

Thematic Report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons



Prisoners under escort

December 2004





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Introduction

It is well known that the early days of custody are a time of greatest risk to prisoners, especially those who are imprisoned unexpectedly or for the first time. We expect to find that prisons have in place supportive reception, first night and induction processes to minimise those risks; and that they will hold prisoners decently and in safety.

Yet a prisoner's first experience of custody will not be in a prison: it will often be in a court cell, followed by an escort vehicle, in which the prisoner will be placed in a cubicle, with no forward vision and in some cases for a lengthy period of time. Afterwards, and at a time of potential trauma during court appearances, prisoners may spend eight or more hours travelling to and from, and being detained in, courts. These experiences of custody have not so far been inspected in detail. Together with the Magistrates' Courts Inspectorate, we are therefore undertaking a thematic report on court custody and escorts, which will inform both our own regular inspections, and joint inspections of criminal justice areas.

This preliminary paper, on escorts, establishes the position, and the issues that arose, prior to the letting of the new escort contracts in August 2004. It uses information gathered from inspection reports over 18 months, as well as fieldwork in 10 prisons to establish the length of a prisoner's day when under escort to and from prison. It provides a benchmark against which the new contractual arrangements can be assessed in the course of the thematic report.

The issues that arose are summarised below.

Summary

This report amalgamates the findings of 18 months of full inspections and prisoner surveys and presents the results of a benchmarking exercise carried out in 10 prisons earlier this year.

- Journeys to court ranged from 42 minutes to two hours 10 minutes. The average journey was one hour 24 minutes. Juveniles, women and young adult prisoners experienced the longest journeys.
- The length of time prisoners were away from the establishment when produced for court ranged from six hours 29 minutes to 10 hours 11 minutes, with an average of eight hours 26 minutes.
- Ten per cent of prisoners arrived after 7pm in the evening.
- The average length of an inter-prison transfer was two hours 22 minutes. Inter-prison transfers to the more remote prisons could take considerably longer.
- Prisoners generally reported positive relationships with escort staff.
- Escort staff and prison staff enjoyed positive and productive working relationships.
- Prisoners disliked the cellular vehicles, specifically the confinement, the length of journeys and the lack of comfort stops. Seventy-four per cent of prisoners rated the comfort of the vehicles as bad or very bad.
- Women under escort reported feeling less safe than men with whom they shared transport, and by whom they could be verbally abused and intimidated.

- Prisoners feared for their safety in the event of an accident, though most reported feeling safe in general while under escort.
- Special needs were not always anticipated in advance and special arrangements made.
- The majority of prisoners rated the provision of comfort breaks as bad. These were provided in only 20% of journeys over two and a half hours in length.
- Prisoners were given insufficient notice of planned moves.
- Prisoners were given insufficient information about what happens under escort, how to communicate with staff or how to make a complaint.

Findings

Background

1.1 Escort contractors carry out about 1.5 million prisoner movements each year, excluding the movement of category A prisoners, at an annual cost of £115 million or £766 per prisoner move.

1.2 The first private contract for escorting prisoners was let as a pilot in 1993 and covered the East Midlands and Northern England. This was followed by eight regional contracts covering all of England and Wales. The Prisoner Escort Custody Service (PECS) within the National Offender Management Service lets and monitors the contracts. A Better Quality Service Review in 2002 and PECS enhancement project preceded their renewal and introduced a four-region structure that became operational on 29 August 2004. The findings on which this paper is based cover the period from April to the end of August 2004 before contracts were re-let, and establish a series of benchmarks against which subsequent performance can be evaluated.

1.3 This preliminary paper is part of a joint project with the Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate (MCSI), but is confined to examining the position for defendants under escort. A subsequent joint publication will include an examination of their treatment and conditions within court custody suites, and a review of performance under the new contracts against the benchmarks identified in this paper. It will also include a review of the use of prison court video links.

1.4 The findings are taken from prison inspection and survey findings since April 2003, and from a benchmarking exercise carried out in 10 prisons during April and August 2004 (see Appendix – Methodology).

Journey length

1.5 Journeys to court were consistently shorter than inter-prison transfers. The average length of the former was one hour 24 minutes and of the latter was two hours 22 minutes. However, these averages conceal considerable variations.

1.6 Our fieldwork showed that court production was quickest for adult local and training prisoners and slowest for juvenile prisoners. Journey lengths for women and young offenders were more variable, with those from Holloway and Glen Parva both taking over two hours. Inter-prison transfers to the more remote prisons took significantly longer. At Parkhurst, for example, the average journey time was three hours and 43 minutes. When prisoners moved between prisons it was not uncommon to see individual journeys in excess of four hours, and on occasion as long as eight or nine hours. In surveys of training prisons, around one in 10 prisoners reported that their most recent journey was over four hours long.

Table 1		Average journey times in minutes for prisoners across 10 prisons for transport to court and transfer to another prison	
Prison	Prison type	Average journey time for court visits	Average journey time for prison transfers
Ashfield	Juvenile	102	n/a
Wetherby	Juvenile	93	170

Acklington	Training prison	63	128
Parkhurst	Training prison	64	223
Portland	Young adults	74	172
Glen Parva	Young adults	130	142
Holloway	Women	120	157
Low Newton	Women	88	143
Preston	Local	68	n/a
Manchester	Local	42	n/a
Average		84	142

1.7 Not only are long journeys in themselves frightening and tiring, but they take place in cramped and uncomfortable conditions and stressful circumstances. Prisoners also commented on boredom during these long journeys, without access to personal property or anything to read.

“I spent six hours in transit between Bournemouth and Dorchester in cramped conditions without a toilet break and also suffering from heroin withdrawal.” (Prisoner at Dorchester)

1.8 Prisoners also told us of administrative problems that resulted in them being delivered to the wrong courts or on the wrong dates, or to the wrong prisons, though these events were relatively rare. Case study 1 provides an example.

Case study 1: Interview with a prisoner at Canterbury

The prisoner described a journey that had taken place in the previous 12 months. He was due to appear at Channel Court but was presented at Chatham Court by mistake. The escort van travelled on to Channel Court via Brighton, making the journey over nine and a half hours in total. The prisoner's medication had not been issued to escort staff despite the prisoner having reminded healthcare and prison staff. He claimed that he was not offered comfort stops during either the outward or return journeys. He said that following this experience he has always double-checked with escort staff that his medication would be available during the journey and that since then he had not had any problems.

Court production

1.9 Although journeys to court may be relatively short, court production results in long periods of time away from the establishment, and sometimes involves a prisoner returning to a different prison from the one he or she left in the morning. A day in court typically begins at 6.30am for men and at 6.00am in some women's and juvenile prisons. Having been issued with a packed breakfast the night before, prisoners move directly to the reception area of the prison where their property is bagged and any prescribed medication issued. The marshalling of the vans and the embarkation process takes some time, but most vans are under way by 8.00am. Vans deliver to multiple court destinations and are contracted to deliver to the last court by 9.30am at the latest.

1.10 Most courts prioritised custody cases and dealt with them in the morning, allowing returns to be made at lunch time or early afternoon. More often return trips began mid to late afternoon and, after drops at multiple destinations, prisoners returned to custody in the late afternoon or early evening. Some prisons closed their reception areas over the lunch period. At Wealstun three prisoners told us that they were held in vans for around one and a half hours because the prison reception was closed. This was also the case at North Sea Camp; at Garth this practice had stopped just before the inspection. Table 2 shows the average length of prisoner days on production at court.

Table 2	Average length of prisoner days when on court production	
<i>Prison</i>	<i>Prison type</i>	<i>Average length of day (mins)</i>
Ashfield	Juvenile	8 hours 30 minutes (510)
Wetherby	Juvenile	8 hours 41 minutes (521)
Acklington	Training prison	7 hours 14 minutes (434)
Parkhurst	Training prison	10 hours 11 minutes (611)
Portland	Young adults	8 hours 27 minutes (507)
Glen Parva	Young adults	8 hours 59 minutes (539)
Holloway	Women	9 hours 48 minutes (588)
Low Newton	Women	8 hours 9 minutes (489)
Preston	Local	7 hours 50 minutes (470)
Manchester	Local	6 hours 29 minutes (389)
Average		8 hours 26 minutes (506)

1.11 Over the course of a day one relatively short hearing is likely to involve over eight hours out of the establishment. Most of this time is spent waiting, as the average journey time to and from court is 84 minutes each way. This is of particular concern for those attending court on a number of consecutive days for trial – especially because facilities in court holding cells are impoverished compared to those in prisons. Exercise is not provided and the meals offered to prisoners are of the sort that staff describe as “tiding them over”. A prisoner at Belmarsh asked:

“Why is a vulnerable prisoner taken out at 6.45am, held in a single cell in reception until after 10 o'clock? The court is held up 40 minutes while he is taken through the tunnel to Crown Court. After a three minute adjournment you knew about beforehand he is left until 5.15pm and then delivered back to Belmarsh to wait in reception until taken back to his cell at 7.30pm. Inhumane! A 13 hour day for three minutes only 200 metres away.”

At Styal inspectors noted:

“One prisoner had arrived at Manchester Crown Court at 8.30am: she did not enter the courtroom until 2.45pm and returned to the court cells at 4.15pm; she was returned to Styal at 6.35pm.”

Figure 1 shows the return time for prisoners in our fieldwork sample.

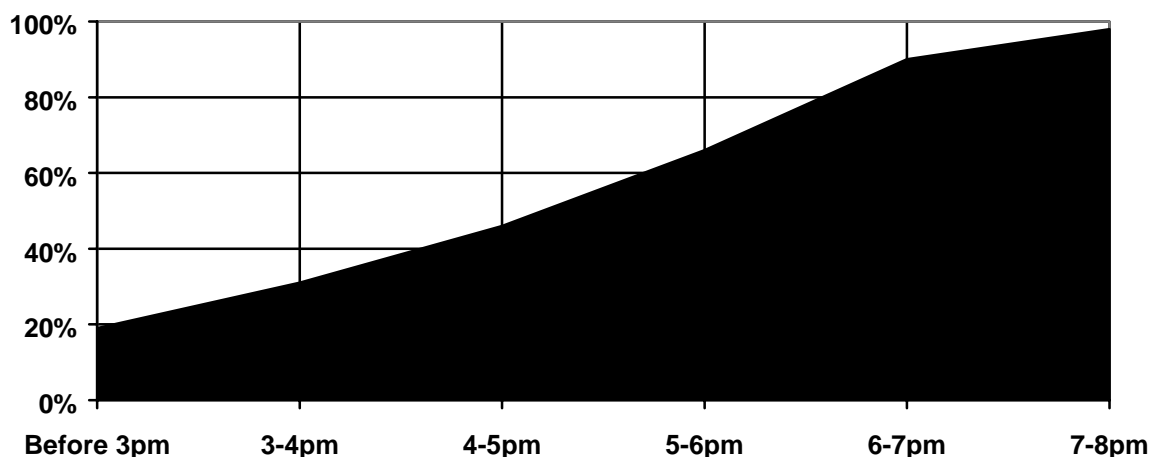


Figure 1. Return times for prisoners from the fieldwork sample.

About 20% of prisoners were returned before 3pm, and most prisoners (90%) were returned by 7pm, but a minority were returned later. Table 3 presents the details of four of these cases from our fieldwork data.

Examples from PER forms of long days for prisoners attending court				
<i>Start point</i>	<i>Arrive at court</i>	<i>Leave court</i>	<i>Arrive at receiving prison</i>	<i>Total length of day</i>
Feltham (8am)	Inner London Crown Court (9.30am)	Inner London Crown Court (5.30pm)	Warren Hill (8.40pm)	12 hours 40 minutes
Edmunds Hill (8.22am)	Chelmsford Crown Court (9.40am)	Chelmsford Crown Court (5.55pm)	Edmunds Hill (7.40pm)	10 hours
Warren Hill (8.20am)	St Albans Crown Court (11.00am)	St Albans Crown Court (5.25pm)	Warren Hill (9.10pm)	12 hours 50 minutes
Low Newton (7.50am)	York Crown Court (10.15am)	York Crown Court (4.30pm)	Low Newton (7.40pm)	11 hours 50 minutes

1.12 Prisoners' late return often had a knock-on effect on important first night procedures. We frequently find, during inspections, that prisoners arriving late (including some first time prisoners) do not receive full first night assessments including shared cell risk assessments, and suicide and self-harm assessment. Neither do they have a chance to shower or use the telephone. For example, at Bedford inspectors noted:

"The main concern for reception staff was the timing of arrivals. This was particularly the case late in the evening when prisoners could arrive after 9pm, leaving them little time to settle them in effectively on their first night."

Conditions in vans

1.13 In our prisoner surveys, prisoners were asked to rate both the comfort and cleanliness of the most recent van that they had travelled on. The majority of prisoners (74%) rated comfort as bad or very bad. Comments included uncomfortable seating, lack of space in the cubicles, the temperature being either too hot or too cold, or being 'thrown around' in the cubicle because of poor driving. A woman prisoner at Eastwood Park said:

"One escort contractor uses vans with cushioned seats whereas the others do not have this requirement. This makes journeys very uncomfortable." ¹

And at Liverpool a prisoner told us:

"The small compartments are extremely restrictive and claustrophobic."

1.14 Results from our survey on the comfort and cleanliness of escort vehicles are shown in Tables 4 and 5. ²

Table 4	Prisoner ratings of the comfort of the escort van on which they had most recently travelled.					
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	1%	9%	8%	36%	43%	2%
Training prisons	2%	14%	10%	36%	36%	2%
Women's prisons	3%	11%	8%	33%	44%	1%
Open prisons	3%	19%	10%	36%	31%	1%
Young adult prisons	2%	10%	7%	26%	52%	1%
Average	2%	13%	9%	33%	41%	1%

Table 5	Prisoner ratings of the cleanliness of the escort van on which they had most recently travelled.					
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	4%	34%	17%	24%	16%	4%
Training prisons	7%	39%	16%	23%	9%	5%
Women's prisons	7%	32%	15%	25%	17%	3%
Open prisons	10%	44%	16%	18%	9%	4%
Young adult prisons	2%	24%	16%	28%	22%	5%
Average	6%	35%	16%	24%	15%	4%

1.15 Prisoners' rating of the cleanliness of vans was more variable, with about the same proportion rating them 'very good' or 'good' as 'very bad' or 'bad'. Inspection of vans in prison reception areas generally found them to be reasonably clean and free of graffiti.

¹ Vans used for inter-prison transfers have padded seats.

² Percentages are rounded up so may not add up to 100.

1.16 There were some occasions when conditions were unacceptable, as the following comments illustrate:

“The transport van was dirty with blood and mucus in the cubicle in which I was transported.”
(Prisoner at Wealstun)

“The van from court stank of urine and the cubicles were very dirty. My clothing stank and I had to wear the same clothes for my next court appearance.” (Prisoner at Liverpool)

“Animals going to the market travel in cleaner conditions. When I asked the escort staff about the state of the vans, they told me they do not get paid to clean the vans.” (Prisoner at Manchester)

1.17 At Hull, New Hall and Styal, inspectors noted that the vans were generally clean but covered in graffiti. Although escort contractors operate a complaints procedure, prisoners’ comments indicated that they were not aware of this.

Relationships between escort staff, prisoners and prison staff

1.18 One of the most striking and consistent findings from surveys, interviews and inspections was prisoners’ positive perception of escort staff.

“The escort staff do their best under difficult circumstances.” (Prisoner at Wealstun)

Survey results indicated that over two thirds of prisoners (69%) said they were treated ‘very well’ or ‘well’ by escort staff, and this finding was consistent across all prison types. Only around one in 10 prisoners thought that they had been treated badly by escort staff. Table 6 shows the prisoner survey results.

Table 6	How did you feel you were treated by escort staff on the most recent journey that you have been on? ³					
	<i>Very well</i>	<i>Well</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	16%	48%	23%	7%	3%	3%
Training prisons	16%	55%	19%	6%	2%	2%
Women's prisons	20%	52%	14%	9%	3%	2%
Open prisons	21%	49%	20%	7%	3%	1%
Young adult prisons	13%	55%	17%	9%	2%	3%
Average	17%	52%	19%	8%	3%	2%

1.19 Inspection reports frequently comment on the relaxed and professional relationships between staff and prisoners. Table 7 provides some comments.

Table 7	Inspection report findings on escort staff treatment of prisoners
Bedford (local)	<i>Escort staff treated prisoners politely and exchanges between staff and prisoners were relaxed and amiable. This was demonstrated in the ease of transfer from reception to the escort vans, where groups of three or four prisoners walked to the escort van together rather than being escorted individually.</i>

³ Data from all prisoner surveys undertaken from April 2003 to August 2004.

	Table 7 cont'd...
Lincoln (local)	<i>Escort staff addressed prisoners by title and explained the searching procedures. Group Four staff were friendly towards the prisoners and made verbal checks on their well being as well as their destination.</i>
Cookham Wood (women)	<i>We observed relaxed communication between prisoners and escort staff as they waited to gain entry to the reception area. The samples of prisoner escort records we looked at were of a good standard.</i>

1.20 Inspection reports also frequently commented on the positive and productive working relationships enjoyed by escort staff and prison reception staff. The exchange of paperwork and property was efficient and relationships were mutually respectful. Table 8 presents some examples.

Table 8	Inspection report findings on escort staff relationships with prison staff
Garth (training prison)	<i>Both prison and escort staff described their working relationships as good. The handover of prisoners occurred in an efficient yet relaxed manner, with both groups of staff clearly aware of each other's responsibilities and requirements. Prisoners were involved throughout the process, and due regard was given to them and their property.</i>
Wormwood Scrubs (local prison)	<i>Good relationships existed between the prison and the contractor for escort services. Prisoners were treated well and the atmosphere was relaxed and good humoured.</i>
Hollesley Bay (open prison)	<i>The relationship between prison staff and escort contractors was positive and professional. Steps were taken to ensure that prisoners and their property were safely handed over to the care of prison staff and that any special needs were highlighted. We observed, for example, a newly-arrived prisoner being given immediate access to the in-possession medication in his property bag.</i>
Rye Hill (training prison)	<i>The transfer of prisoners and their property between escort staff and Rye Hill officers took place promptly and efficiently. Although prisoners had some complaints about the comfort of the escort vehicles and the length of some journeys, most were complimentary about the transfer arrangements.</i>

1.21 In busy local prisons, working relationships were well established and escort contractors often attended operational or 'safer custody' meetings at the prison. At Leeds, escort staff were part of a pilot scheme for new suicide and self-harm warning forms. In Belmarsh, a member of the escort contractor's staff worked in reception organising vans, checking documentation and identifying higher risk prisoners. Inspectors noted:

"A member of the escort firm was on duty from 7.00am until the last of his vehicles had left the prison ... this aided efficient information exchange. Documentation was checked quickly and thoroughly."

Similarly, at Brixton inspectors found that:

"A member of the escort contractor's staff was on duty each morning in the prison to ensure that escorts were dispatched on time. This member of staff worked together with the prison's manager in reception to ensure that operations ran smoothly."

1.22 Although mostly true of local prisons, escort staff also enjoyed close working relationships with prison staff in training prisons. At Downview escort staff regularly visited the prison to iron out operational problems, and at Cookham Wood escort staff attended security meetings.

1.23 There were some exceptions to this positive message: comments from individual prisoners revealed abuses of power or unprofessional behaviour by escort staff. For example, at Wandsworth one prisoner commented:

"The escort officer was not impartial. He informed other prisoners that my offence was sexual, involving underage children."

At Belmarsh a prisoner commented:

"Staff smoked in the van even after I asked them not to because of my poor health. I was told to show some respect for their uniform."

Feeling safe under escort

1.24 Prisoner survey results for personal safety under escort are generally positive, with 59% rating it as 'very good' or 'good'. Women prisoners were slightly more likely to rate their personal safety under escort as 'bad', possibly because of their exposure to male prisoners in shared vans (see 1.26).

Table 9	Prisoner ratings of their personal safety while under escort on their most recent journey.					
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	8%	48%	17%	13%	10%	3%
Training prisons	10%	50%	15%	14%	7%	3%
Women's prisons	9%	47%	14%	16%	11%	2%
Open prisons	8%	52%	13%	15%	11%	1%
Young adult prisons	7%	54%	16%	12%	6%	2%
Average	9%	50%	16%	14%	9%	3%

1.25 From our analysis of PER forms across 10 establishments, it was clear that court custody staff normally undertook regular checks of prisoners. Inspection reports generally found that vulnerability issues were properly documented and shared with escort staff, and first aid kits were usually carried on vehicles.

1.26 However, there were some comments that suggested that some women and Rule 45 (voluntary segregation) prisoners were at risk from other prisoners. Contractors are careful to keep juvenile prisoners and women apart from men under escort and in court, and under the new contracts juveniles are transported separately from adults, but women can be subjected to verbal abuse from men when held in neighbouring compartments in the same van.

During the inspection of Foston Hall, reception staff told inspectors:

“On one occasion a woman transferring to Winchester had to share the transport with a male prisoner. When the van arrived at Foston Hall reception area, the man was standing on his head on his seat kicking the roof of the van. He was verbally abusive and aggressive, and the woman due to travel in the van with him was understandably anxious about her journey.”

At New Hall one woman commented:

“As a first time offender of over 55 I was abused verbally very badly by other prisoners while in the van. It was clearly heard by staff but was not addressed in any way.”

1.27 From inspection reports:

- *some Rule 45 (voluntary segregation) prisoners claimed they were abused when their status had become known to other prisoners.*
- *some juveniles at Castington complained that with their hands cuffed together inside the cellular vehicle they could not steady themselves when the van moved.*

1.28 This latter finding from Castington is worrying when considered alongside the concern that many prisoners have about being thrown around the cubicle when the vehicle is underway because of the lack of seatbelts. PECS's position is that seatbelts can be used to self-harm, and that experience shows that prisoners fare better than staff in the event of an accident as they are held in a confined space and are not thrown around the van on impact. However, the absence of seatbelts leaves prisoners feeling very vulnerable, and we believe that an independent assessment of the risks of injury on impact within a cellular vehicle with and without seatbelts should be carried out by independent road safety experts and the results made public.

Special needs

1.29 Although there are contingencies in the contracts that allow for the separate escort of prisoners with disabilities, pregnant women and children under the age of 15, some prisoners with physical impairments or particular healthcare needs complained that special arrangements were not made. At Rye Hill one prisoner said:

“They did not cater for disabled people like me. There was no room and it was very uncomfortable.”

At Leicester a prisoner commented:

“As I am disabled the small compartment is both uncomfortable and unsafe with no seatbelt, with regards to the vehicle breaking which causes me to slide forward in my seat.”

At Foston Hall a prisoner commented:

“I was informed by escort staff that due to a back problem I should not have travelled in a normal van. This was never pointed out to me before the journey.”

Table 10 sets out surveyed prisoners’ perceptions of the attention paid to their healthcare needs and Case study 2 provides an individual example.

Table 10	Prisoners’ perceptions of the attention paid to their healthcare needs while under escort					
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	3%	21%	24%	20%	21%	4%
Training prisons	6%	26%	26%	17%	15%	5%
Women's prisons	7%	25%	18%	20%	20%	4%
Open prisons	3%	27%	32%	18%	15%	4%
Young adult prisons	4%	32%	21%	17%	14%	5%
Average	5%	26%	24%	18%	17%	4%

Case study 2: Interview with a prisoner at Parkhurst

The prisoner was elderly and suffered with a back condition and had severe mobility problems. He was due to be transferred from Bristol to Parkhurst. No special arrangements were made despite his health problems and his requests to prison and escort staff. He boarded a normal escort van which stopped at Winchester where he was told he would not be travelling on to Parkhurst until the next day. The prisoner claimed he was not given any prior warning of this. The next day he was escorted from Winchester to Parkhurst. Over the two days he was in transit for four hours and 45 minutes. The prisoner said that no comfort breaks were offered during either journey. At one stage he asked if he could go to the toilet, and was given an empty drinks bottle to use. The prisoner said that he was very uncomfortable in the vans although the escort staff were sympathetic and did what they could for him given the resources available.

Comfort breaks

1.30 This is an area of considerable concern. The contract requires that such breaks are provided for journeys in excess of two and a half hours, but it is not always known in advance that a journey will take that long and escort staff can be faced with having to locate a police station or prison for an unscheduled stop at short notice. In these circumstances prisoners are told that their journey will take longer if they make such a diversion. Given such a choice prisoners may decide to hold or to use a ‘portable toilet bag’.

1.31 An examination of PER forms indicated that comfort breaks were either not offered or declined in 80% of 225 journeys of over two and a half hours in length⁴. Declined breaks are included in this figure as we are not confident that when it was recorded that a comfort break was offered this had actually happened. In several cases we followed up prisoners whose records indicated that breaks had been

⁴ There were 225 journeys of over 2.5 hours. Of these, in 179 cases comfort breaks were either not offered or declined.

offered to be told that this was not the case. At Foston Hall inspectors noted:

“During the week of the inspection two prisoners arrived from Holloway. Their prisoner escort records (PERs) recorded that they had left Holloway at 11.55am and arrived at Foston Hall at 2.10pm. The PERs noted regular checking of both prisoners, and recorded a ‘comfort stop offered – declined’ at 2.00pm, only 10 minutes before arrival at Foston Hall. Both prisoners denied that a comfort stop had been offered to them. Other prisoners told us they had been advised before setting off that a toilet break would prolong their journey time.”

1.32 Some male prisoners told inspectors that in the absence of any toilet facilities they were told to urinate in the stairwell of the van. There have also been numerous accounts of empty drinks containers being used for this purpose. Inspectors at Castington noted:

“Some staff recollected incidents of young people alighting from the escort vehicles with plastic bags in which they had urinated.”

1.33 Not surprisingly, the majority of prisoners (57%) rated the provision of comfort breaks as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’. Prisoners were humiliated by using ‘portable toilet bags’ or other receptacles. Moreover, they were not told what the arrangements were until they asked, which was normally when they could hold on no longer, compounding their embarrassment. In fact there was a dearth of information about the expected length of the journey, toilet breaks, sanitary protection, what to do in an emergency, or how to complain. (Inspectors at Leeds noted:

“Prisoners told us about the discomfort and embarrassment on long journeys with no toilet facilities or appropriate breaks. Plastic urination bags were expedient rather than considerate.”

A prisoner at Rye Hill said:

“There are not enough breaks on journeys between establishments. I once needed the toilet and had to wait six hours until I could go, which is not acceptable.”

Table 11 sets out our survey findings.

Table 11	On the most recent journey that you have been on, how was the frequency of comfort breaks?					
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Very bad</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	1%	10%	18%	18%	34%	4%
Training prisons	2%	11%	17%	20%	38%	2%
Women's prisons	2%	10%	15%	19%	39%	3%
Open prisons	1%	14%	22%	19%	39%	3%
Young adult prisons	1%	11%	13%	23%	35%	6%
Average	2%	11%	16%	20%	37%	4%

1.34 The issue of comfort breaks is particularly relevant to inter-prison transfers when it is known in advance that the journey is likely to be in excess of two hours. In these instances we feel it is imperative that a comfort break is scheduled on the chosen route and offered to the prisoner. It is also important that staff encourage prisoners to use toilet facilities immediately before boarding the vans.

1.35 Table 12 provides a selection of prisoner comments, and Table 13 gives examples of some of the longest documented journeys in which prisoners did not receive comfort breaks.

Table 12	Inspection report findings regarding use of comfort breaks
Weare (training prison)	<i>I had to urinate into a milk carton</i>
Bedford (local prison)	<i>I think toilets are needed in the transfer buses as the way it is now with toilet bags makes you feel low about yourself</i>
Portland (young adult prison)	<i>We were in the van for three and a half hours with no break</i>
Liverpool (local prison)	<i>I wasn't allowed to go to the toilet along with nine other prisoners, we did not stop once during a five hour journey</i>

Table 13	Examples from PER forms of long journeys for prisoners who did not receive any comfort breaks		
<i>Start point</i>	<i>Arrive at receiving prison</i>	<i>Total length of journey</i>	<i>Details of checks or stops made</i>
Belmarsh (10.50am)	Parkhurst (3.25pm)	4 hours 35 minutes	Comfort stop declined. Lunch pack given. Six checks on prisoner documented.
Guys Marsh (8.30am)	Glen Parva (12.30pm)	4 hours	No comfort stops offered. Three documented checks on prisoner. No details of any refreshments offered.
Lewes (10.40am)	Canterbury (2.10pm)	3 hours 30 minutes	Lunch pack and water given, seven documented checks on prisoner, no comfort stop offered.
New Hall (9.45am)	Low Newton (12.40pm)	2 hours 55 minutes	Lunch pack given but no details of any comfort stops offered or welfare checks.

Information in advance of transfer

1.36 It was a common complaint among prisoners who had had experience of inter-prison transfers that they did not receive adequate notice, preventing them from contacting family or friends or saying goodbye to staff or prisoners with whom they had established relationships.

"I was given two hours notice to move from Acklington to Haverigg. I don't think this was enough time to give my family and outside visitors my new address." (Prisoner at Haverigg)

1.37 We also came across instances of prisoners being transferred against their will, while in the middle of education or vocational training programmes, or when expecting visits. This undoubtedly caused acute distress and ran counter to the Prison Service aim of helping prisoners to improve themselves and prepare for a law abiding life on release. While we understand prison population pressures, this did not only occur in the context of emergency overcrowding drafts. Table 14 highlights two occasions when this happened as a result of planned moves.

Table 14	Inspection report extracts illustrating lack of notice of planned moves
Castington	<i>In most cases of planned transfers to Northallerton, young adults were told on the morning the transfer was to be effected. There was no telephone in reception for young people to contact their families to tell them that they were moving to a different establishment, and they had to rely on staff on their unit to do this for them.</i>
Weare	<i>Prisoners who had transferred from Pentonville, in particular, complained about the lack of information they had been given about their move to Weare. They had only been told at breakfast time on the morning of their move. They had not been able to make a telephone call and one prisoner had been expecting a visit at his sending establishment on the day of the transfer.</i>

At Portland a prisoner commented:

“They told me the day I was being transferred that I had half an hour to pack my stuff. I found out on the day and had a visit planned that day.”

At Hollesley Bay a prisoner commented:

“My parole process had started at Wayland but half way through I was transferred to Hollesley Bay.”

1.38 We also found that it is the norm for prisoners at court to have received no written information in advance about any of the following:

- the escort company and the role of escort staff
- conditions while under escort (such as what to do to get assistance, use the toilet or make a complaint)
- details of reception arrangements at the receiving establishment

1.39 This is a significant omission, which heightened anxiety levels, especially for those for whom this was their first experience of cellular confinement. Tables 15 and 16 below show what prisoners knew immediately before starting their journeys.

Table 15	Did you know where you were going when you left court or when transferred from another establishment?		
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	78%	21%	1%
Training prisons	90%	10%	0%
Women's prisons	88%	11%	1%
Open prisons	90%	9%	1%
Young adult prisons	84%	15%	1%
Average	86%	14%	1%

Table 16	Before you arrived here did you receive any written information about what would happen to you?		
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't remember</i>
Local prisons	11%	86%	3%
Training prisons	20%	78%	2%
Women's prisons	12%	86%	2%
Open prisons	16%	81%	3%
Young adult prisons	22%	73%	5%
Average	16%	81%	3%

1.40 Most prisoners were aware of where they were going (although more than one in five prisoners in local prisons said they did not know where they were being taken) but only a very small minority said they had received any further information.

1.41 At New Hall staff had produced laminated sheets of information for escort staff to hand to prisoners at court, regarding the reception arrangements at New Hall, but this was not the norm. Escort contractors did not have similar handouts for prisoners to tell them how to attract the attention of staff, what the toilet arrangements were, what to do in an emergency or how to complain. This information is particularly necessary in the context of first custody.

Appendix – Methodology

This briefing paper is based on secondary analysis of inspection report findings between September 2003 and August 2004 and from analysis of prisoner surveys carried out within full inspections between April 2003 and August 2004 (n = 5000). Table A1 lists the inspections on which this paper is based:

Table A1	Inspection reports included in this report			
Training prisons	Local prisons	Women's prisons	Young adults (18-21)	Open prisons
Haverigg	Belmarsh	New Hall	Hindley	Wealstun
Rye Hill	Leeds	Eastwood Park	Castington	Spring Hill
Wellingborough	Leicester	Cookham Wood	Ashfield	Hollesley Bay
Featherstone	Lincoln	Downview	Lancaster Farms	North Sea Camp
Wealstun	Wormwood Scrubs	Bullwood Hall	Reading	
Wymott	Bedford	Styal	Portland	
Garth	Brixton	Buckley Hall		
Grendon	Hull	Askham Grange		
Dovegate TC	Dorchester	Foston Hall		
Everthorpe	Wandsworth			
Weare	Manchester			
Magilligan	Preston			

In addition, 10 prisons were visited between June and August 2004 to record information from a simple random sample of PER forms in prisoners' records. In order to sample 50 examples of court visits and 50 examples of inter-prison transfers at each establishment, the total population figure was divided by 50 to provide a sampling frequency. For example, in a prison with a population of 500 prisoners, every tenth record was examined. The following was recorded:

- *the length of time prisoners spent in escort vans on individual journeys*
- *the length of prisoner days when on court production*
- *the frequency with which comfort breaks were taken on long journeys*

Interviews with prisoners were also undertaken to verify the details recorded on the PER forms, and to ask about escort experiences. Table A2 lists the prisons visited for PER analysis and the date of the visit:

Table A2	Prisons visited in PER form analysis exercise	
Prison (type)	Data collected	Date of visit
Portland (young adults)	Court appearances and transfers	9 June
Wetherby (juveniles)	Court appearances	14 June
Preston (local)	Court appearances	23 June
Manchester (local)	Court appearances	5 July
Parkhurst (trainer)	Court appearances and transfers	13 July
Ashfield (juveniles)	Court appearances and transfers	4 August

Glen Parva (young adults)	Court appearances and transfers	16 August
Low Newton (women)	Court appearances and transfers	13 August
Acklington (trainer)	Court appearances and transfers	16 August
Holloway (women)	Court appearances and transfers	18 August

There were not enough inter-prison transfers to local prisons or juvenile establishments to provide meaningful information, so fieldwork there was confined to examining records of journeys to court.