



🏠 Location: Keynsham/Patchway/Bridgwater
📅 Date: 4th/5th/11th February 2025
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

ICV Panel Meeting - February

➤ Guest Speaker Input; The Lay Observers

Policy Lead: Jake Moores / National Chair: David Whalley

Lay Observers (LOs) are ministerial appointees who monitor the treatment and conditions of detained persons (DPs) while in court custody and during escort from police custody to court and prison. Their insights provide an essential perspective on the detainee journey beyond police custody, highlighting issues that impact court efficiency, detainee welfare, and the broader criminal justice system. Key information taken from the input:

A national thematic report (“Broken Journeys”; [Broken-journeys-broken-system-LO-transport-thematic.pdf](#)) has identified persistent and systemic transport issues:

- **Excessive journey lengths**, driven by prison capacity pressures (prisons approx. 97% full).
- **Late arrivals** to court resulting in listing delays, inefficient hearings, and occasionally missed appearances.
- **Long waits** for police prior to collection, due to complex routing of escort vehicles.
- Current Personal Escort & Custodial System (PECS) contracts (SERCO in the South; GEOAmev in the North/Wales) offer limited enforceable penalties, restricting the ability to improve performance until the next contract cycle in 2030.

A follow-up national report is due shortly and early indications suggest continuing concerns.

LOs frequently observe instances where women and children are transported alongside men, including individuals charged with sexual or violent offences. Despite physical separation within vehicles, noise travels, and the environment is often distressing. The contract only requires separate transport “where possible”, and compliance is inconsistent.

Health, Risk Information and Record Quality

- Detainees sometimes arrive in court with unassessed physical or mental health needs.
- Only Bristol and London currently provide on-site paramedics in court custody suites.
- Custody records passed from police to courts are digital but not always complete or detailed, making risk assessment difficult (e.g., vague markers such as “escape risk” with no context).
- Records do not routinely include information on food or hydration, contributing to detainees reporting hunger on arrival.



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- Detainees often report having had little or no food before transport. Court custody staff are usually instructed not to provide food, as this is considered the responsibility of police custody. The lack of shared information about meals leads to complaints and affects detainee welfare.
- Recent policy changes mean detainees are no longer automatically handcuffed outside cells. Decisions are now risk-based, but this can result in handcuffing in public areas, raising concerns about dignity and reputational risk for the justice system.
- There are only around 60 Lay Observers nationally, with just 3–6 covering the South West across large geographical areas, sometimes travelling up to 50 miles to reach a court. Workloads vary significantly, from very quiet courts (e.g., Yeovil) to extremely busy ones (e.g., Bristol Magistrates' and major urban courts). LOs usually visit busy courts monthly and quieter courts quarterly. A new recruitment campaign is expected soon.

LOs are keen to strengthen relationships with ICVs and the PCC, recognising the overlap in monitoring themes. Potential areas for closer working include:

- Regular liaison and information sharing
 - Joint observational visits (ICVs observing court custody; LOs observing police custody)
 - Better understanding of the full detainee journey from arrest to prison arrival
 - Engagement through ICVA's place on the National Escorting Meeting (NEM)
- Insights from Lay Observers highlight system-wide pressures affecting detainee transport, custody risks, and court operations. Stronger partnership working between LOs, ICVs, and PCC oversight functions would support a more joined-up understanding of detainee welfare, enhance scrutiny, and create opportunities for collective influence with the MOJ and PECS providers.

Wider Issues Relevant to Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs)

A number of concerns raised by LOs also affect police custody and Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs):

- DPs often arrive at court with multiple physical or mental health issues, many of which are undiagnosed prior to arrival.
- Access to medical support is inconsistent; only a small number of courts, including those in Bristol and London, have regular paramedic cover.
- Digital Escort Records (DERs) are frequently incomplete or inaccurate, despite being intended to provide a full record of a detainee's custody journey.
- DPs often report feeling hungry, having had little or nothing for breakfast. Court staff are not permitted to provide food, even where welfare concerns are apparent.

The current Lay Observers Annual Report can be access here: [Lay-Observers-Annual-report-2024-2025.pdf](#)

Link to Recording of meeting (password in email):

<https://avonandsomersetconstabulary.box.com/s/xqjp34tmeqspm524x8q7yipnkaq7m1>



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DPCC attendance at Keynsham ICV Meeting

Kevin attended the first half of the Keynsham ICV meeting and has indicated he will attend: Patchway meeting in July, Bridgwater meeting in November

The Government has confirmed that Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will be abolished in 2028, at the end of the current PCC electoral cycle (formally announced on 13 November 2025).

The reform forms part of wider plans to “strengthen police governance” and improve consistency and performance across policing.

Significant time is currently being spent preparing for the transition outlined in the Government’s white paper, including proposals for:

- Potential reduction in the number of police forces
- Possible creation of a national police service
- Substantial changes to local governance and scrutiny

These proposals have raised concerns—particularly about the future of local policing and PCC roles. The Chief Constable has raised these issues with the Home Secretary.

A national review is under way. A report is expected within six months outlining potential future PCC responsibilities, arrangements for non-mayoral areas, and the extent of Home Office oversight

There remains considerable uncertainty about future scrutiny arrangements. Stakeholders, including APCC Chair Emily Spurrell, have stressed the need for strong, robust oversight.

- Deputy mayors may lose some powers
- Somerset’s exclusion from the WECA mayoral model adds additional complexity for Avon & Somerset

Current governance and scrutiny arrangements will remain unchanged until PCC terms end in May 2028.

Despite uncertainty, it was noted positively that the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme will continue as a statutory requirement, ensuring ongoing independent oversight of police custody regardless of structural reforms.

➤ OPCC Update

NATIONAL:

- **Home Office Review of the ICV Code of Practice** - The policing minister has agreed to a Home Office–led review of the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Code of Practice. This review was initiated by ICVA and will support updates and improvements to ICV Schemes nationally.
- **Food Availability for Detainees** - National reporting continues to highlight issues regarding the availability of food options for detainees, with some forces experiencing reduced provision of items such as crisps, biscuits, and, in certain areas, milk due to cost pressures. ICVA plans to raise a formal question on this in the next quarter. Schemes are asked to monitor local food availability closely, ensuring that all dietary requirements continue to be met.
- **Government Policing White Paper** – See DPCC input
- **Children in Police Custody – APPG Report** - The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children in Police Custody has published a new report, “*Making Children’s Rights a Reality in Police Custody*,” following a year-long inquiry into the experiences of children aged 10–17 across England and Wales. The report draws on evidence from lived-experience volunteers, written submissions, and engagement with police, practitioners, youth organisations, and academics. The inquiry concludes that police custody remains an adult-centred and harmful environment for children and calls for substantial reforms. Key recommendations include stricter limits on detention, enhanced safeguards, mandatory access to specialist legal advice, and the expansion of community-based alternatives to custody. (Report: [*Rights of Children in Police Custody*](#))

LOCAL:

- **Mandatory Equalities Module (College of Policing)** – Katherine has circulated the link to the College of Policing’s mandatory Equalities training. This module must be completed by all volunteers and forms an essential part of maintaining best practice and meeting statutory responsibilities around equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **ICVA Anti-Racism Training** – The ICVA anti-racism training package, issued on 31/12/25, remains outstanding for some volunteers. Completion is required to support ICVA’s commitment to anti-racist practice and to strengthen volunteers’ confidence in identifying and challenging disproportionality within custody settings.
- **ICVA Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)** – The deadline for submission of all evidence for the upcoming QAF review is the 31st of March 2026. Work continues to collate and quality-check documentation ahead of submission to ensure we meet the required standards. We’re going for Gold! We will keep you posted on the outcome!
- **ICV Recruitment** – Recruitment activity is progressing well. Three volunteers in Cohort 1 completed their training on the 22nd of January, and a further nine volunteers in Cohort 2 are scheduled to receive their training on the 26th of March 2026, strengthening resilience and coverage across the scheme.



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- **2025 Volunteer Survey** – Thank you to those that completed the annual survey. We are currently working through the responses and will update you on the findings in due course.

➤ Panel Discussion & Custody Updates

1. Reviews and Sleeping Reviews - Concerns were again raised about the completion of sleeping reviews and reviews generally. In several cases, reviews had been carried out but not communicated back to the Detainee (DP), with no evidence on the custody record showing that the DP was informed when awake.

This was acknowledged by the police.

- Reviews are conducted at 6 hours and then every 9 hours by Inspectors.
- Custody Sergeants are generally very good at informing DPs, but a gap occurs when Detention Officers (DOs) notice a DP is awake and do not always relay this to Sergeants.
- DOs manage food, cleaning, and practical tasks well.
- PACE requires DPs to be informed of reviews; this expectation will be reinforced through additional communications.
- Colour-coded custody whiteboards indicate awareness of reviews. Only a custody Sergeant can remove the marker, which may not occur if they are not aware the DP is awake or are dealing with other matters.

ASP to issue further comms reminding staff of PACE requirements.

2. Review Timeliness and Data - Dan (HOC) reported that current analysis shows 31% of reviews are not completed on time. While there are mitigating factors (e.g., demand pressures), this remains a concern.

A piece of work is being commissioned to better understand performance and identify improvements. Data will be brought to the July panel meeting.

The question was asked whether failures impact prosecution. Dan confirmed it constitutes a breach of PACE. The issue has also been raised by the PCC at the Government Scrutiny Board.

3. Fidget Toys, Tablets & Neurodiversity

Owen reported that Keynsham is well-stocked with fidget toys, aside from one type that Katie is sourcing.

Tablets are in use and operating effectively.



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Neurodiverse signage has been circulated twice recently. While there is no formal training, staff are expected to use it appropriately.

Dan noted an opportunity to strengthen this area at the March Inspector workshop, where neurodiversity will be a core topic. There will be a lead Inspector for each area moving forward.

4. Staffing Update

- 9 substantive Inspectors, 1 development post.
- **Team 1:** 1 substantive (Nick), 1 acting for 3 months (transferee arriving soon)
- **Team 2:** 2 substantives
- **Team 3:** Development post
- **Teams 4 & 5:** 2 substantive each
- No shortages: absences are due to sickness/annual leave/training. Teams currently well-staffed.

5. SERCO Transport

Keynsham ICVs raised a recent issue where a detained individual was due to be transported to Cardiff, but was instead taken to Bristol, despite Cardiff staff intervening.

Dan confirmed transport is a national issue, with no accountability clause in SERCO's contract. This has been escalated to the Chief Finance Officer, with expectation of higher-level conversations.

6. Exercise Yard Access

While there is no legal right to exercise yard access, it is encouraged where it is safe and feasible. With only two yards, availability can be limited (e.g. when housing high-risk detainees).

ICVs noted that DPs often appear unaware of the yard option and suggested they may forget information given at booking-in.

Dan agreed the 6-hour review presents an opportunity to remind DPs.

7. Metal Detectors

ICVs commented that the metal detectors, previously described as a significant improvement, may be less impactful in practice.

ASP felt they remain better than nothing, although many DPs approach the desk already in cuffs. Nick added they provide "unseen benefits," as individuals intent on hiding items often avoid using them.



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Katie confirmed they have prevented some EIP searches, effectively reducing intrusive searching when the detector results are clear.

8. Positive Staff Engagement

Keynsham ICVs shared an example of DOs providing excellent support to a distressed female DP, including facilitating yard access.

ICVs emphasised that custody staff consistently go “*above and beyond*,” and the issues raised are not “*needle-moving*” concerns.

9. Rights & Entitlements (R&E) – Observation Opportunity

It was agreed that this would be beneficial, provided that detained persons give their consent beforehand. Observations should only take place sporadically to ensure they do not detract from time spent engaging with a wider number of detainees. However, the group agreed there is clear value in undertaking this periodically.

Dan fully supports this and will issue comms. Consent from the detained person will be required before any observation.

10. Trial Cell with TV (Keynsham)

Owen confirmed this had been explored but could not be signed off, so the proposal has been discontinued.

11. Food Provision

Dan stated Avon & Somerset is discarding too much unused food, prompting a review into ordering processes.

Owen believes the current range is good, including cereal bars, but supports reviewing waste levels.

12. Children in Custody

A thematic lead is in place, and ongoing work aligns with the findings from national reports on children in custody. This continues to receive regular focus.

13. Workforce & Process Updates



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From Nick's presentation:

- DOs reduced from 105 to 90, which meets the force's intended staffing level.
- 8 new DOs joining in March will bring numbers to 97/98.

A dedicated custody officer process is now running annually. A Use of Force (UoF) panel has been introduced, reviewing random incidents. Next steps include incorporating independent partners, including ICVs, where appropriate. Dan will liaise with Dee as this connects to the Independent Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel (ISoPPP).

14. Custody Advisory Board (CAB)

- Superintendent James Raphael to chair future CAB meetings.
- Terms of Reference are being drafted.
- 360-degree feedback forms will be issued to stakeholders.

15. BWV Access

DO access to Body-Worn Video is being developed and remains a work in progress.

16. Health & Safety Executive Review

Following the incident involving a custody officer being shot in the Met, national guidance states no searches should be conducted without body armour. The HSE is auditing all forces on search procedures.

ASP is awaiting its audit and hopes the use of metal detectors will be accepted as part of mitigation arrangements.

18. Additional Observations, Equipment Updates & Opportunities for Scrutiny

Plastic Cuffs and Metal Detector Use

Dan confirmed that plastic cuffs are being introduced, allowing detainees to safely stand in front of metal detectors during searches. This is aimed at improving safety and compliance with revised search expectations.

ICV Observation Opportunities

Patchway confirmed they are happy for ICVs to observe the booking-in process, subject to detained person consent. Dan expressed strong support for increasing ICV observational opportunities, especially:



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- During protest-related custody operations, where Patchway is the designated protest custody unit and prisoner numbers are high. This provides an important opportunity for independent scrutiny.
- When incidents occur requiring enhanced oversight, so ICVs gain a better understanding of custody pressures in real time.

These opportunities will strengthen transparency and help build context around the decisions and processes ICVs review during routine visits.

Use of Force (UoF) – Scrutiny & Panel Work

Dan highlighted several developments in the Use of Force scrutiny framework:

- A Use of Force Scrutiny Panel has been introduced within custody.
- Ryan Edwards (Bridgwater) is the lead for UoF and adverse incidents.
- Meetings are currently held monthly, conducted online, meaning ICVs can dial in from home. The structure may evolve, but monthly meetings are the current model.
- Dan will be requesting ICV attendance to act as *critical friends* during UoF reviews.
- The intention is to include independent internal and external voices, strengthening accountability.
- Feedback and learning from each panel session will be provided to officers.

Definition of Use of Force

- UoF includes any physical interaction or verbal commands involving compliance and must be recorded as UoF.
- All UoF submissions are now processed via PRONTO.
- Panel reviews focus on incidents involving more than basic force, such as:
 - Intimate searches
 - Use of handcuffs (considered UoF)
 - Cell extractions

Custody and Assaults on Staff

Custody remains the environment with the highest volume of assaults on officers. This links to Operation Hampshire, which focuses on monitoring and improving responses to assaults on police.

Next Scheduled Panel Meetings:

Of note: we've shifted the days around to help as many people as possible attend, either in person or online.

JULY 2026:

- Tuesday the 7th; Bridgwater, First Floor, The Bridgwater Room (10:00 – 14:00)
- Thursday the 9th; Keynsham, First Floor Briefing Room (10:00 - 14:00)
- Wednesday the 15th; Patchway, First Floor, Meeting Room 6 (10:00 – 14:00)



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ICV Monitoring & Recording Checklist

1. HPC/LADs Presence

- Confirm these roles are present and note any concerns.

2. Staffing Levels

- Only record if staffing is notably low (e.g., 4 or fewer Detention Officers, 2 or fewer Sergeants) and impacting detainee care.

3. Sleeping Reviews

- Check custody logs sporadically to ensure detainees are informed, once awake, that a review occurred while they were asleep.

4. Neurodiverse Signage & Adjustments

- Is signage being used appropriately?
- Are reasonable adjustments in place (e.g., fidget toys, vulnerable cell use, mood lighting)?

5. Exercise Yard

- Are detainees routinely informed about access to the exercise yard?

6. SERCO Transport

- Note any transport challenges on the day or during the week.

7. Fidget Toys, Reading Material & Glasses

- Are these items available and routinely offered?
- At Keynsham: folder with puzzles/colouring sheets - can this be replicated across all suites?

8. Juveniles

- Have they received a juvenile-friendly version of Rights & Entitlements?
- Do they have an Appropriate Adult?
- Has alternative accommodation been explored, exhausted, and recorded in the custody log?

9. Female Point of Contact

- Recent dip-sampling shows low compliance - please monitor closely.



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Ensure all female detainees have a designated point of contact.

Recent dip-sampling shows low compliance - please monitor closely.