



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting
📅 Date: 16th of July 2026
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

ICV Joint Panel Meeting – July

July saw our first joint Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) meeting held at Police Headquarters in Portishead. This was the first time ICVs from all three custody suites, Bridgwater, Keynsham and Patchway, had come together for a single meeting.

15 ICVs attended, with 8 apologies received. The event was very well attended and provided a valuable opportunity for visitors to share experiences, network with colleagues from other suites, and take away a range of useful information. We were also pleased to welcome two guest speakers who delivered informative presentations on Duty Solicitors and Neurodiversity in Custody (see below).

Based on the positive feedback received, we will continue to hold the summer ICV panel meeting as a joint event. The February and November panel meetings will remain local and continue to be held at each individual custody suite.

ATTENDEES:

ASC – HOC Dan Ashfield, Insp Nick Evans, Sgt James Nelson, Insp Jon Nash

OPCC – Sally Fox, Rob Simmons, Dee Derrick, Becky Maye, Katherine Pruet

ICVs – Bridgwater: RD, TM, JR, AS, PT, DS, SD. Keynsham: KT, MF, TB, CM, JP. Patchway: PR, DD, FW.

➤ OPCC Updates

Director of Performance and Accountability: Sally Fox



A very warm welcome was offered to the ICVs along with thanks for all the hard work that they have been doing and Sally commented that this is a provision that she is incredibly proud of.

Getting Gold: Recently the scheme achieved recognition of being Quality Assured as Gold, which is a real testament and commitment to the work of the ICVs.

A question was raised around the difference between Code Compliant (what the scheme was previously graded at) and Gold within the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) framework.

- **Code Compliant** represents the minimum statutory and operational requirements expected of all Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) schemes. This includes areas such as robust recruitment and vetting processes, volunteer induction and training, governance arrangements, detainee welfare oversight, mechanisms for holding the force to account, and compliance with the Home Office Code of Practice.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting
📅 Date: 16th of July 2026
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

- **Gold Standard** builds on these foundations and recognises schemes that demonstrate excellence and continuous improvement. Additional requirements focus on proactive volunteer recruitment and diversity monitoring, enhanced volunteer development opportunities, anti-racism initiatives, community engagement, sharing of good practice nationally, effective challenge and scrutiny of custody practices, partnership working, volunteer voice mechanisms, and investment in scheme management.

The ICV Scheme has evidenced compliance across all Code Compliant requirements and has also demonstrated substantial evidence against all Gold Standard criteria. Achieving Gold Standard reflects not only compliance with statutory obligations but also a commitment to best practice, innovation, volunteer support, transparency, and improving outcomes for detainees and communities.

Celebration Event & the future: Sally thanked everyone who was able to attend the Volunteer Celebration Event and Workshop in May. Following the announcement that Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will be abolished in 2028, the event provided an important opportunity to hear from our volunteers and discuss how we can make the most of Clare's remaining term, while continuing to provide the best possible support for volunteers involved in scrutiny work.

We were delighted to receive valuable feedback from attendees and are already exploring plans for a larger scrutiny conference next year. We hope to involve the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) and showcase the vital role that scrutiny plays within policing. This is an exciting piece of work, and further details will be shared in due course.

The announcement regarding the abolition of PCCs, made in November last year, came as a surprise to both staff and the PCC, with little advance notice. The proposed future governance model is expected to include a Police and Crime Board comprising the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Mayor, five local authority leaders, two independent members and a Police and Crime Lead. However, final arrangements are yet to be confirmed.

Significant legislative changes will be required to support the transition, with primary legislation expected to begin progressing from Autumn 2026. Staff are anticipated to transfer into the new structure in May 2028, although detailed implementation plans are still being developed.

Of the current scrutiny arrangements, only the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme is a statutory requirement, with other panels operating as recognised best practice. Work is ongoing across several programmes to help shape future arrangements and ensure that effective scrutiny remains in place.

In the meantime, scrutiny activity will continue as normal, and it remains business as usual.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting
📅 Date: 16th of July 2026
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

➤ Guest Speaker Input; The Legal Aid Agency (LAA)

Contract Manager: Simon Fletcher (SF)

The Panel received a presentation on the role of legal aid in ensuring access to justice, regardless of an individual's financial circumstances. Members heard that legal aid supports individuals to understand their rights, obtain legal advice and representation, and receive a fair hearing throughout legal proceedings.



SF outlined the role of the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice responsible for administering legal aid, contracting and paying providers, and monitoring quality and compliance. The LAA does not provide legal advice directly or determine court outcomes.

Members were advised that criminal legal aid is available from the point of police detention through to court proceedings. Free and independent legal advice at the police station is available to all detainees regardless of income and was described as a key safeguard, particularly for vulnerable individuals.

The Duty Solicitor Scheme was explained, providing independent legal representation for individuals who do not have their own solicitor. The role of accredited representatives and court duty solicitors was also outlined.

SF described the LAA's quality assurance arrangements, including contract management, peer review and compliance monitoring. Where concerns are identified, firms may be subject to additional scrutiny or, in serious cases, contract termination.

In discussion, members asked about legal aid eligibility, declining numbers of criminal defence practitioners, court duty solicitor availability, and how poor-quality legal advice is identified and addressed. SF advised that eligibility varies depending on the court involved, acknowledged workforce pressures within the sector, confirmed duty solicitors remain available until released by the court, and explained that quality concerns are primarily identified through peer review and contract monitoring.

The Panel noted assurances that free legal advice remains available to detainees regardless of income, that independent representation is available through the Duty Solicitor Scheme, and that the Legal Aid Agency maintains oversight of providers through accreditation, contract management and quality assurance processes.

Link to Recording of Simon Fletcher's input: [ICV Duty Solicitor Scheme Presentation - Panel Meeting 16.07.2026 - YouTube](#)



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

➤ Custody Updates

Head of Custody: Dan Ashfield

Governance

- A new Performance Team has been established over the past 6 months. Inspector Jon Nash now leads Performance and Compliance, supported by two Logistics Officers.
- Monthly performance meetings have been introduced to review key performance indicators (KPIs) arising from inspections, including individual, team, and station performance.
- Oversight of sickness management has improved, addressing an area frequently highlighted during ICV visits. No specific trends have been identified, with absence levels remaining seasonal.
- Each of the 11 Custody Inspectors now has responsibility for a designated thematic area. Inspectors provide data which feeds into a visual performance dashboard, including measures such as average child wait times. Increased scrutiny and quality assurance are being applied, particularly in relation to children.
- Thematic data is reported through to senior leadership meetings to support wider performance oversight.
- A new Use of Force Custody Panel has been established and will meet monthly to review five real-life examples of custody-related use of force. As part of this process, the panel will consider cases involving a female detainee, a child, and a detainee from an ethnic minority background, ensuring a broad and representative review of practice.

We are pleased that four ICVs have volunteered to sit on the panel, contributing an important independent perspective to the force-wide review and scrutiny of use of force practices.

It is particularly encouraging that ASC recognises the value of involving ICVs in this work, acknowledging the vital role they play as independent voices. Thank you to those who have volunteered to support this important initiative and help strengthen transparency, accountability, and public confidence in custody practices.

Force Updates

- Work is underway to review the use of constant observations, particularly the impact on frontline officers who may otherwise be responding to emergency calls.
- ICVs are asked to engage with officers carrying out constant observations to establish whether they have received an appropriate handover, understand the detainee's risk level, and are aware of the reasons for the observation. Previous reviews identified instances where officers had not received sufficient information when taking over observations.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting
📅 Date: 16th of July 2026
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

General Updates

- From the 12th of October, Inspector shifts will extend until 4:00am (currently 2:00am), 7 days a week.
- Recent changes to the Sentencing Act have led to increased bail activity and higher custody footfall. Although an upward trend is being monitored, no concerns have been identified at this stage. (Please see attached document which outlines the changes to the Act).
- All staff and visitors within custody, including Appropriate Adults and solicitors, are expected to wear identification lanyards. ICVs are also asked to ensure their lanyards are visible when moving around the unit.
- A Custody Officer training course is scheduled for September, with an anticipated intake of 12 officers. Recruitment for Detention Officers is currently at interview stage.
- Current staffing levels are healthy, with workforce planning already underway for 2027-28.
- A new requirement for Detention Officers and police staff to wear body armour when carrying out detainee searches is being introduced following a fatal incident in a London custody suite. The policy is in its final stages of development. Body Worn Video (BWV) is also being introduced into custody environments.

Appreciation and Feedback

The Head of Custody thanked ICVs for their continued support and positive feedback, noting its value in recognising good practice. Concerns raised during visits remain important in driving improvement. Abandoned visits are not considered acceptable, and an escalation process will be developed with Becky and Dee to address any future occurrences.

Questions and Responses

Q: Where would a child be diverted to if not kept in custody?

A: Decisions are led by Children's Services. The preferred option is placement with a suitable family member. Where this is not possible, police protection powers may be used, giving Children's Services up to 72 hours to secure appropriate accommodation. The process is subject to significant scrutiny.

Q: How frequently are observation levels reviewed? Can they be increased from Level 1?

A: Detainees presenting significant risks, such as self-harm or medical concerns, will typically start on Level 4 observations. Observation levels are reviewed continuously and are generally reduced as risks decrease. It is uncommon to increase observation levels, as the highest level is usually applied initially where required.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting
📅 Date: 16th of July 2026
🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

Q: ICVs were previously advised to remove lanyards when visiting detainees. Does this remain the expectation?

A: As ICVs are generally escorted, this is not a concern when engaging with detainees. However, lanyards should be worn at other times to ensure individuals can be easily identified within the custody unit.

Q: What is the difference between a Custody Officer and an Escorting Officer?

A: Custody Officers are Sergeants responsible for custody decision-making and oversight. Escorting Officers are generally Detention Officers who support the management and movement of detainees.

➤ Performance, Compliance and Neurodiversity in Custody

Inspector Jon Nash:

Performance and Compliance

Inspector Jon Nash provided an overview of his new role leading Performance and Compliance within Custody. The role focuses on HMICFRS compliance, governance, continuous improvement, and strengthening integration between Custody and the wider force.

A key objective is to improve information-sharing between Custody and operational policing, recognising that custodial operations have become increasingly separate from the wider organisation over time.

Compliance checks are being strengthened through a structured programme of audits and inspections:

- Regular joint site inspections with Equans to monitor building and cell condition issues.
- Enhanced oversight of daily and weekly custody checks carried out by Detention Officers.
- Thematic compliance reviews, including testing staff knowledge and preparedness in areas such as fire evacuation procedures and emergency response arrangements.
- Work is underway to improve exercise yard environments, including reviewing wall coverings to reduce self-harm risks and create safer, more usable spaces for detainees.



Neurodiversity in Custody

Insp. Nash highlighted the significant presence of neurodivergent individuals within the criminal justice system and the importance of making custody environments more accessible and less distressing.

Current and planned improvements include:



**AVON &
SOMERSET**
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER

🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

- Reviewing cell environments, including colours, lighting and visual stimuli, to reduce sensory overload.
- Exploring the use of stenciling, artwork and environmental enhancements in custody areas and exercise yards, particularly for children and young people.
- Considering how custody environments can better support individuals with ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other neurodivergent conditions.

Particular concern was raised around the accessibility of written information provided to detainees, recognising that lengthy text-heavy documents can be difficult for some individuals to process, especially when distressed.

The aim is to make the custody process as accessible and stress-free as possible while ensuring appropriate risk assessment and safeguarding measures remain in place.

Identification of Neurodivergent Detainees

A discussion took place regarding the use of neurodiversity indicators or signs on cell doors. While such markers may assist staff and visitors in adapting their communication and approach, concerns were raised about detainee dignity, privacy and potential stigma.

It was noted that the use of identifiers is not currently applied consistently across custody units. Alternative approaches were discussed, including recording information on custody records or custody unit information sheets, subject to system capability and information-sharing requirements.

Insp. Nash agreed to explore whether amendments to existing custody system reports could be made to provide relevant information more discreetly and consistently.

Training and Awareness

Insp. Nash advised that specialist neurodiversity training for custody staff is limited and variable in quality.

Work is being considered to develop a consistent and evidence-based training package for custody staff, inspectors and relevant stakeholders, aimed at improving understanding of neurodiversity and promoting best practice when engaging with detainees.

Link to Recording of Insp. Nash's input: [*ICV Update - Neurodiversity Provision in Custody - Panel Meeting 16.07.26*](#)



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

➤ Items raised with Custody & Updates

Location	Issue/concern	Progress Update from meeting
<u>All sites</u>	Sleeping Reviews: ICVs remain concerned that DPs are not being routinely informed. <i>This continues to be an issue across all sites.</i>	The new Performance and Compliance Team are dipping sampling sleeping reviews. All reviews should be in person unless there is an exception (for example, someone is in a deep sleep). Any dropped reviews are purely due to demand.
	ABORTED VISITS x2 in 4 months - Keynsham 20/04/26, Patchway 24/06/26 <i>Due to staff dealing with a medical emergency necessitating an ambulance & a DP making threats around self-harm plus minimum staffing & 2nd aborted visit due to staff shortages, heatwave.</i>	Aborted visits should not be happening. We will work with Becky and Dee to create some sort of escalation process <u>in order to</u> further prevent this issue.
	Fidget toys <i>Insp Jon Nash advised they have been removed to be replaced. Update on current position?</i>	The current provision of fidget toys was not deemed safe/suitable for detainees. After a visit to Blackberry Hill Hospital, <u>a number of</u> suitable fidget toys are now on order who will be appropriate for all detainee types.
	Neurodiversity signage <i>Ongoing inconsistent use.</i>	See section from Insp. Jon Nash's input.
	SERCO concerns <i>Ongoing.</i>	We have a new Insp. From Gwent Constabulary who has joined us and will be the custody lead for SERCO. While a formal complaints process exists, SERCO contracts don't include significant punitive measures, limiting enforcement options. This is a <u>national issue</u> .
	Custody Inspector shortages <i>Has this improved since Feb?</i>	Now have a full compliment of Insp's which will hopefully be noticed on visits.
	Exercise yard <i>ICVs report that DPs across all suites are often unaware the exercise yard is available to them.</i>	Concerns raised that many detainees are unaware an exercise yard is available. In A&S staff do not have to be in the exercise yard with detainees compared to other areas where they are supervised therefore making it resource intensive.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

		The exercise yard is not currently referenced during the booking-in process. Members agreed access to fresh air can help de-escalate detainees and should perhaps be promoted more proactively. Discussion took place about improving signage and information provided to detainees, potentially through a simplified rights/information sheet incorporating symbols. Comparisons were made with clearer custody signage used in other forces (Gwent) It was agreed DOs should be encouraged to make greater use of the exercise yard where appropriate. During the recent heatwave, at least two detainees slept in the exercise yard overnight.
	Metal detectors <i>Are they being utilised effectively across the 3 sites? Have they been taken out to any events at all?</i>	Insp. Mark Jenkinson is now the custody lead for searching. He will be completing a review of the metal detectors, their usage and compliance. They've been in place for 6-7 months. Our training site is also looking to incorporate a custody setting for scenario-based training. This hopes to be up and running in about 6 months' time. Would be great for the ICVs to come along and observe this training when it happens.
	Religious items <i>Are they being stored appropriately at all sites? (Patchway check showed they were in an untidy state in a box)</i>	Matt Roberts has been appointed as the new SPOC and has begun reviewing religious materials. Plans are in place to work with community representatives to assess and improve the force's ability to meet cultural and religious needs. Improvements are expected over the coming months. <i>(ICVs to keep an eye on this).</i>
<u>Site-specific issues</u>	<u>Issue/concern</u>	<u>Progress Update from meeting</u>
<u>KEYNSHAM</u>	20/03/26 – gluten free food out of date. <i>Is there a process in place for routinely checking stock dates and removing out-of-date items?</i>	Katie Maun plans to overhaul the custody ordering system. A new structure is close to implementation and will standardise ordering arrangements across all custody units, helping to address issues such as out-of-date items.
	Lack of acknowledgment when entering the custody suite and attending for a visit.	Very sorry that this has been experienced by ICVs at Keynsham. This is not acceptable and regardless of how busy staff are, ICVs should be at the very least, acknowledged on arrival. A message will be sent out to all staff around this matter.

🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

		(Email has been sent to Keynsham ICVs with this information on 21/07).
<u>PATCHWAY</u>	Several times throughout May ICVs raised Kitchen cleanliness issue: dirty food probe. <i>Ongoing issue in Patchway only.</i>	A reminder was issued regarding the cleanliness and management of the dirty probe storage area at Patchway.
	Religious Materials <i>Placed untidily into a box.</i>	See above.

➤ Custody Reviews

ICV Bridgwater Coordinator, Richard Denby, led a discussion on how ICVs can help identify opportunities to improve the quality of custody reviews:

- ICVs should look for evidence that PACE reviews are being conducted at the appropriate times, that detainees have been informed of the review, and that any feedback has been recorded.
- For detainees held for extended periods (e.g. over 15 hours), there should normally be evidence of multiple reviews and that the detainee has been kept informed.
- ICVs were reminded that PACE review requirements do not apply in all circumstances, such as recalled prisoners.
- When speaking with detainees, ICVs were encouraged to ask whether they have been kept updated on their detention and informed of any decisions, including whether they have been charged.
- If a detainee appears unaware of their status or progress, ICVs may wish to check the custody record for further information.

Richard's slides will be attached to the minutes for reference. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.

➤ Custody App

ICV Keynsham Coordinator, Keith Taylor, highlighted the importance of using the Avon and Somerset ICV App consistently and accurately especially the **tagging function**.



🏠 Location: HQ, Portishead -Joint ICV Meeting

📅 Date: 16th of July 2026

🕒 Time: 10:00-14:00hrs

ICVs were reminded to record within the app whether any issues identified during a visit were **resolved or unresolved at the time of the visit**. This information is essential in enabling both the OPCC and Custody staff to track and follow up concerns effectively. The below image shows what the OPCC/ASP will see if an issue has been tagged:

ICV-1743

Dashboard / Visits / ICV-1743

Ref #	ICV-1743	ICV	Rob Simmons
Start of Visit	14 Jul 2026 at 09:00	Additional ICVs	Diana Derrick
End of Visit	14 Jul 2026 at 10:32	Custody Inspector	
Location	Bridgwater Police Centre, Avon and Somerset, Avon and Somerset	Sergeant	Nelson #302
		Escorting Officer	#73851

Detainees

Cell	Category	Type	Gender	Visit Details	Has Issue	Actions
1	PACE	Adult	Male	Available for Visit? Yes Visit Consent Given? Yes Custody Record Consent? Yes Custody Record Viewed? No Record Number?	Yes	View

ICV General Comments

test

Volunteers were also encouraged to make full use of the app's tagging function when recording issues. Tags are particularly important for unresolved matters, as they are automatically highlighted within the notification reports received by the OPCC and the police. In addition, app data can be analysed to identify trends and the frequency of recurring issues across custody suites, helping to inform improvement activity and oversight.

ICVs were asked to ensure reports are completed fully and accurately to maximise the value of the information captured through the Avon and Somerset custody app.

➤ Next Scheduled Panel Meetings

NOVEMBER 2026:

- Wednesday the 11th; Keynsham, First Floor, Briefing Room (10:00 – 14:00)
- Thursday the 12th; Bridgwater, First Floor, Meeting Room 5 (10:00 - 14:00)
- Tuesday the 17th; Patchway, First Floor, Meeting Room 6 (10:00 – 14:00)