

PROPOSED CUSTODY FACILITY IN DURHAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

NOVEMBER 2020

Q1. Why does Durham Constabulary need to build a new custody facility?

Custody facilities are an essential requirement within policing, and the operation of them must support effective and efficient policing in the police force area, as well as delivering value for money. The existing four custody facilities in Durham do not meet the required Home Office standards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of officers, staff and detainees. They are also costly to manage, and each facility needs to be managed by a particular ratio of sergeants, constables and staff in order to ensure their safety and that of detainees.

The development of the new custody facility follows an inspection last year by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) which highlighted an urgent need for the Force to undertake a major refurbishment of the Force's custody suites to bring them up to modern-day standards. In addition, the Home Office (HO) issued new design guidance in September 2019, which has added further requirements of custody facility, including specific guidance relating to ensuring equality, security, privacy and dignity for detainees.

A complete refurbishment of our existing custody facilities would be a significant undertaking which would be much more costly in the short and long term than building a new centralised custody suite. To do so would not reduce the risks that currently exist, would not provide value for money for the taxpayer, and it still would not be possible to achieve compliance with HO guidance despite having invested in refurbishment.

A new facility would be a safer environment for our staff and officers to work in by enabling full CCTV monitoring systems to be installed, all blind spots to be eradicated, provision of holding areas to facilitate officers to book multiple detainees in at once and reducing the waiting times for our officers involved in booking in allowing them to get back out onto the streets quickly.

The facility will also be specifically designed to provide more accessibility for detainees, many of whom are vulnerable. While in detention, the police are responsible for the care of detainees and the new facility will significantly improve our ability to provide for their welfare and meet their needs.

Custody is an important means of gathering evidence that can be used within investigations and prosecutions. Building the new facility would also enable centralisation of other functions linked to detention and investigation processes. One example is Crime Scene Investigation, which is now required to meet

International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) accreditation standards, a requirement which would benefit from a specific purpose-built facility.

A new custody facility provides an opportunity for Durham Constabulary to achieve HO compliance and secure evidence. It is important that we can demonstrate a high level of forensic integrity in police evidence and investigation processes, in order to negate the possibility of defence challenges in criminal justice proceedings, or for prosecution cases to be thrown out of court.

Q2. Why can't the existing custody estate be remodelled/refurbished instead of building a new facility?

The existing custody estate fails to meet many of the current standards required by HMICFRS and the Home Office. These standards relate to equality, privacy, dignity and safety of officers, staff and detainees to include physical factors such as:

- floors need to be level access for those with who have reduced mobility, or use aids and adaptations such as wheelchairs,
- van docks are required for privacy and safety,
- washing facilities need to be provided in cells,
- cells need to meet required daylight levels,
- charge desk design should enable both privacy (with separate juvenile charging areas) and sight lines for monitoring,
- showers must enable privacy and dignity,
- ratios of cells to interview room levels are required to be met,
- virtual courts are to be provided,
- modern monitoring systems within cells need to be in place

In 2017, a feasibility project was undertaken to examine whether Spennymoor Custody facility could be remodelled to meet requirements given this is one of the newest buildings within force and there is available land on which to expand. The study showed that this would involve a major construction project that would essentially require dismantling the structure of the station back to its shell and then completely rebuilding to include all new infrastructure (such as drainage and heating services). The cost exceeded an offsite new build by over one third, and the study demonstrated that the investment would still not achieve a fully compliant facility due to limitations with site layout.

Refurbishment of the other facilities would result in similar findings. In each facility, we reliably estimate that the cost of fully refurbishing suites to undergo major reconstruction would exceed new build costs. Bishop Auckland's facility is at an advanced age, and refurbishment would require demolition and rebuild on a site where there is limited space available to expand. Durham City station has a very restricted plot and again, there is insufficient space in order to make the facility compliant. Darlington was remodelled in 2011 to maximise the space available and there is no further capacity to improve layout or standards to achieve compliance. Peterlee has similar site limitations to those described with the other custody

facilities. Critically, investment and building work would still not result in a facility that meets expectations and standards required.

For this reason, it is not prudent to pursue refurbishment of the existing estate.

Q3. Will the location of the new facility mean travelling times will impact upon use of officer time?

This is dependent upon the site of arrest but in many instances, travelling times will be reduced. It should also be noted that mobile technology is enabling a more agile way of working where officers do not necessarily have to return to station locations to upload reports. The site of the proposed new facility has been identified following demand analysis and it provides a central location for arrest points with good access to main arterial road networks. Current custody processes are being reviewed to ensure that any additional travelling time is offset by a booking in system that is smoother and more efficient: one which also ensures the detainees safety and welfare remains paramount. This will minimise the need for officers to have to wait until space becomes available at the charge desk.

Q4. What will be included in the new facility?

The facility will include 48 cells, and supporting accommodation, necessary to meet HMIC and Home Office modern custody standards. The facility will also house other functions linked to the broader custody process, including Prisoner Handling Team, Offender Management, some CID and Safeguarding officers. The facility also affords an opportunity to centralise some other linked services, including Crime Scene Investigation and Property teams.

Q5. Where will the new facility be located?

Terms are currently being discussed to acquire a site near Durham Gate at Thinford, Spennymoor. The land acquisition is subject to the planning application being approved and subject to contract.

This location has been selected based on data showing where arrests are made, proximity to major arterial routes, travel times, transport links and access to bus routes. The site options available of this scale were limited, however the preferred site meets requirements and budget.

Q6. What are the timescales for the opening of the new facility?

The facility is expected to be completed by early 2023, subject to planning consent and wider approvals being obtained according to programme.

Q7. What does this mean for the remainder of the estate?

The new facility will mean that the existing Custody areas at Bishop Auckland, Durham City, Peterlee and Darlington will no longer be in use. In addition, the centralisation of the teams that manage and have synergies with Custody as well as Property and CSIs will result in usage of the Estate being reprofiled. An Estates review will be undertaken to make best use of space, and where recommendations are made and any proposals developed, wider engagement and consultation will be undertaken.

There are no plans at present to reduce the overall estate footprint or close police stations, though it should be noted it may be necessary to consider this in future years. Durham Constabulary, however, considers neighbourhood policing to be the bedrock of its engagement with the public it serves, and is committed to continuing to providing this on an ongoing basis. It should also be noted that, as a result of IT investment, policing is able to operate on a more agile basis, meaning that officers do not have to return to stations as they had to previously, and neighbourhood policing benefits from being able to use IT to maintain visibility and presence in communities.

Q8. What is the cost, how is it funded, and will the new facility save money?

The estimated cost is £21m and it will be paid for from reserves held by the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner. It is expected that the centralised facility will save money as it will require fewer officers and less overtime, it will reduce current ICT costs as well as costs incurred through medical/ healthcare provision etc. The existing officers and staff will be redeployed into other operational teams and facilities.

Q9. Will the new facility have energy efficient technology?

The mechanical and electrical services to the building are being developed and designed at the moment. The facility will have to meet Part L of Building Regulations which places obligations to conserve fuel and power in design of buildings. This means that the building will be designed to include both passive energy efficiency measures (such as maximising daylight to reduce use of electric lighting whilst minimising unwanted heat from the sun) and active low carbon technology (such as recovering heat generated by cooling systems to help in providing hot water in the building). More information will be provided as technical design is developed.

Q10. Will the new facility ensure inclusivity in design?

The new facility will have to meet the requirements of Part M of Building Regulations which places obligations to ensure accessibility within design. The building will also need to comply with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 throughout the facility, for instance, providing level access routes that can be used by those with limited mobility or who move with the assistance of aids such as wheelchairs. Equality and

diversity compliance are being worked on in consultation with the Constabulary's internal representative groups and staff associations to ensure we create an inclusive environment with suitable facilities to meet a variety of needs, for instance, to meet the specific needs of vulnerable detainees with underlying issues. More information will be provided as technical design is developed.

Q11. How will we be kept informed about progress and changes?

We have already commenced a programme of engagement, in order to brief key stakeholder groups. This will include local resident groups, businesses, elected officials, and partner organisations. In addition, we will provide information about the facility on our website and will shortly be conducting statutory consultation as part of the process of submitting a planning application.

Feedback is welcomed from our communities and local stakeholders, and the following specific email inbox has been set up for this purpose:

custodyproposal@durham.pnn.police.uk