

## 2023 INSPECTION OF COURT CUSTODY CENTRES

### PEOPLE HELD IN COURT CUSTODY CENTRES ARE GENERALLY WELL LOOKED AFTER BY COURT STAFF

Our inspection of court custody centres is a challenging exercise with court facilities located across metropolitan Perth and throughout the regions as far north Kununurra, east to Kalgoorlie, and south to Albany. Adding to the complexity is a diversity of infrastructure, ranging from relatively modern, large, and sophisticated facilities through to centres located in registered heritage listed buildings, each of which present maintenance and operating challenges. Overlaid on this, is a series of contracts with several private organisations for the management and operation of adult court custody facilities in Perth and throughout the regions.

Despite the varied arrangements for the operation of court custody centres, our inspection found that people held in custody were generally treated well, with staff demonstrating genuine concern for the care and welfare of the individuals in their custody. Similarly, court custody staff worked well with other key stakeholders such as police, court staff, and prison staff.

It was pleasing to see both Ventia and the Department working together to address a possible ambiguity between policy and expected practice on strip searching of young people in custody. Although we were told it was rare that young people would be received into the custody of Ventia staff, it was a good outcome to have the position clarified and the policy revised.

Once again, our inspection identified varying standards of infrastructure across court custody centres, and these are documented in this report together with a recommendation to undertake an audit to identify priority areas in need of improvement. The Department's response to this recommendation noted the challenges, stating that improvements to address safety and security can be reported and where possible prioritised. The response also noted a funding submission had been prepared to undertake building condition assessments for all court buildings, but any identified improvements would require further funding submissions. While I understand the practical realities of this situation, it seems that little is likely to change in the medium to longer term and the identified infrastructure challenges will persist.

If I am honest, I must admit this report has taken too long to be completed and I accept criticism for the length of time between our site inspections in late 2023 and publication in 2025. Although the inspection did suffer some unavoidable delays within our office, it has highlighted for us a need to critically look at how we undertake inspections of court custody centres and how we might improve inspection processes and the timeliness of the final inspection report. This work is planned for the latter part of this year as part of the ongoing revision of our operating methodology.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from key stakeholders, including contracted organisations, members of the judiciary, management, and staff within the courts, and from key personnel in the Department. I also acknowledge the contribution of operational staff at various facilities who spoke with us to share their perspective and experience.

Finally, would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their contribution to the inspection.

**Eamon Ryan**

Inspector of Custodial Services

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