of any training in completing the form, the completion and use of the form varied across the prison estate. This problem continued throughout the prisoner's time in custody, with reviews not taking place on time or following other significant events such as a further conviction or adjudication for a violent, racist or homophobic offence.'*¹⁶

The review concluded:

*'The CSRA was a welcome initiative and is believed to have helped reduce the number of homicides in prisons. However, the completion and review processes for this risk assessment continue to be implemented inconsistently across the prison estate. Better staff training and information sharing are necessary to ensure cell-sharing decisions are based on thorough risk assessment.'*¹⁷

- I.12** Reception and health care staff who assess a prisoner on arrival will use information contained in a Person Escort Record to inform their assessment. A PER is a record of significant events during prisoner movements; it should include information relevant to the prisoner's journey, such as comfort stops and offers of food, alongside information relevant to assessing and managing the risks a prisoner might pose to themselves or others. A PER must be completed for every journey a prisoner makes between police custody, court custody and prisons. Other documents, such as self-harm warning forms, may be attached to the PER. The Inspectorate's thematic review of the use of PERs in 2012 concluded that they

¹⁵ Home Office (2006) *Report of the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry*, London: The Stationery Office

¹⁶ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report of a review of the implementation of the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry recommendations*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.19

¹⁷ Ibid, p.20

were often poorly completed and did not provide the information receiving establishments needed to know.¹⁸

Our expectations

1.13 HMI Prisons inspects against criteria known as *Expectations*¹⁹. These are the standards by which we assess treatment and conditions for prisoners, and each inspection assesses the outcomes for prisoners held in that establishment against them. Each expectation is underpinned by ‘indicators’ which help test if the expectation has been met. Although the expectations vary slightly for different types of establishment, the first 24 hours in custody is assessed under the ‘Safety’ healthy prison area across all establishments.

1.14 At all adult prisons, our expectations are that:

- Prisoners feel and are safe on their reception into prison and for the first few days in custody
- Prisoners are treated with respect on arrival at the prison
- Prisoners know what will happen next and the sources of help that are available
- Prisoners are fully supported on arrival and during their early days in prison
- Officers ensure that individuals’ needs or immediate anxieties are addressed before they are locked away for the night.

1.15 Our new expectations for women prisoners²⁰ recognise their specific needs and include the following additional expectations:

- The safety of women’s children and other dependents is assessed and safeguarded
- Women’s needs are accurately assessed on arrival and timely action is taken to address them. Officers ensure that individuals’ needs or immediate anxieties are addressed before they are locked away for the night.

Our findings

1.16 The findings of this paper are separated into three different areas; the prisoner’s experience in reception, the prisoner’s experience on their first night at the prison and the support available to prisoners during their first 24 hours in an establishment.

Reception to a prison

1.17 On arrival at an establishment, prisoners are moved one by one from the escort van to the prison’s reception area. While in reception prisoners have their identity checked, along with their ‘warrant to detain’, by an officer at the reception desk. They will usually be placed in a holding cell from which they will be taken to undergo other processes. Their belongings will be searched and checked to ensure all items are permissible. They should then have their risks and needs assessed in a private interview by a trained member of staff and will have their health assessed by a nurse.

¹⁸ HMI Prisons (2012) *The use of the person escort record with detainees at risk of self-harm*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

¹⁹ HMI Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Treatment of Prisoners and Conditions in Prisons*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

²⁰ HMI Prisons (2014) *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Treatment of and Conditions for Women in Prison*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

- I.18** Vulnerable prisoners²¹ are normally transferred from the escort van either first or last, and go through same reception process as ‘mainstream’ prisoners. Some prisons fully integrate vulnerable prisoners with other prisoners. However, they are usually held separately from mainstream prisoners while being processed and are then taken to their accommodation – normally a specific vulnerable prisoners wing – with other vulnerable prisoners. Some vulnerable prisoners told us that they did not always feel adequately separated and protected from others, which heightened perceptions of vulnerability. For example, one prisoner told us:

‘Reception was not very discreet when dealing with vulnerable prisoners, allowing other prisoners to immediately identify a vulnerable prisoner whilst going through reception procedures. Other prisoners were able to view a vulnerable prisoner being processed at the reception desk.’²²

- I.19** Even after what were frequently long waits in escort vans outside the prison²³, only 40% of men at local prisons told us that they had been in reception for less than two hours. However, those in custody for the first time in men’s local prisons were significantly more likely to spend under two hours in reception than those who had been in prison before (49% compared to 36%). At some establishments we inspected it took much longer and prisoners confirmed to us in confidential surveys that they were kept in reception for long periods:

‘Nine hours and 45 minutes in reception and induction – first day!’

‘To get to my cell on the first night took eight hours from when I got off the prison van.’

- I.20** The physical condition of the reception area is important as it can help to put prisoners at ease. Some of the reception areas we inspected were clean and welcoming with lots of information to inform and occupy prisoners, but many others were not up to the standard we would expect.

‘Reception was very good: it was clean and suitably furnished, and staff were welcoming. Holding rooms had reading material, including a range of leaflets in 16 languages and TVs which screened an informative video about the prison. The gender ratio of staff was appropriate. Searching was proportionate and carried out sensitively. Two peer support workers met all new arrivals; their work was valued by staff and prisoners.’ (HMP Eastwood Park, 2013)²⁴

‘The busy reception area was austere and dingy. Holding rooms were in a decrepit condition. There was poor ventilation, rooms smelled badly and were disfigured with graffiti. There was nothing to occupy prisoners. Staff had poor sight lines of holding rooms and prisoners were not effectively supervised. CCTV had been installed in some holding rooms but was not working at the time of the inspection. We saw prisoners smoking in non-smoking cells without challenge.’ (HMP Wormwood Scrubs, 2014)²⁵

- I.21** During our inspections, we observed mainly welcoming, polite and friendly interaction between the reception staff and prisoners. This was supported by our survey findings: 62% of respondents at men’s local prisons and 81% of those at women’s local prisons told us that they were treated well or very well in reception.

‘Fairly friendly staff and the officers on reception seemed fairly polite and normal to speak to and approach.’

²¹ Those deemed at risk from bullying by other prisoners or those at risk of self-harm and suicide.

²² Comment from confidential prisoner survey conducted as part of the inspection process.

²³ HMI Prisons (2014) *Transfers and escorts within the criminal justice system*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.32

²⁴ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Eastwood Park*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.1

²⁵ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.19

- I.22** However at some establishments, staff attitudes were found to be functional rather than supportive towards the newly arrived prisoners. Those in prison for the first time were more likely to report being treated well or very well: 65% of those at men's local prisons, compared with 61% of those who had been in custody before.
- I.23** Information about what was going to happen to them was provided to new prisoners through notices and videos in prison holding rooms and by staff and peer supporters. However, this provision was inconsistent and newly arrived and anxious prisoners, sometimes with poor literacy and other difficulties, often had problems understanding and remembering what they were told, even when they were given appropriate information. Only 40% of men at local prisons recalled that they were given information to explain what was going to happen to them when they first arrived, and we found a similar picture at women's prisons, with only just over half (58%) of women at local prisons stating that they were given information about what was going to happen to them. Only 35% of men remanded in custody told us that they received information telling them what was going to happen to them, compared with 42% of sentenced prisoners. While it was likely that more prisoners were told verbally what would happen to them, we found that few prisoners were given this information in printed form or in a language that they could understand to take away and read again later. It is not surprising that anxiety, confusion and shock made it difficult for many prisoners to remember what they were told. Written information would help resolve this for many. Prisoners told us that a lack of knowledge about what was going to happen to them next made them feel confused and anxious.
- I.24** Little information was provided to prisoners in languages apart from English; however we found good practice in our inspection of HMP Send (2014), a women's training prison, where information was available to prisoners in 14 different languages.
- I.25** Peer support provides a method of reassuring new arrivals and reducing any anxieties they have with regard to entering prison (see HMI Prisons' 'Peer Support' findings paper²⁶). When peer supporters are used in reception they can provide a valuable service for newly arrived prisoners. It is important that peer supporters are not given inappropriate responsibilities or access to confidential prisoner information.
- I.26** All prisoners are given a rub down search²⁷ on arrival in prison, and they may be strip-searched by officers. Drugs and phones are the most usual items found. Prisoners may also be required to sit on a Body Orifice Security Scanner (BOSS) chair to detect any concealed packages in body orifices. We expect strip-searching to be done only when it has been risk assessed as necessary and supported by intelligence, and officers should explain the process to the prisoner. The prisoner should not be totally naked during the strip-search, nor be routinely asked to squat. The prisoner should be searched one half of their body at a time. Some establishments may provide a gown for the prisoner to wear²⁸.
- I.27** Where a prisoner is identified as having secreted contraband internally an intimate examination may take place. This will be conducted by a health care professional on medical grounds and not by a prison officer. Intimate searches must only be carried out with the prisoner's consent and medical practitioners will only carry out intimate examinations where it is clinically required.
- I.28** Although 79% of men and 91% of women at local prisons told us that they were searched in a respectful way in reception, many were routinely strip-searched with no supporting

²⁶ HMI Prisons (forthcoming) *Life in Prison: Peer support. A findings paper by HM Inspectorate of Prisons*

²⁷ A 'Level A rub down search' involves an officer running their hands over the prisoner's clothing, looking in their ears, nose and mouth and potentially using a metal detector to assist this process.

²⁸ For several years, the prison service has used the term 'full search' to refer to this type of search. However, HMI Prisons continues to use 'strip search' as we believe this more accurately reflects the prisoner's experience of the process.

intelligence, even if they had come direct from continuous custody. This is unnecessary and disproportionate. Prisoners often describe negative experiences of being searched:

'I don't like the way the strip search was carried out. They make you stand naked with your hands in the air.'

'During the strip search in reception there were a lot of staff within sight, including female staff.'

'Very unsympathetic reception staff. They were not very understanding to first timers during the strip search, and didn't explain why this was needed.'

- I.29** At HMP Dovegate (2015), we reported that all prisoners were strip-searched without individual risk assessments, and those entering the prison for the first time were also inappropriately made to squat during their search²⁹.
- I.30** At men's local prisons, prisoners reported their experiences differently depending on their personal situations and their cultural backgrounds. Men on remand were slightly less positive than sentenced prisoners about the way they had been searched (77% of those on remand said that the search was respectful, compared with 80% of sentenced prisoners) and 75% of men with disabilities said they were searched in a respectful way, compared with 80% of non-disabled prisoners. Muslim men were less likely to report being searched respectfully than non-Muslim prisoners (71% compared with 80%).
- I.31** On arrival at the prison, prisoners' belongings are searched and checked to ensure they are allowed before they move through the establishment. The possessions that prisoners are allowed to have with them are set out on a standard national facilities list; individual prisons may not add to this list but can select from it so what is allowed in one prison may not be allowed in another. Prisoners, particularly those on remand, often report frustration with the small amount of property they are permitted to take into the residential accommodation. This creates an additional anxiety as prisoners are often not told what will happen to their belongings and staff do not routinely explain how they can access their property at a future date. In 2012–13 the PPO received over 3,000 complaints that were eligible for investigation; one in five of those related to property³⁰. This is also a frequent complaint made to members of the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB) within prisons.
- 'They deliberately stopped processing my property, saying weekend staff could do it – and left me minus my clothing and uncertain when I'd next see it or if it would be safe. I felt very frustrated.'*
- I.32** Initial health screening interviews should be conducted as soon as possible, in private, by a nurse or GP, to assess prisoners' physical health needs, substance withdrawal issues and mental health problems. Health care screens in reception are linked to the overall health care IT system, SystemOne. We generally found that initial health screening was good, with health care staff making appropriate referrals to services such as substance misuse when necessary. However, it was concerning that some of these assessments were conducted in close proximity to other prisoners, creating a possible breach in patient confidentiality. Our PER thematic³¹ described the difficulties health care staff sometimes had in accessing important information about newly arrived prisoners:

²⁹ HMI Prisons (2015) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Dovegate* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.13

³⁰ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2014) *Learning Lessons from PPO Investigations: Prisoners' property complaints*, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, p.5

³¹ HMI Prisons (2012) *The use of the person escort record with detainees at risk of self-harm*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

*'At one establishment, reception officers barely spoke to incoming prisoners other than to check their name. Here, the reception nurse told us that she always 'rifled through' as many PERs as she could to find information about self-harm, and placed the yellow (second) copy of the relevant pages, and any self-harm warning forms, in the prisoner's health care file. However, there was not always time to go through each PER thoroughly, so self-harm information might be missed, particularly if a self-harm warning form had not been completed. She added that she would, in any case, check SystemOne and the confidential medical file for any self-harm information for each incoming prisoner she saw.'*³²

- I.33** Convicted prisoners are placed on the 'entry' level of the incentives and earned privileges scheme and male entry level prisoners are given prison issue clothing in reception, and are required to wear this for at least 14 days on arrival at an establishment. Remand and women prisoners are allowed to wear their own clothing if it is available. We often found prisoner clothing to be ill-fitting and unsuitable for use.

'Our observations during the inspection supported the views of prisoners in our survey about the lack of basic provisions. In our survey, fewer prisoners than at comparator prisons said that they could get enough clean clothes for the week. There was too little prison clothing to go round, with some prisoners being issued with only three sets of underwear for the week. This was compounded by ill-fitting and damaged items, leaving prisoners feeling embarrassed about the clothing they had to wear.' (HMP Bristol, 2014)³³

- I.34** Prisoners should be allowed to take numbers from their mobile phone and make one telephone call, subject to risk assessment. It should then be explained how they can add approved numbers that they are allowed to call to their 'PIN phone' list and what numbers (such as their legal representative) they are allowed to call in confidence.
- I.35** Prisoners are issued with an emergency canteen pack to tide them over until they can make or receive a full canteen order. They can choose to receive a 'smokers' or 'non-smokers' pack. Packs will contain basic toiletries and tobacco or sweets. The cost of canteen packs is then taken out of the prisoners' future earnings in the prison and this should be explained to the prisoner. Inspections frequently find prisoners have to wait a long time before they can make a full canteen order and this makes them vulnerable to debt and associated bullying.
- I.36** The majority of prisoners arriving at the prisons we inspected had access to something to eat before being locked up for their first night – whether that was in the reception area or in the first night centre – but there were individuals who arrived at establishments late in the evening who did not always receive the same treatment. In the prisons we inspected, many prisoners did not have the opportunity to shower before being locked up on their first night. The table below shows that although the majority of prisoners were offered tobacco on their arrival, in our surveys many told us they not offered other basic entitlements. On numerous occasions our own checks confirmed these shortcomings.

³² HMI Prisons (2012) The use of the person escort record with detainees at risk of self-harm : HM Inspectorate of Prisons, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.17

³³ HMI Prisons (2015) Report on an announced inspection of HMP Bristol London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.33

When you first arrived here, were you offered any of the following:	Men's local prisons	Women's local prisons
Tobacco?	80%	84%
A shower?	33%	49%
A free telephone call?	57%	76%
Something to eat?	72%	79%
PIN phone credit?	52%	64%
Toiletries/basic items?	59%	76%

(Data from adult male and young adult male local prisons and adult female local prisons)

First night in prison

- I.37** Most prisons will have a dedicated first night centre or induction wing where new arrivals will be placed, with a separate unit for vulnerable prisoners. Based on the cell sharing risk assessment, which will be conducted either in the reception area or in the first night centre, prisoners will either be allocated to a single or shared cell. In some cases, sharing a cell can offer newly arrived prisoners with additional support in their first hours in custody.
- I.38** As with reception areas, first night centres often vary in their physical conditions. We expect first night cells to be prepared for the new arrival: they should be clean and well-equipped with suitable bedding and furniture, and other items such plastic cutlery, plates and mugs, a television and a kettle. Even though a small number were well-equipped and clean, we too often found that first night cells were dirty and unprepared for new arrivals, with some containing offensive graffiti and insufficient bedding and equipment. In some prisons new arrivals are placed in the best accommodation, with a separate shower and toilet attached to the cell.
- I.39** First night centres are sometimes too small to hold the large number of receptions to the prison. Individuals new to the establishment are therefore dispersed elsewhere in the prison, reducing their chances of receiving greater levels of support during the crucial first period of custody. Conversely, we found that in many prisons, prisoners who were assessed as unsuitable for 'normal location' elsewhere in the prison, for fears over their safety, the risks they posed to other prisoners or other reasons, were taking up scarce beds in first night centres. Some first night centres were used to reintegrate ex-segregation prisoners³⁴, placing vulnerable new arrivals in close proximity to some of the most challenging prisoners. This mixture of prisoners in first night centres creates an inappropriate environment and poor example for new arrivals.

'I do feel like I was thrown in to the lion's den somewhat. Officers did not show much presence and drugs were offered by other inmates instantaneously. It does not seem right for induction prisoners to be mixed with those who have been here for a long time. There is a problem with systematic intimidation.'

- I.40** In our prisoner survey, 73% of respondents at men's local prisons said that they felt safe on their first night at the prison and 75% of those at women's local prisons told us that they felt safe on their first night. Only 65% of men in custody for the first time reported feeling safe on their first night (compared with 77% of those who had been in custody before).

³⁴ Prisoners who have been separated from the 'normal' population due to their disruptive behaviour and/or because they require protection from others.

'First night was horrible, depressing and scary.'

'First night centre was scary as I was sharing with four other prisoners and could not sleep all night, one person was suicidal and had withdrawal symptoms from high drugs, and another person was suicidal and was screaming all night...'

- I.41** First night assessments provide a tool for staff to identify anxieties which may lead to incidents of self-harm and/or risks which the individual may pose to others. If staff are not trained to conduct these assessments correctly, there is potential for serious incidents to occur. The quality of first night assessments varied greatly between the establishments we inspected. There were good examples of risk assessments at the women's establishments: staff paid more attention to identifying and managing the anxieties displayed by the women and ensured that they placed sufficient attention on the wellbeing of their dependents.
- I.42** A small number of first night interviews and CSRAs were carried out in a sensitive, confidential manner which sufficiently identified risks. For example at HMP Thameside (2015) we reported that:

*'First night staff were properly sighted on issues of risk and vulnerability, conducted focused first night risk assessments and offered appropriate support to those who needed it.'*³⁵

- I.43** However, the first night assessments at many of the men's prisons we inspected did not give enough emphasis to vulnerability as they were not sufficiently private, and neither enough time nor resources were allocated to allow staff to conduct the assessments effectively. Prisoners often told us that they felt staff rushed these assessments and therefore risks were not adequately addressed.

'I feel like there was no proper screening or cell sharing risk assessment as I was high risk in my last prison and when I mentioned it here they didn't know what high risk was.'

'I should've been assessed by healthcare and they should've been made aware that I was a schizophrenic and high risk CSRA when sharing a cell with another schizophrenic who was high risk.'

- I.44** Wings were normally staffed by operation support grades at night. Some made a point of identifying all new arrivals, speaking to them individually and checking they were settled for the night. However, we were concerned that in many establishments, night staff could not identify new arrivals unless a specific risk had been noted or if the prisoner was subject to an open assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT)³⁶ document. Consequently, staff were not providing higher levels of support for individuals who were new to the establishment.

'I got no help on my first night, I was just put in a cell and the door shut.'

- I.45** As described above some prisoners may arrive late to the establishment because they have travelled long distances or been delayed in getting from reception to the first night centre. It is essential that they are able to receive all of the above services, and that staffing is sufficient within the first night centre to complete all of the required risk assessments, before locking them up for the first night. Prisoners should also have the cell call bell explained to them and know how to summon help if they require it.

³⁵ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report on an announced inspection of HMP Thameside* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.11

³⁶ Case management document for prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Access to support during the first 24 hours

- I.46** We expect that ‘prisoners are fully supported on arrival and during their early days in prison.’³⁷ This support should come from officers promptly addressing individual needs and anxieties, and prisoners having adequate access to chaplaincy and/or peer support workers, and to information about what is going to happen to them and how to access services in the prison.
- I.47** HMI Prisons’ thematic on suicide in prisons³⁸ highlighted the important role that a prison’s reception processes have on preventing suicide and self-harm among newly received prisoners. An individual’s experience of their first 24 hours in prison is extremely important³⁹. In order to navigate this stressful and high-risk time safely, individuals rely on other prisoners and staff members to provide information to help them understand what is going to happen to them⁴⁰. Peer support can also play a key role within the first 24 hours in reassuring new arrivals and reducing any anxieties they have with regard to entering prison along with improving the quality of, and the atmosphere in, the first night accommodation.

‘I am a first time prisoner and I received nothing on what prison was about, what to do or anything. So I would recommend that there should be someone there to explain what goes on etc.’

- I.48** As shown in the table below, many prisoners at both men and women’s local prisons were likely to report having problems when they first arrived. Although women reported having more problems when they arrived at the prison (76%), they were also much more likely to receive help from staff in dealing with them.

	Men’s local prisons	Women’s local prisons
When you first arrived did you have any problems?	76%	78%
Did you receive any help/support from staff in dealing with these problems?	32%	52%

(Data from adult male and young adult local prisons and adult female local prisons)

- I.49** There was some evidence of good work in this area and good practice was identified at HMP Preston (2014), a men’s local prison, which provided opportunities for those new to an establishment to discuss their anxieties, and therefore reduce the risk of self-harm or suicide.

‘The follow-up interview the day after arrival gave prisoners an opportunity to ask any questions or disclose any anxieties after their first night in custody. It also allowed staff to check that they understood the information they had been given and find out how they were feeling.’⁴¹

- I.50** Once prisoners are allocated a cell and have their PIN phone numbers approved they should have opportunities to phone home. Delays in approving PIN phone numbers can prevent this. On the whole, prisoners were more likely to report problems with contacting family

³⁷ HMI Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Treatment of Prisoners and Conditions in Prisons* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

³⁸ HMI Prisons (1999) *Suicide is Everyone’s Concern* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

³⁹ Jacobson, J., Edgar, K. and Loucks, N. (2007) *There When You Need Them Most: Pact’s First Night in Custody Services* Prison Reform Trust, p.iii

⁴⁰ HMI Prisons (2014) *HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2013–14* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.25

⁴¹ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Preston* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.21

members (33% at men's prisons and 27% at women's prisons) and accessing phone numbers (32% at men's prisons and 23% at women's prisons) compared with other problems. Over a third (39%) of individuals at women's prisons reported having mental health problems and a third (37%) also reported having problems with feeling depressed or suicidal.

	Men's local prisons	Women's local prisons
Did you have any problems with loss of property?	15%	11%
Did you have any housing problems?	20%	26%
Did you have any problems contacting employers?	5%	2%
Did you have any problems contacting family?	33%	27%
Did you have any problems ensuring dependents were being looked after?	3%	4%
Did you have any money worries?	23%	24%
Did you have any problems with feeling depressed or suicidal?	23%	37%
Did you have any physical health problems?	18%	25%
Did you have any mental health problems?	23%	39%
Did you have any problems with needing protection from other prisoners?	8%	5%
Did you have problems with accessing phone numbers?	32%	23%

(Data from adult male and young adult local prisons and adult female local prisons)

1.51 Prisoners should be able to speak to a Listener⁴² or Insider⁴³ when they request to, but many of the establishments we inspected had no established formal peer support scheme for those who were new to the prison, and only a third of prisoners who were in custody for the first time reported having access to a Listener and or Samaritan phone when they arrived. Peer supporters may provide reassurance, answer questions that prisoners are reluctant to ask staff, give induction presentations and tours of the prison and carry out administrative tasks such as the distribution of equipment. In our inspections, we found that there were different levels of support available for prisoners across the different types of establishments. These services were not always available to new receptions: for example, at HMP Durham (2013) 'meet and greet' prisoner orderlies trained by Shelter saw all new arrivals on their first night to complete a housing needs assessment, but while they were available to offer other support they had no other formal first night responsibilities.

1.52 We found good support at HMP Styal (2015), a women's local prison, where:

*'First night arrangements were good and peer workers played a key role in helping new arrivals to settle into the prison.'*⁴⁴

1.53 Where individuals could access support, it was usually to a very good level, although some peer support workers such as Insiders had access to very personal information which was inappropriate.

⁴² Prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners.

⁴³ Prisoners who introduce new arrivals to prison life.

⁴⁴ HMI Prisons (2015) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Styal*, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.11

Insiders and Listeners lived in the first night centre; they were organised, enthusiastic and provided new prisoners with much needed assistance. Insiders helped prisoners complete their induction and immediate needs assessment documentation, although they were regularly allocated inappropriate tasks beyond their remit with little staff supervision⁴⁵. (HMP Elmley, 2014).

I.54 Prisoners were positive about the support they received from Listeners and Insiders:

'I think that listeners do a crucial job in supporting new prisoners in the jail.'

'It is very overwhelming to have so much information within the first few days, but people like safer custody, insiders and peer mentors are a great resource to have.'

'Someone should be responsible to help you on a more personal level when you come in. As a first time prisoner it was and still is very distressing and lonely and hard to accept.'

When you first arrived here, did you have access to any of the following:	Men's local prisons	Women's local prisons
The chaplain or a religious leader?	44%	56%
Someone from health services?	67%	74%
A Listener/ Samaritans?	31%	41%

(Data from adult male and young adult local prisons and adult female local prisons)

Conclusion

I.55 A prisoner's reception and first 24 hours in prison is a high-risk time. Prisoners experience reception and their first 24 hours in custody differently, depending on their personal characteristics and previous experience of prison. They may have strong feelings of remorse or shame, concern about family members or be apprehensive about what will happen to them in prison. There will usually have been little effort to allay their concerns while they wait in court. We found mostly positive treatment by reception staff but routine strip-searching was the norm in many establishments and prisoners were not always given enough information on what was going to happen to them. There were also concerns surrounding the experiences of individuals in the first night centres. In many of the establishments we inspected, night staff were unaware of the new receptions and we were not sufficiently assured that first night interviews and CSRAs were always completed to a satisfactory standard. First night accommodation was not always prepared properly (for example, it was not clean or lacked basic necessities such as bedding).

I.56 On the whole, those who had been remanded in custody or were in prison for the first time reported much less positive experiences of their first 24 hours in custody. As the first point of contact which this group of prisoners, who are vulnerable and often completely unknown to staff, will have with the prison system, local prisons need to do more to ensure that reception and induction processes aim to support these 'at risk' individuals more effectively.

⁴⁵ HMI Prisons (2014) *Report on an announced inspection of HMP Elmley* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, p.22

- I.57** Through our inspections, we found the most common weaknesses in prison reception processes to be:
- prisoners being strip-searched without individual risk assessments being applied
 - staff not giving clear and accurate information to help prisoners understand what is going to happen to them
 - first night accommodation often being underprepared for the new arrivals (inadequately clean or not containing the correct provisions, such as bedding and plastic dining utensils)
 - staff not undertaking thorough first night interviews and therefore insufficiently assessing risks that new arrivals pose to themselves and others.
- I.58** However, recent increased use of peer support workers to provide support to new arrivals and help them to adjust to their new environment is a positive development, although prisons need to ensure that peer support workers do not have access to new arrivals' confidential information and are not given inappropriate responsibilities. We also found evidence of good staff identification and support for new arrivals in some cases.
- I.59** The first 24 hours in custody is a crucial time for prisoners. It is a time when prisoners are at their most distressed and risks of self-harm and suicide are extremely high⁴⁶. It is therefore extremely important that individuals are made to feel safe and supported by staff and other prisoners. Staff should take time to explain what is going to happen to a prisoner during their time at an establishment, particularly in their first few days. Staff should be properly trained to identify risk factors, while also taking their time to fully assess prisoners' anxieties. Accurate completion of risk assessments can help to ensure that prisoners are safe from harm in their early days in custody.

Acknowledgements

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⁴⁶ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2014) *Learning from PPO Investigations: Risk factors in self-inflicted deaths in prisons*, p.11