



# **Independent Custody Visiting Scheme**

## **Annual Report**

**2014-2015**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme enables volunteers from the local community to observe, comment and report on the conditions under which people are detained in police custody. The Scheme provides an independent check on the operation of statutory and other rules governing the welfare of people in custody and helps to promote greater understanding and confidence in this process.

The Police and Crime Commissioner has a statutory duty under Section 51 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to make arrangements for detainees to be visited by independent custody visitors, to keep these arrangements under review, and revise them as required.

## **2. KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2014/15**

### **Move to new Police Centres**

Quarter 3 of 2014/2015 saw the closure of 8 local custody units (Bath, Weston super Mare, Bridgwater, Broadbury Road, Trinity Road, Taunton, Southmead and Staple Hill) and the opening of the new PFI suites at Patchway, Keynsham and Bridgwater. It was a huge move for all involved, most notably the custody staff who not only had to adapt to new surroundings but a new staffing model.

## **3. INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS**

The scheme currently has 56 custody visiting volunteers.

26 new custody visitors joined the scheme during the year as part of the move to the new police centres; 8 at Patchway, 9 at Keynsham, 3 at Bridgwater and 6 at Yeovil. .

This year recruitment was targeted at underrepresented groups in the community using a range of methods such as a radio interview on a BME radio station, talks at local universities and colleges and adverts placed in a variety of newspapers and magazines. Twitter was also used to reach out to more people. As a result a higher number of BME and young ICVS have been recruited, with several interested parties on a waiting list for future recruitment rounds.

The average age of an ICV is now 45, and those categorising themselves as anything other than 'white' is now at 5%. 4 ICVs consider themselves disabled.

### **Leavers**

37 ICVs left the scheme this year for various reasons, most notably the closure of local custody units due to travel time. Other reasons included reaching the end of the 9 year fixed tenure, moving out of the constabulary area or having personal commitments which did not allow time to continue volunteering.

### **OPCC Custody Visiting Officer**

Following Lorna Muffett's departure, Anna Hill took over the Custody Visiting Officer role at the end of April 2014.

## **4. STATISTICS**

328 visits to custody have taken place and 851 interviews have been held during the period.

- 44% of detainees in custody were interviewed. (-3% on last year)
- 32% were unable to be interviewed for a variety of issues such as the detainee being asleep, in a police interview, at hospital or receiving medical treatment or a

recommendation from the custody staff that an individual is not safe to interview. (-5% on last year)

- 24% refused an interview (+8% on last year)

This level of refusal is much higher than other areas in the wider region and is being addressed at the Regional ICV Scheme working group meetings. Self-introduction by custody visitors is being considered as this has proven very successful in other constabulary areas.

Custody records can be viewed by visitors with permission by the detainee or if custody visitors are concerned about the detainee's welfare but they are unable to gain direct permission due to incapacity. During 2014/15 less than 3% of detainee's custody records were viewed by custody visitors.

ICVA run some specific training on viewing custody records to aid ICVs in the process of checking records, with a view to more records being checked as a regular part of the ICV role.

*Please see annex 1 for detailed statistics by custody unit*

## **5. ISSUES ARISING FROM VISITS**

Issues raised by custody visitors are dealt with immediately by the detention officer or custody sergeant wherever possible and this provides the most satisfactory resolution for the majority.

If an issue cannot be resolved immediately in this manner the scheme administrator liaises with the Custody Inspectors or the Criminal Justice Manager. This is most suitable for more generic issues, police procedures and relationship management.

Issues raised this year have been primarily related to long waits for detainees needing a shower, a number of foreign detainees needing interpreters, long waits for mental health assessments and cold, draughty cells. It is worth noting that the majority of the issues occurred when the new PFI police centres had just opened, where there were a number of teething issues.

Delays in access to custody for visitors have been monitored since the new PFI police centres opened in late August/early September 2014. The average wait times across the units are:

Patchway – 14 minutes  
Keynsham – 10 minutes  
Bridgwater – 12 minutes  
Yeovil – 5 minutes

As a result of a small number of some unusually long wait times, it was agreed that ICVs should expect to wait up to 15 minutes for the visit to start once in the custody area before approaching a member of staff. In highly exceptional circumstances where custody is very busy, it was agreed that ICVs will wait an extra 15 minutes bringing the wait time to 30 minutes before approaching the Custody Inspector. It's at this time that the decision to abort a visit will be made.

These delays are mainly because staff are busy therefore access to the building cannot be gained or there is no member of staff available for escorting. The new DO role structure

means that there are members of staff that cannot leave their role to facilitate a visit and so some time is lost waiting for a member of staff to become free.

There were 5 aborted visits this year; staff shortage and very busy custody were the reasons given.

The number of detainees at the new police centres has been lower than anticipated. The average numbers of detainees were:

Patchway – 14 detainees

Keynsham – 9 detainees

Bridgwater – 8 detainees

Yeovil – 3 detainees

*Please see annex 2 for entry delay times and number of detainees*

## **6. PRIORITIES FOR 2014/15**

### **Number of visits for 2015/2016:**

The PCC has set in conjunction with the Chief Constable, a visiting frequency across the constabulary area against which performance is monitored, measured and published annually.

For the financial year 2015/2016 there will be a total of 271 visits:

73 visits per year each (approx. 1 visit every 4-5 days) for Patchway, Keynsham and Bridgwater.

Yeovil will remain as it is currently – 52 visits per year (1 per week)

### **Electronic reporting**

An electronic report form loosely based on the West Midlands model is being devised to replace the paper report forms currently used. A working group of ICVs was formed to look at the West Midlands model and to make suggestions for what would be created for Avon and Somerset. This piece of work is taking longer than hoped but will be implemented as soon as possible.

### **Regional ICV Scheme**

Avon and Somerset is part of a regional working group to bring together the Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire ICV schemes. The working group is made up of the OPCC Custody Visiting Officer as well as a number of ICVs from around the wider region. This year, the group have been discussing how the scheme is run in their area with a view to identifying best practice to roll out as a standardised scheme. It is hoped that the regional scheme will be launched late in 2014 at the Regional ICV conference.

## **7. UPDATES FROM PANEL COORDINATORS**

### **Bridgwater – Panel Coordinator Rob Snow**

After another year has passed and we continue to function well as a panel. The merging of several panels to form one has worked well and everyone has integrated well with each other. Aside from a few teething problems with the new build, which on occasion has caused confusion, the visits carried out by the panel have been done effectively with the full cooperation from the police custody staff.

The last year saw 3 new visitors join the panel and 6 monthly reviews that are being currently being undertaken. We continue to have successful quarterly panel meetings, where we get a chance to keep ourselves up to date on how the panel is progressing and working together.

At our recent panel meeting, we looked at some statistics collected by the OPCC regarding visiting delay times and detainee numbers, Bridgwater appears to be making up the average for the force area.

There have been no dramatic issues relating to the visits and any minor concerns have been dealt with either via myself or Anna Hill, OPCC. All of which all have had a successful outcome.

### **Patchway – Panel Coordinator Annaphie Rogers**

When Patchway opened the initial aim was to visit once every 5 days but this proved difficult to manage as our visitors have varied commitments. We subsequently changed to having 2 visits in every 10 day period. So far this new visiting regime seems to be working well.

The move to the new centre brought transport problems for some members and we have had a few resignations and retirements. We are now back up to 14 visitors, who are all enthusiastic and dedicated. Seven are from the previous centres, three started at Patchway in autumn 2014 and four started in April 2015.

The cleaning and upkeep of the new building is a vast improvement on the old custody suites. There have been some complaints about draughts coming from under the benches and problems with the sound quality of the intercoms. The detention staff are generally very friendly and efficient.

The centre is very busy and there is not always time to visit all detainees, on these occasions we prioritise the vulnerable. We are disappointed that persons with mental health difficulties are too often being kept in police cells instead of the hospital, and when this happens we always query the position. After a few teething problems things seem to be going well at Patchway.

### **Keynsham – Panel Coordinator John Sommer**

Starting to work in the new custody suite has required a lot of work and understanding by all. Half the panel are experienced ICVs who have come from three different locations, each with their slightly different ways of working. The other half are newly recruited. What they all say is how much they enjoy working together in a spirit of mutual support. The experienced ICVs have done an excellent job in helping the new recruits in

One of the challenges is that in order to deliver the number of visits required of a 48 cell suite, visiting slots have been reduced to four days in size. The system of designating a reserve for each slot has meant that keeping up to the required number of visits has not been a problem. A tribute to the flexibility of the volunteers.

The new recruits are enthusiastically questioning with new eyes things that happen or are seen during a visit. Some giving old problems new impetus and others agreeing with longstanding observations by valuable experienced visitors. The aim of everyone is to continue to improve the quality of our visits in order to ensure that detainees are treated as the law requires and the public expects.

This objective is made a lot easier by all levels of staff. They listen to our observations and usually act on what we tell them or give us clear reasons for their chosen actions. The ICVs see criticism as a mechanism for improvement and not as a means of catching someone out. The staff deserve great credit for accepting that this is our role and responding positively to it.

**Yeovil – Panel Coordinator Gordon Czapiewski**

The team has recently been bolstered by new recruits who have been trained and are now visiting. Yeovil has retained the original structure whilst the other suites have merged and migrated to the new model on brand new sites. In line with other areas numbers in custody have fallen. Visits have been performed on a regular basis with frequent dialogue with the constabulary which enables the processes and systems to be kept relevant and effective. We are involved in the regional group meetings which are analysing visiting practices and have also contributed to the development of the electronic reporting system.

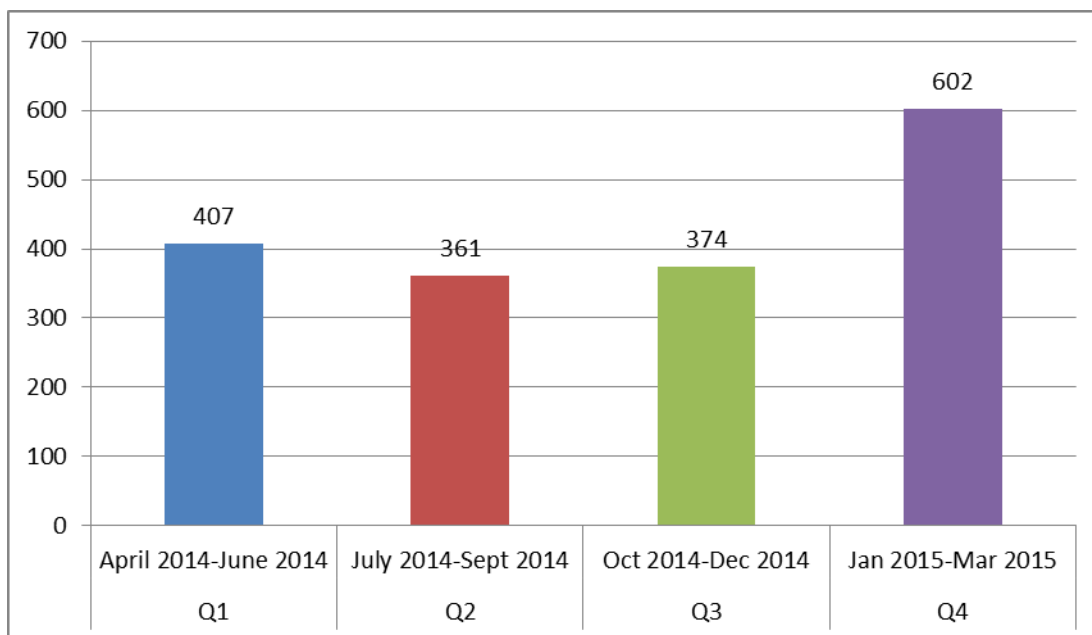
## ANNEX 1 – STATISTICS IN DETAIL

1<sup>st</sup> April 2014-31<sup>st</sup> March 2015

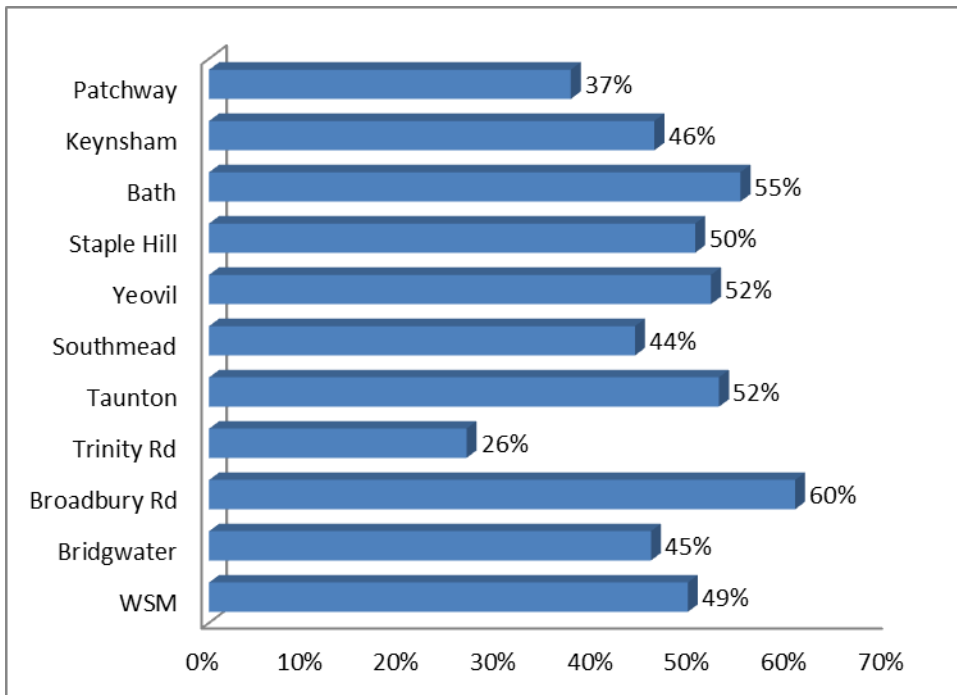
### Key Performance Indicators

Performance Issue	Target	Actual	
Number of visits undertaken	335	328 (98%)	Target Not Achieved
Percentage of detainees refusing a visit	16% or less	24%	Target Not Achieved
Percentages of Issues resolved on site	80% or higher	95%	Target Exceeded
Percentage of issues escalated to local criminal justice inspector	15% or less	3%	Target Exceeded
Percentage of issues escalated to Custody Manager or other	5% or less	2%	Target Exceeded

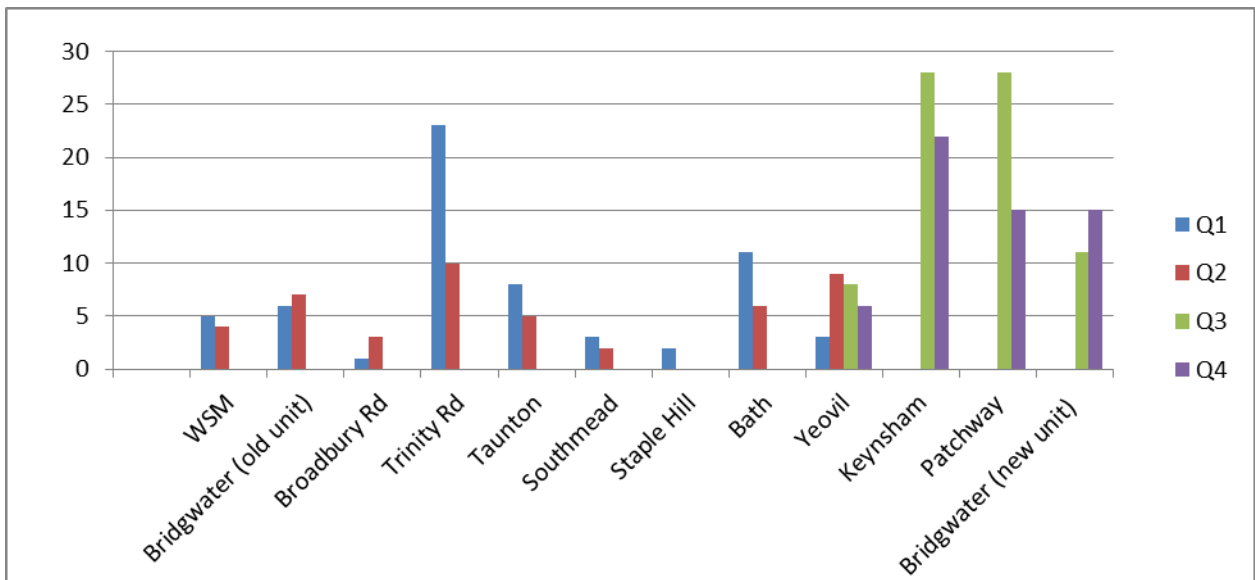
### Number of detainees in custody



**Percentage of detainees interviewed**



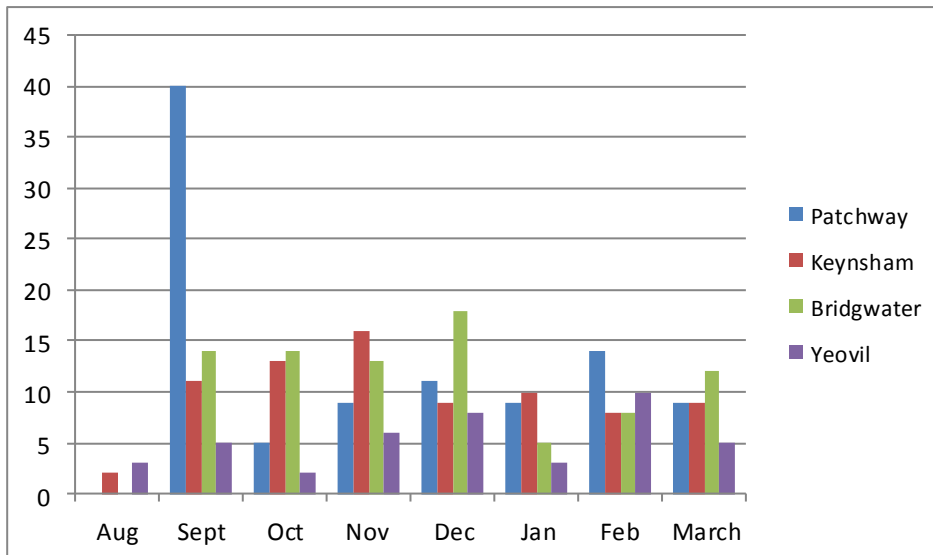
**Percentage of refusals**





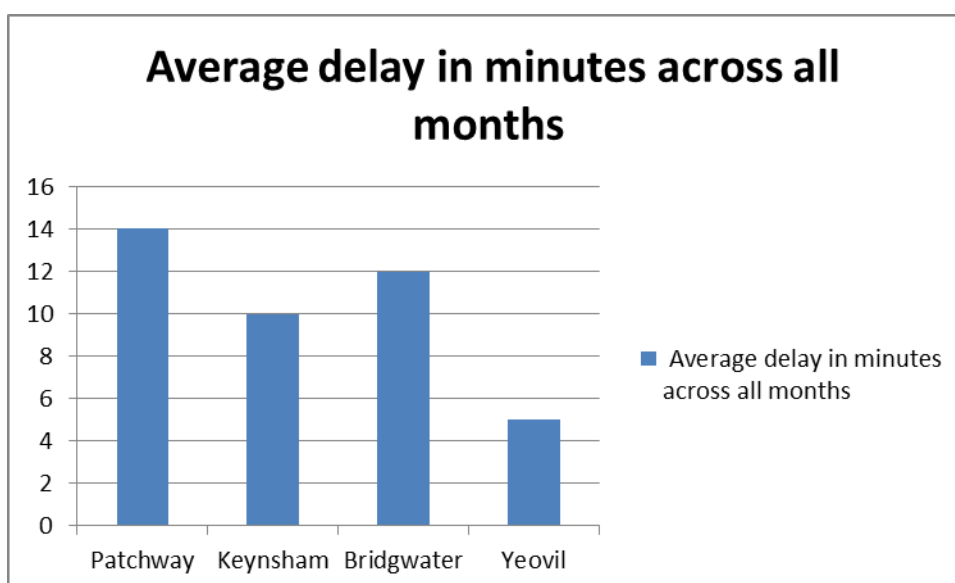
**ANNEX 2 – DELAY TIMES AND NUMBER OF DETAINEES**  
 1<sup>st</sup> August –31<sup>st</sup> March 2015

**Average delay to visit start time in minutes by month**



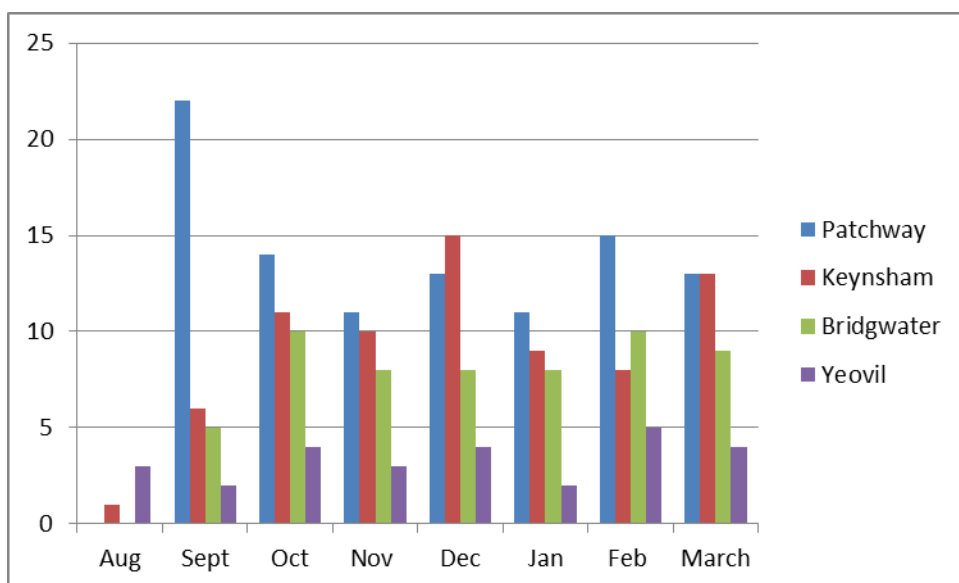
Delay to visit (mins)	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Patchway	N/A	40	5	9	11	9	14	9
Keynsham	2	11	13	16	9	10	8	9
Bridgwater	N/A	14	14	13	18	5	8	12
Yeovil	3	5	2	6	8	3	10	5

**Average delay time in minutes across all months**



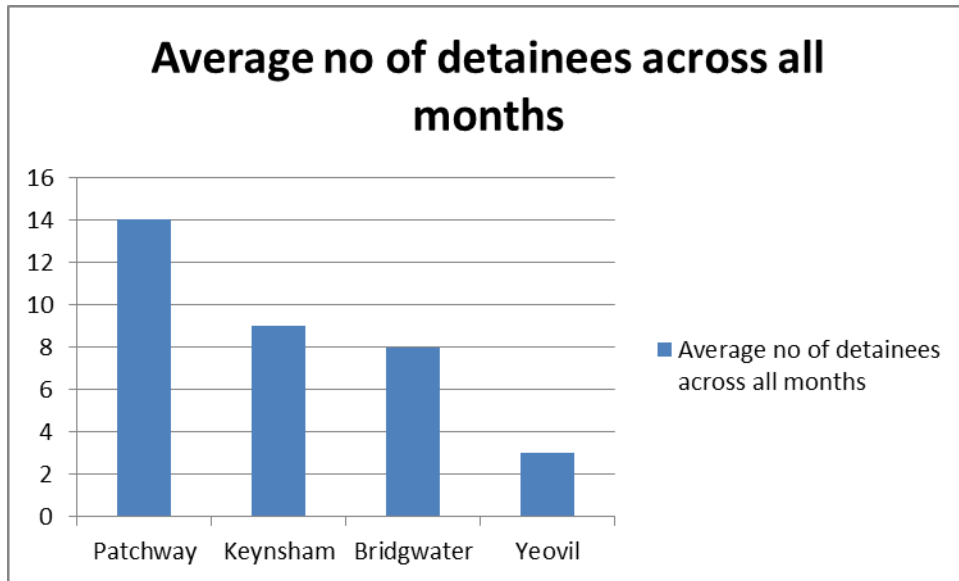
	Average delay in minutes across all months
Patchway	14
Keynsham	10
Bridgwater	12
Yeovil	5

### Average number of detainees by month



Average no of detainees	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Patchway	N/A	22	14	11	13	11	15	13
Keynsham	1	6	11	10	15	9	8	13
Bridgwater	N/A	5	10	8	8	8	10	9
Yeovil	3	2	4	3	4	2	5	4

**Average number of detainees across all months**



	<b>Average no of detainees across all months</b>
Patchway	14
Keynsham	9
Bridgwater	8
Yeovil	3