

2023-2024 Annual Report

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs)

Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's Office



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Foreword from the Avon & Somerset Police & Crime Commissioner

I am delighted to present our Annual Report for the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme in Avon and Somerset.

The report covers the period of 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and provides a summary of the work undertaken and the achievements made by the ICV Scheme in Avon and Somerset.

The management of an effective scheme remains a statutory function for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and serves to raise public awareness of the rights, entitlements, health and wellbeing of those individuals detained in police Custody. As policing continues to remain under intense public scrutiny the ICV Scheme is a valuable part of the work of my office to ensure transparency and to hold the Chief Constable to account.

ICVs continue to report on well-run custody suites, run by officers who value their visits. However, as always challenges and opportunities continue to exist.

The wider team and I are incredibly grateful to our ICVs for their steadfast and continued commitment in this vital role. I would like to thank those of our ICVs who have shown willingness to go above and beyond to support their colleagues and cover other Custody suites outside of their designated base. This has helped enormously to ensure that these very important weekly visits continue to take place. The ongoing provision of comprehensive feedback from ICVs is invaluable to my office and senior leaders who use their observations to make improvements on a continual basis.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to Avon and Somerset Constabulary and the consistent support that has been offered to the ICV Scheme by the respective leads in each Custody Unit. Thank you also in particular to the support provided by Head of Custody Sam Kayser.

In January 2024 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) jointly conducted an inspection of Avon and Somerset Police's custody facilities. The inspection report will be published later this year.

Our Annual Report highlights some fantastic achievements including achieving Code Complaint status in the Independent Custody Visiting Association Quality Assurance Framework – a first for Avon and Somerset. A successful ICV recruitment campaign has recently ended, and we look forward to increasing our ICV numbers further as we progress through 2024.

We sadly lost one of our ICVs Chris Mosely at the start of 2024. Chris started his ICV journey in the summer of 2018 and quickly became an incredibly valued and pivotal member of the Bridgwater ICV Team. His insights and commitment will be missed.



Mark Shelford
Avon and Somerset Police & Crime Commissioner

Introduction

The Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act placed a statutory obligation on all PCCs in England and Wales to have in place an effective ICV Scheme in their police force area.

The primary purpose of the Scheme is to provide independent scrutiny of Avon and Somerset Police to ensure that those detained in Custody are being treated fairly and in accordance with Code C of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). The Act can be viewed in full through the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/13/contents/enacted>

Avon and Somerset OPCC ICV Scheme Managers are jointly responsible for organising and overseeing the delivery of Custody visiting arrangements in Avon and Somerset. Since August 2023 the scheme has greater administrative support in place in the form of a new full-time Contact & Scrutiny Officer. The team are currently in the process of recruiting a new Scrutiny and Assurance Manager to jointly manage the ICV Scheme.

The ICV Scheme has been written in conjunction with the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) 'National Standards on Independent Custody Visiting' and the Home Office's 'Code of Practice on Independent Custody Visiting.' These arrangements are kept under review on a four yearly basis and are revised, as necessary. The ICVs are supported in their role through a combination of regular contact with the office, meetings, online forums and training sessions.

The PCC provides regular updates to the Police and Crime Panel, a statutory joint partnership that supports and scrutinises the decisions and activities of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Avon and Somerset ICV Scheme

The Custody Visiting Scheme is currently organised into three panels aligned with the three designated Custody units in the Avon and Somerset Constabulary area: Patchway, Keynsham and Bridgwater Police Centre. ICVs are allocated upon appointment to a specific panel.

Unannounced visits are made at least once per week to the three designated Custody units. All the Custody centres are active and open for 24 hours a day, all year round.

PFI Custody Centers	No. of Cells
Bridgwater	36
Keynsham	48
Patchway	48

Each of the three sites have 4 vulnerable cells which have a full-length window in the door as opposed to a smaller hatch on a normal cell door. These cells are usually reserved for juveniles and vulnerable individuals. Last year, Avon and Somerset police had put in a proposal to increase the number of vulnerable cells, this remains an outstanding piece of work.

After each ICV visit, ICVs complete a report of their findings using the Avon and Somerset Custody App and submit this report to the Scheme Managers. This report can also be reviewed by the police Custody Lead.

During their visits, the ICVs will inspect several different areas including:

- Cells and toilets.
- That CCTV is present and working.
- Reasonable temperatures are maintained within the cells and centre.
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided.
- Any detainee visible injuries have been explained.
- Female detainee hygiene concerns are addressed.
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing have been provided.
- The food preparation areas and bedding are in a clean, tidy and hygienic condition.
- Religious materials are stored appropriately
- The detainee is satisfied with their treatment in Custody.
- A reasonable period of time to rest has been given, if detained overnight.
- With the consent of the detainee, ICVs check the Custody log to ratify the detainee's account of their detention.

If a visit discloses any aspect of the treatment of detainees or conditions at the Custody unit which are unsatisfactory then the issue is recorded on the report and raised with the Custody Sergeant at the time. Any action taken by the Custody Sergeant (or Escorting Officer) should also be recorded on the report by the ICVs and the issue marked as resolved. If ICVs are not satisfied that the issue has been resolved, they may ask to speak to the Duty Inspector about their concerns.

Unresolved issues or those requiring a response from the PCC are brought to the attention of the ICV Scheme Manager. Feedback is provided to ICVs regarding any comments they raise following discussions with the Custody Inspector or, in more serious instances, following discussions with the Head of Custody.

ICV Scheme composition

The ICV Scheme in Avon and Somerset currently has 20 Custody visiting volunteers. These comprise of 13 female visitors and 7 male visitors – spanning a range of different ages and backgrounds.

The Scheme Managers meet with each ICV Panel and the respective police Custody lead tri annually to discuss issues reported, emerging trends, risks, initiatives, statistics and general updates. Training material is circulated throughout the year and the PCC for the past couple of years has held an annual Volunteers Celebration Event. In June 2023 the PCC welcomed volunteers to Avon and Somerset Police Headquarters in Portishead where awards were presented and all enjoyed lunch outside in the grounds.

OPCC recognition for 2022 Recruitment Campaign & new November 2023 ICV Recruitment Campaign launched

In June 2023 the OPCC together with the creative communications agency Purplefish, were delighted to win the 2023 PRCA DARE Public Sector Award. This award was given in recognition of the OPCC volunteer recruitment campaign that was launched at the end of 2022 and raised awareness of the PCC's scrutiny volunteer panels alongside the ICV Scheme. In total, 19 new volunteers joined the three independent scrutiny panels and the ICV Scheme.

The PRCA DARE Awards seek out and reward the very best PR and communications campaigns across the UK, decided by a panel of highly respected industry experts across eight regions.



OPCC and Purple Fish Team, June 2023

Whilst the recruitment launched at the end of 2022 was highly successful, the campaign did not attract as many applications for ICVs as the OPCC would have liked to have seen. Therefore, in November 2023 the OPCC launched a new Recruitment Campaign targeted specifically at recruiting members of the public to be Independent Custody Visitors.

The campaign attracted a good number of applications and interviews are currently ongoing, the OPCC will certainly see an uplift in ICV numbers moving forward into 2024.

OPCC recognised for national award for custody visiting

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) – the national membership organisation that supports, leads and represents ICV Schemes – has developed a quality assurance framework to assess how well schemes comply with the code of practice governing custody visiting.

This is the second year that these schemes have been assessed nationally under the framework and the first time that the Avon and Somerset OPCC has participated in the scheme and were presented with a Code Compliant Quality Assurance Award by ICVA at a ceremony in Birmingham.

Comments on the award, Mark Shelford PCC said:

“I am pleased to hear that our scheme has been recognised in these national awards. I would like to extend a huge thank you to all the dedicated staff and volunteers who make this scheme possible.”

“Becoming a custody visitor is a great opportunity in our work to ensure efficient and effective policing which serves all our communities”



Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive at ICVA said:

“The quality assurance framework represents a significant amount of additional work to ensure that independent custody visiting is regularly reviewed, improvements are made where they are needed, and excellent practice is shared. I congratulate schemes on their accomplishments and thank them for their commitment.”

ICV Scheme Managers receiving award, November 2023

Statistical analysis

A total of 19,518 individuals were detained across the three Custody centres in Avon and Somerset throughout 2023/2024, this represents a 0.08% increase from last year’s statistics. The following demand was recorded across each of the Custody centres:

PFI Custody Centres	Detainees	Percentage
Bridgwater	6822	35.0
Patchway	6799	34.8
Keynsham	5897	30.2

Of those individuals detained:

- 83.8% identified as male, 15.9% as female, 0.1% as unknown.
- 32.4% were between 18-30 years old, with 6.1% between 10 and 17 years old. The remaining 58.3% were aged between 31-60 years old and 3.1% were aged 61 years and over.
- 69.8% self-defined their ethnicity as white, 4.1% as black, 2.9% as Asian, 3.6% as mixed race, and 1.9% as other ethnicity. The remaining 8.1% of detainees did not declare their ethnicity.

A total of Quarterly statistics are sent by the PCC’s office to the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) for national collation. A total of 144 ICV visits were undertaken during 2023/24. The frequency of visiting is 1 visit every 7 days at each of the 3 Custody Units. All visits were physical inspections.

DPs through Custody 2023-2024	Total ICV visits	Total DPs at ICV visits	Total no. DPs visited
Apr-Jun: 4,469	37	321	156
Jul-Sep: 4,907	38	382	169
Oct-Dec: 4,987	35	361	155
Jan-Mar: 5,390	34	399	150
Totals:	144	1,463	630

Visits: Summary of findings

Most of the issues raised by ICVs are dealt with promptly at the time of the visit. By their very nature, they tend to be low-level issues relating to a detainee's comfort and general level of satisfaction.

Many ICV Visit reports include praise and compliments to the Custody staff, that there are no issues or problems and that all is as expected, to a high standard with calm well run suites being observed. Also, custody kitchen cleanliness, ready meals in date-order, showers and sink area cleanliness, exercise yards clean and religious material neat and respectfully stored.

Examples of good practice from forces

- Increased presence of Healthcare Practitioner (HCP) in custody - whilst the shortages of HCPs began as a concern at the start of the reporting period, in November 2023 ICVs noticed a marked improvement in the ICV provision as at least 6 new HCPs were onboarded.
- Allergy charts – a new addition in all custody kitchens.

Causes for ICV concern:

- Staffing concerns - ensuring there are adequate staff in custody continues to be a challenge. This has impacted on ICV visits, on at least 3 occasions ICV visits were delayed from starting due to staff shortages, on one occasion Keynsham custody was closed (October 2023) due to staff shortages and 3 ICV visits were abandoned due to insufficient staff being available to escort ICVs. The concern for ICVs is that if staff welfare is impacted and staff are stressed, will this impact detainees?. These concerns are regularly discussed with senior custody management and there is a continual focus by them on recruitment and retention.
- SERCO delays - SERCO continues to experience low staffing which is causing delays in transporting detainees to court and prisons. This situation does not appear to be improving and is impacting on police resources.
- ICVs have noted inconsistencies around the storage of religious material, including prayer mats not being wrapped or religious texts not being stored neatly.
- ICVs have noted on occasion low stocks of clothing and anti-ligature blankets when they have not been replenished in a timely fashion.
- ICVs continue to report that reading material, fidget toys and the use of the exercise yard are not routinely being offered to detainees.

Examples of where ICVs have affected change

- During one visit mould was noted growing on the exercise yard floor, this was viewed as a slip hazard, this was promptly cleaned and is now routinely monitored.
- ICVs should access anonymised custody records for detainees. Following a police system upgrade, ICVs noted that the custody record was being printed in unredacted form. This was highlighted to custody management and promptly amended on the police system.

Comments from Panel Coordinators

"The Keynsham ICV team saw significant turnover in its makeup over the past 12 months. It is now a team of 8 people including 3 new members. Andy Churchill stood down after serving for over 10 years, and special mention to Paul Randy who was the team coordinator until the end of 2023. He has subsequently taken up a similar role in Patchway.

The team continued to focus on the shortcomings in the provision of healthcare services and it is pleasing to see a major improvement during recent months. The issues regarding transport provision are also being monitored, as well as identifying staffing shortages.

Overall, I feel that the team has had a positive impact in terms of continuing to shift the culture to be more proactive, rather than reactive to detainee needs. This focus needs to be maintained.

During the year the team made a visit to the custody suite every week without fail, and some of the team also supported the Patchway team. This is testament to the commitment and dedication of all the team members."

Keith Taylor, ICV Coordinator Keynsham

"Having been an ICV at Keynsham Custody for the past 9 years, 5 as Coordinator and also interim Coordinator at Patchway for the past 9 months as well, in December I transferred to Patchway as Coordinator because of the lack of ICV numbers to carry out the required 7-day weekly visits.

My grateful thanks to a number of Keynsham ICVs, as not only have they had their own rota to complete, but they have assisted with the Patchway quarterly rota as well. Without their help logistically it would have been impossible to implement, as 2 ICVs are required to attend each visit.

The Patchway team although 6 strong included 2 new recruits and also had 2 ICVs taking timeout for personal circumstances and 1 eventually leaving the scheme to pursue other commitments after 9 years as an ICV.

As "Critical Friends" it's important that we have a good rapport with all staff. We are able to carry out our "Rights and Entitlements" checks and making sure detainees are "fairly treated". Checking that all staffing levels are well maintained, reporting in our digital report any staffing issues that need to be highlighted to the OPCC and Custody Inspector to be addressed. Any detainee issues are resolved before we complete our visits and all Resolved and Unresolved issues are recorded in the Digital Report, as we record positive and negative feedback.

The Custody environment can be very challenging for staff, as mental health is becoming extremely common amongst detainees, but professional help within Custody is available if a detainee is agreeable. ICVs also regularly report how professionally detainees are looked after, to prevent a "Death in Custody" also the staff ensure ICVs safety is paramount.

There is an ongoing ICV Recruitment campaign and several potential ICVs are in the pipeline, to swell the figures. There was also a HMICFRS Inspection visit of the 3 Custody Units in January"

Paul Randy, Patchway Custody ICV Coordinator

It's been a transient few years'; Pandemic, restructure, loss of paid staff, new staff started, loss of ICVs, a new recruitment campaign, more loss of ICVs and now new ICVs to start near end of this year. On top Custody has gone through various staffing issues and stakeholder challenges.

Custody is a dynamic, evolving environment and this last year more than ever before. A transient time, which had its impact, although we kept respect, understanding and compassion for all those in the collaboration. When something is challenged like never before it can strain relationships. Having good attitudes among most, if not all of us, we should feel proud that despite being a thoroughly challenging year we kept respect, understanding, support and a great collaborative relationship. ICVs know detainees benefited because various times they have told us how well custody treat them. Despite adversity we showed resilience.

Anita Dibble, ICV Coordinator Bridgwater

Priorities for the ICV Scheme 2024-2025

- Work with ICVA and other ICV schemes to ensure that national themes are addressed.
- Ensure effective dissemination and delivery of training to 2024 ICV intake. A key focus this year will be renewing all training material currently used for new ICVs.
- Maintaining the schemes Code Compliant status awarded by ICVA's Quality Assurance Framework, ready for reassessment in 2025-26. However, where possible work towards achieving a higher level of accreditation.
- Effectively onboard replacement Scrutiny & Assurance Manager's to sit alongside Rebecca Maye and jointly manage the ICV Scheme.
- Continue to have conversations with Avon and Somerset Constabulary with the view to consider the creation of a Custody Scrutiny Panel. Such a panel would bring Avon and Somerset in line with other areas in the force who have demonstrated this level of scrutiny, bringing together a range of interested parties.

Useful further reading

LEARNING THE LESSONS
Improving policing policy and practice

IOPC Independent Office for Police Conduct

CUSTODY

- Nine IOPC case studies highlight learning from incidents in police custody
- The Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody discuss preventing police-related deaths
- ICVA's call for action on the use of anti-rip clothing in custody
- The College of Policing's new national immersive custody training
- HMICFRS share key findings from recent custody inspections
- NAAN introduce new resources to help forces identify vulnerability
- A detention and escort officer and a custody nurse discuss their work

Download a copy and find out more from
www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/learning/learning-the-lessons

The Learning the Lessons magazine is published by the IOPC. It is developed in collaboration with partners in policing.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) – Learning the Lessons issue 42 focuses on custody.

Published in August 2023 the issue explores learning around how to prevent police-related deaths and highlights important training, tools and resources to improve police policy and practice.

Themes include deaths and near misses in custody, mental and physical healthcare, substance misuse, and children and young people.

Click on the link below to read this edition of Learning the Lessons.

[Learning the Lessons issue 42 - custody | Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/learning/learning-the-lessons)



Annual Home Office Custody Statistics released February 2024

The Home Office released the second annual national custody data. This data is an important annual return.

As this is only the second year of these statistics being collected, they are marked as 'Official Statistics in Development' and do not represent a full return from all

forces, although the returns have increased significantly this year. You can read the full report [here](#).

Further information about the ICV Scheme

Further information about the ICV Scheme can be viewed through the following link:

[The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme | OPCC for Avon and Somerset \(avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk\)](https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk)



ICVA is a Home Office, Police Authority and PCC funded membership organisation set up to lead, support and represent PCC and Police Authority-led schemes. Further information about ICVA can be viewed through the following link: <https://icva.org.uk/>.

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