

Report on an unannounced inspection of the
short-term holding facility at

Larne House

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

6 June 2018

Glossary of terms

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Fact page

Task of the establishment

To hold immigration detainees for up to seven days before their removal from the UK or transfer to an immigration removal centre.

Location

Antrim, Northern Ireland

Name of contractor

Mitie

Last inspection

2 February 2016

Escort provider

Mitie

Introduction

Larne House is one of three residential short-term holding facilities (STHFs) in the immigration detention estate.¹ The facility is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Home Office can hold detainees for up to five days in a residential STF, or seven if removal directions have been set. The Larne House facility is run on behalf of the Home Office by the private company Mitie, which took over the contract from Tascor on 1 May 2018. The facility holds up to 19 men and women. Detainees arrive from Drumkeen House STF in Belfast, police stations, prisons or directly from enforcement operations in the community. On departure, detainees are transferred to immigration removal centres in England and Scotland, removed from the UK or released into the community.

During the inspection, only one person was held. We were told that the number of detainees had been reducing but the new contractor was unable to provide us with any detainee logs or figures. This was apparently because information was not available from the previous contractor. We were given the same reason for other data and policies being unavailable. No detainees arrived at or left the facility. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) for the Glasgow and Edinburgh STHFs also monitored Larne.

¹ The others are at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre and Manchester Airport short-term holding facility.

About this inspection and report

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent, statutory organisation which reports on the treatment and conditions of those detained in prisons, young offender institutions, immigration detention facilities and police custody.

All inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons 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 detainees. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

All Inspectorate of Prisons reports carry a summary of the conditions and treatment of detainees, based on the four tests of a healthy prison that were first introduced in this inspectorate's thematic review *Suicide is everyone's concern*, published in 1999. The tests have been modified to fit the inspection of short-term holding facilities, both residential and non-residential. The tests for short-term holding facilities are:

Safety – that detainees are held in safety and with due regard to the insecurity of their position

Respect – that detainees are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention²

Preparation for removal and release – that detainees are able to maintain contact with family, friends, support groups, legal representatives and advisers, access information about their country of origin and be prepared for their release, transfer or removal. Detainees are able to retain or recover their property.

Inspectors kept fully in mind that although these were custodial facilities, detainees were not held because they had been charged with a criminal offence and had not been detained through normal judicial processes.

² Non-residential STHFs are unsuitable for long stays and detainees should not be held in them for more than a few hours. This limits what activities can or need to be provided. We will therefore report any notable issues concerning activities in the accommodation and facilities section.

Summary

- S1 We last inspected Larne short-term holding facility (STHF) in 2016 and made 10 recommendations. The facility did not fully accept any of the recommendations and partially accepted seven. It rejected three recommendations. At this follow-up inspection, we found that the facility had achieved two recommendations, partially achieved one and not achieved seven recommendations.
- S2 The facility was staffed by both male and female officers. The booking-in process was conducted at an open desk. As at our previous inspection, we were told that detainee custody officers (DCOs) did not assess detainees' mood during the booking-in process; this assessment was carried out by the nurse. Some restrictions to prevent detainees from self-harming remained disproportionate to the risks posed. There was nurse cover at the facility 24 hours a day, and the nurse saw all new arrivals. Detainees had good access to telephones.
- S3 The only detainee held during the inspection reported that staff had treated her well. Men and women were held in the facility together. As at the previous inspection, local managers could not immediately retrieve and review closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage. All staff were trained in assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT) case management processes for detainees at risk of suicide or self-harm. ACDT documentation was reasonably good.
- S4 We were told that all DCOs had been trained to use the restraint techniques set out in the *Home Office Manual for Escorting Safely*. According to the available documentation, force had been used once in the previous six months. The austere separation cell had been used once since the previous inspection and written guidance on its use had recently been issued by the new contractor.
- S5 Detainees could maintain contact with their legal representatives. The contractor could not provide us with any details of the numbers of detainees or length of time that they were held.
- S6 Detainees held in single rooms could lock their doors from the inside, and all detainees had access to a small safe in which they could store valuables. Couples could share rooms. The facility was accessible to people using a wheelchair. Detainees could practise their religion, and a Muslim chaplain visited the facility if requested. Detainees could make formal complaints in writing. Catering arrangements were satisfactory. There were enough activities for detainees held for short periods.
- S7 DCOs told us that they would help to prepare detainees for their release by explaining the conditions of release and provide travel details to their destination, using professional interpreting services when necessary. Detainees could receive visitors, and volunteers from the Larne House visiting group attended the centre. The entrance to Larne House was not clearly signposted, which could make it difficult for visitors to find. Detainees could freely access the internet and email but could not use video conferencing or social media, which remained a disproportionate security measure.

Section 1. Safety

Arrival and reception

Expected outcomes:

Detainees travelling to and arriving at the facility are treated with respect and care.

Risks are identified and acted on. Induction is comprehensive.

- I.1** No detainees arrived at the facility during the inspection. One female detainee had arrived the day before. She told us that she had been treated well during the journey and by staff at the centre on arrival. The detainee had been transferred in a suitable vehicle and was not handcuffed during the journey.
- I.2** The centre was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and was staffed at the time of the inspection by a duty operations manager and six detainee custody officers (DCOs), three of whom were women. We were told that there was always a female officer on duty.
- I.3** DCOs were notified of new arrivals well in advance, allowing sufficient time to prepare for their arrival. We were told that detainees would not be admitted without the necessary form authorising their detention (IS91). We were told that new arrivals were welcomed by facility staff, and were given a rub-down and wand search in private. They were issued with a toothbrush, toothpaste and a replacement clothing pack.
- I.4** DCOs booked in detainees using professional telephone interpreting services when necessary, and completed a thorough induction and a room-sharing risk assessment. However, as at our previous inspection, this was carried out at the reception desk in front of the waiting room, which could have prevented confidential communication between DCOs and detainees. We were told that DCOs asked detainees if they had any needs or concerns about living with others. They did not assess the detainee's mood and state of mind, but the nurse identified any concerns during a more in-depth interview and immediately passed information to DCOs.
- I.5** A nurse was based at the facility 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and all new arrivals were seen for a health assessment. Consultations were conducted in a dedicated health care room off the main reception area. We were told that the door would be closed and the consultation would be completed in private.
- I.6** Detainees could retain cash but not mobile phones with cameras and internet access, for security reasons. However, replacement mobile phones were routinely given to detainees to use with their own SIM cards. If their SIM card was not compatible with the facility's loan phones, detainees could retrieve telephone numbers from their mobile phone. Two payphones, with privacy hoods, were also available for detainees, and they could buy phone cards from the facility shop. We were told that staff actively encouraged detainees to give their family, friends and legal representatives the telephone numbers of the payphones for incoming calls.

Recommendation

- I.7 Reception interviews should be conducted in private.**

Safeguarding adults and personal safety

Expected outcomes:

The facility promotes the welfare of all detainees and protects them from all kinds of harm and neglect. The facility provides a safe environment which reduces the risk of self-harm and suicide. Detainees are protected from bullying and victimisation, and force is only used as a last resort and for legitimate reasons.

- I.8** DCOs were not aware of any Mitie safeguarding adults policy or the national referral mechanism (NRM) to identify and support victims of trafficking. We were told that if DCOs identified detainees who were at risk of harm due to specific vulnerabilities, this would be reported immediately to the Home Office.
- I.9** All DCOs had been trained in assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT) case management procedures for detainees at risk of suicide or self-harm. Although Mitie was unable to provide us with any figures on ACDTs, we found on-site copies of five that had been opened in the previous six months. The quality of the closed ACDT documents that we reviewed was reasonably good, although there was systematic use of 'DP' to refer to the detained person rather than their preferred name. Observational entries were good and demonstrated care and support for detainees in crisis.
- I.10** Not all rules to prevent self-harm were proportionate to the risks posed or sufficiently tailored to the individual. Detainees were not allowed to keep phone chargers, belts or items of corded clothing, such as sweatshirts with hoods. They were also prevented from retaining their own razor blades, which was intrusive and unnecessary for those detainees not at risk of self-harm.
- I.11** Men and women could be held together in the facility. As at our previous inspection, three rooms on a single corridor had been designated for use by women, but this corridor was not separate from the rest of the facility and men could walk through it to go to the dining room. If the facility held a high number of men, they might also have to be located in rooms on this corridor, although we were told this rarely happened. Women in these rooms could lock them; this could be overridden by staff in the event of an emergency. Communal areas were shared by men and women.
- I.12** Staff were visible around the centre. CCTV cameras monitored the facility. Although the footage was stored on a hard drive, as at the previous inspection, local managers could not easily retrieve and review it. To do this, they had to make a request to the Home Office, which then contacted a subcontractor to visit the facility to download it. This was time-consuming and could potentially delay the gathering of any required evidence.
- I.13** There was one record of a use of force against a detainee in the previous six months. The man had refused to return to the residential area after seeing a nurse. He was initially passively resistant but then became aggressive. Paperwork demonstrated attempts at de-escalation before the detainee was placed in handcuffs, for approximately 10 minutes, and a waist restraint belt for about 50 minutes, mostly in the restricted position, which allows arm movement. The management of the incident appeared proportionate and force was used as a last resort.
- I.14** The detainee remained aggressive and disruptive and spent 36 hours in the separation cell before being transferred, which we were told was the only recorded use of the cell since the previous inspection. The man had also destroyed furniture and was not suitable for normal accommodation. He was also considered a risk to himself and the ACDT documentation suggested that he was well cared for and allowed substantial freedom of movement. The cell (previously a police station cell, see paragraph I.26) was stark, with no toilet, sink, drinking

water or furniture. Mitie had published written guidance for its use shortly before our inspection, but this was not in place at the time the man was held.

Recommendations

- I.15 Mitie should publish a safeguarding policy and publicise this to all staff. The policy should include clear links with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the local safeguarding adults partnership board.**
- I.16 Men and women should be held separately.** (Repeated recommendation I.14)
- I.17 Detainees should be referred to by their preferred name in all documentation.**
- I.18 Detainees' clothing and toiletries should not be removed unless an individualised risk assessment indicates otherwise.** (Repeated recommendation I.11)
- I.19 Onsite managers should be able to retrieve and review closed-circuit television footage easily.** (Repeated recommendation I.15)

Safeguarding children

Expected outcomes:

The facility promotes the welfare of children and protects them from all kinds of harm and neglect.

- I.20** Children were not held at the facility. AccessNI, the criminal history disclosure service in Northern Ireland, had checked the criminal backgrounds of Mitie staff working in the facility.

Legal rights

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are fully aware of and understand their detention, following their arrival at the facility and on release. Detainees are supported by the facility staff to freely exercise their legal rights.

- I.21** Detainees who already had a legal representative could maintain contact with them. Lists of local legal representatives and their telephone numbers were displayed in the facility, along with details of the Civil Legal Advice helpline in English and other languages. Detainees could consult their legal representatives in private in one of the two interview rooms.
- I.22** Detainees were issued with the reasons for their detention, but in English only. We were told that Home Office staff explained the reasons using interpretation. Neither the contractor nor the Home Office could provide us with data on the number of detainees held or the length of detention, which was poor.

Recommendations

- I.23 Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand.** (Repeated recommendation I.26)
- I.24 Data that is important for purposes of accountability should be available regardless of changes in contractor, and should include numbers detained, length of detention and numbers of incident reports.**

Respect

Accommodation and facilities

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are held in a safe, clean and decent environment. They are offered varied meals according to their individual requirements. The facility encourages activities to promote mental well-being.

- I.25** The facility was clean, appropriately ventilated and did not feel oppressive. It could accommodate 19 detainees in 10 bedrooms, and also included a reception area, health care room, two interview rooms, association room, dining room, exercise yard, prayer room, separation cell and staff offices.
- I.26** The bedrooms were basic but clean and well maintained, with one to four beds. Couples could share a room. Detainees in single rooms could lock their rooms from the inside. Personal safes were available in rooms to enable each detainee to store valuable items. Some rooms, which had previously been police station cells, were more cell-like, had smaller windows and were less well ventilated. Clean pillows, blankets and bedding were issued to new arrivals.
- I.27** The exercise yard was small and cage-like but was unlocked all day, allowing free access for detainees. It had a table and chairs, some benches and some pictures on the walls. It included a sheltered area that detainees could use when it rained, as well as a cigarette lighter on the wall. We were told that it was locked at midnight, but if a detainee wished to have a cigarette or go outside after this time staff would facilitate this.
- I.28** Catering arrangements were adequate. Detainees had free access to the dining room, 24 hours a day. All food and drink had to be consumed in the dining room, and could not be taken elsewhere. The dining room contained a television, DVD player and four fixed tables, each with four seats attached. We were told that when the facility was full, detainees would eat in two sittings. Biscuits, porridge, cereal, fruit, and hot and cold drinks were freely available in the dining room. A variety of frozen ready meals, including vegan, halal and kosher, were heated up and provided at regular mealtimes. A menu card listing the options had been translated into a range of languages. Staff maintained a record of when detainees ate and would support those who were not eating. Staff told us that they would provide meals for detainees who arrived outside mealtimes, and could use petty cash to shop at a nearby supermarket if needed. The food storage and preparation areas were clean and well stocked. Detainees could buy a limited range of confectionery and soft drinks from the facility shop.
- I.29** There were sufficient activities to occupy detainees held for short periods, including newspapers, magazines and books, although most were in English. A television, games console, two computers, board games and a selection of jigsaws were also available in the association room.

Respectful treatment

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are treated with respect by all staff. Effective complaints procedures are in place for detainees. There is understanding of detainees' diverse cultural backgrounds. Detainees' health care needs are met.

- I.30** DCOs were polite and respectful. We observed staff interacting with the detainee held, and the atmosphere in the facility was relaxed. The detainee told us she was satisfied with her treatment in the facility, but was worried about her immigration case. Staff wore several name badges, to access various buildings, but it was difficult to read them to identify their names.
- I.31** Detainees could complain formally in writing. Complaint forms in English and other languages were available, and there were three secure boxes for detainees to post complaints. A Mitie detainee operations manager emptied the boxes daily.
- I.32** The centre had an external access ramp and two accessible toilets. Staff told us they were aware of the need to open a care plan for all detainees with disabilities. All staff had completed equality and diversity refresher training within the previous year.
- I.33** Professional telephone interpreting appeared to be used regularly. Data was provided for November 2017, December 2017 and January 2018 rather than the three months prior to the inspection. The figures showed that telephone interpretation had been used on 110, 75 and 124 occasions respectively during those months. Staff were clearly comfortable using the service.
- I.34** The facility had a designated prayer room, which was accessible to detainees 24 hours a day, but it was box-like and poorly ventilated. It was equipped with religious texts and prayer mats, and the direction of Mecca was indicated on the ceiling. There was a published rota for a visiting chaplaincy service. Contact details for a local Muslim chaplain were available and he visited when requested.
- I.35** Female detainees were held in the facility with men, on a corridor designated for their use (see paragraph I.11). There were toilets and showers for women, and a choice of sanitary protection was freely available. We were told that no pregnant women had been held at the facility.

Preparation for removal and release

Communications

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are able to maintain contact with the outside world using a full range of communications media.

- I.36** Detainees could access the internet and web-based email accounts, but Skype and social networking sites were blocked, which was disproportionate.
- I.37** The facility was not signposted. It was next to a police station and visitors had to go to the police station entrance to find their way to the facility. Detainees were allowed personal and legal visits in the two interview rooms. These were booked in 30-minute slots between 2pm and 9pm daily, although staff told us that this arrangement was flexible and they would allow access to a family member who had travelled a long distance and arrived outside this period. Visitors could bring property into the centre for detainees, up to a maximum weight of 22kg. Medication could also be brought in and was stored until the detainee left the facility. Detainees could telephone family, friends and legal representatives to advise them of their transfer. Information cards with the address and telephone number of immigration removal centres (IRCs) were available for detainees transferring to further detention.
- I.38** A group of volunteers, the Larne House visiting group, visited detainees in the centre ad hoc to provide additional support and advice. Posters advertising this service were displayed throughout the centre.

Recommendations

- I.39** The entrance to the facility should be signposted for visitors.
- I.40** Detainees should be permitted access to Skype and social networking sites, as well as the internet and email.

Leaving the facility

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are prepared for their release, transfer or removal. They are able to retain or recover their property. Families with children and others with specific needs are not detained without items essential for their welfare.

- I.41** We were told that before they left, all detainees were seen by the nurse, given a rub-down search and had their personal belongings returned. Staff told us that detainees were not routinely handcuffed when leaving the facility or during transfer to an IRC.

Section 2. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation To the Home Office and facility contractor

- 2.1 Men and women should be held separately. (1.16, repeated recommendation 1.14)

Recommendation To the Home Office

- 2.2 Detainees should be permitted access to Skype and social networking sites, as well as the internet and email. (1.40)

Recommendations To the facility contractor

Arrival and reception

- 2.3 Reception interviews should be conducted in private. (1.7)

Safeguarding adults and personal safety

- 2.4 Mitie should publish a safeguarding policy and publicise this to all staff. The policy should include clear links with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the local safeguarding adults partnership board. (1.15)
- 2.5 Detainees should be referred to by their preferred name in all documentation. (1.17)
- 2.6 Detainees' clothing and toiletries should not be removed unless an individualised risk assessment indicates otherwise. (1.18, repeated recommendation 1.11)
- 2.7 Onsite managers should be able to retrieve and review closed-circuit television footage easily. (1.19, repeated recommendation 1.15)

Legal rights

- 2.8 Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand. (1.23, repeated recommendation 1.26)
- 2.9 Data that is important for purposes of accountability should be available regardless of changes in contractor, and should include numbers detained, length of detention and numbers of incident reports. (1.24)

Communications

- 2.10 The entrance to the facility should be signposted for visitors. (1.39)

Section 3. Appendices

Appendix I: Inspection team

Tamara Pattinson
Stevie Wilson

Inspector
Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

Appendix II: Progress on recommendations from the last report

The following is a list of all the recommendations made in the last report, organised under the four tests of a healthy establishment. The reference numbers at the end of each recommendation refer to the paragraph location in the previous report. If a recommendation has been repeated in the main report, its new paragraph number is also provided.

Safety

Detainees are held in safety and with due regard to the insecurity of their position.

Recommendations

Reception interviews and medical consultations should be conducted in private. (1.9)

Partially achieved

Detainee custody officers should ascertain detainees' mood on arrival and assess any risks. (1.10)

Not achieved

Detainees' clothing and toiletries should not be removed unless an individualised risk assessment indicates otherwise. (1.11, repeated recommendation 1.9)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.18)

Onsite managers should be able to retrieve and review closed-circuit television footage easily. (1.15)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.19)

Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand. (1.26)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.23)

Men and women should be held separately. (1.14, repeated recommendation 1.13)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.16)

The separation cell should be formally taken out of commission until appropriate governance is in place. (1.23)

Achieved

Respect

Detainees are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention.

Recommendation

Detainees should have free access to the exercise yard. (1.40)

Achieved

Preparation for removal and release

Detainees are able to maintain contact with the outside world and be prepared for their release, transfer or removal.

Recommendations

Detainees should be permitted access to legitimate websites and email, including Skype and social networking sites, subject to risk assessment. (I.39, repeated recommendation I.57)

Not achieved

Detainee custody officers should issue travel warrants, rather than cash, to detainees being released from detention. (I.45)

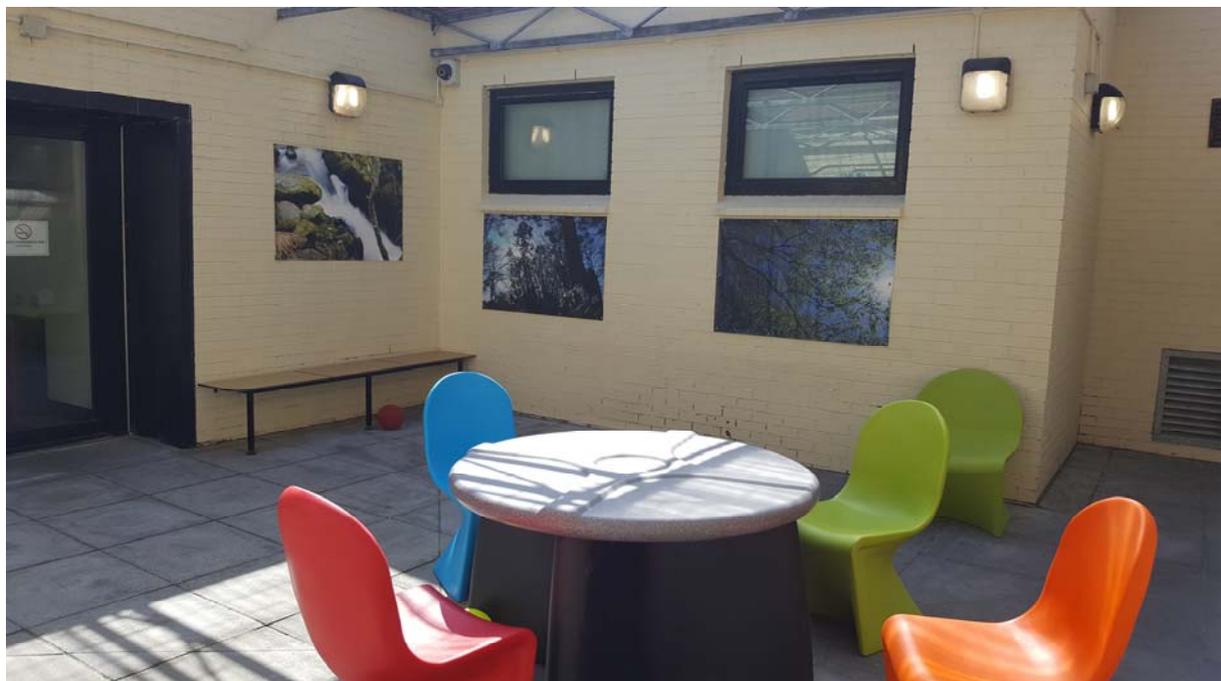
Not achieved

Appendix III: Photographs

Dining room



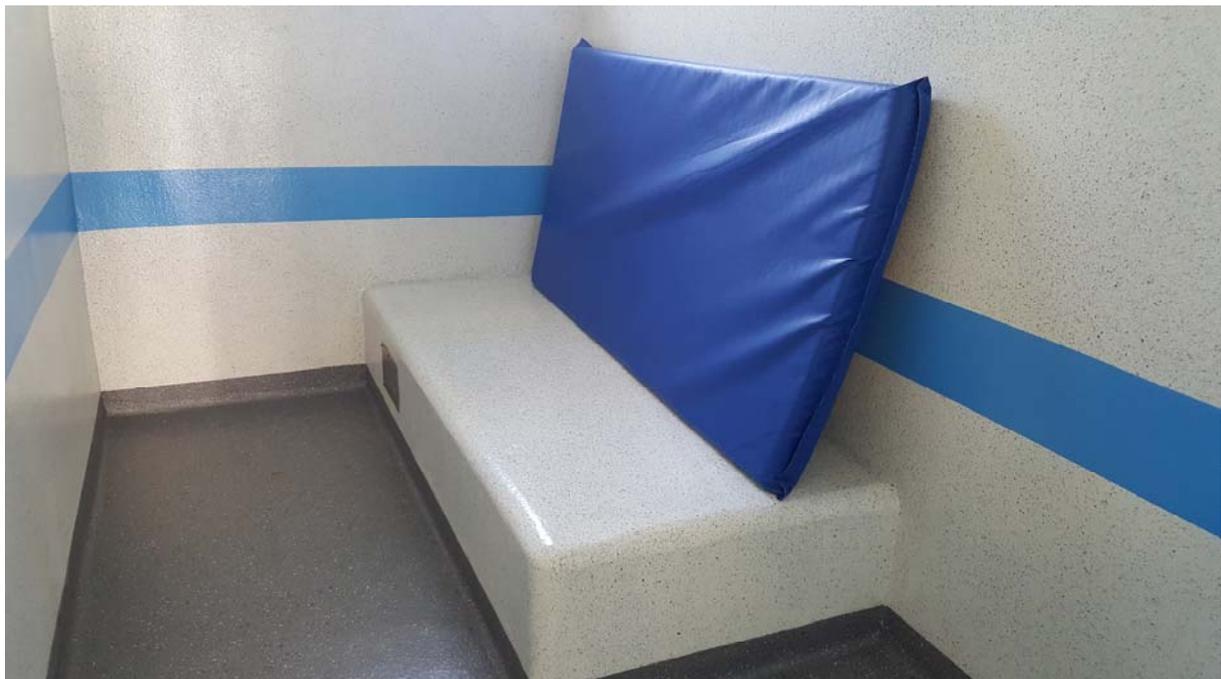
Exercise yard



Prayer room



Separation cell



Unoccupied double rooms

