



JOY ALLEN
DURHAM POLICE AND
CRIME COMMISSIONER



Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

ANNUAL REPORT
2024/25

FOREWORD

FROM JOY ALLEN, DURHAM POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER



As Police and Crime Commissioner for County Durham and Darlington, I am pleased to present this year's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Report.

As part of my Police, Crime and Justice Plans' Criminal Justice priority, I have pledged to renew focus on preventative and rehabilitative approaches to address offending behaviour.

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme is one of the many scrutiny arrangements my office oversees to maintain accountability and transparency of policing services on behalf of the public. It provides an impartial insight into police custody practices and reassures our communities that those individuals being held within police custody receive their full entitlements and the highest standards of care and welfare.



JOY ALLEN

DURHAM POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

I want to express my sincere thanks to our Independent Custody Visitors, who generously give their time and commitment to this important work. Alongside making unannounced visits - often at the weekends or in the evenings- they also commit to their own personally development through ongoing training. Their professionalism, diligence and compassion have driven many improvements locally to ensure detainees, especially the vulnerable or young, are heard and receive the best quality of support and care.

This report documents their activities throughout 2024-25, and reflects the outstanding partnership between my office, Durham Constabulary and our dedicated volunteers. It also highlights the force's continued commitment to learning, openness to scrutiny, and eagerness to maintain high standards within the custody environment.

In December 2024, we entered an exciting period in our history with the opening of a new state-of-the-art building housing all our custody facilities under one roof – and much more. The Investigative Hub is already transforming the way we operate and perform in several key areas of business thanks to its highly advanced and contemporary design.

Alongside 48 new custody cells and modern waiting areas, the Hub provides 24/7 health care by qualified medical staff to monitor and maintain the health and safety of detainees. This was something that could not be achieved

across three sites that were operating and often resulted in several hours of police time lost by transporting detainees to hospital. The efficiencies made possible through this project are already being reinvested in frontline policing to benefit our wider communities.

For the ICVs themselves, the Hub has provided improved office space and welfare facilities which is making life easier when they visit to conduct their assessments. I know our ICVs have enjoyed completing their responsibilities in this new cutting-edge environment.

There is a strong willingness among all our ICVs to build on the achievements over the past 12 months, and I have every confidence the scheme will continue to go from strength to strength in the future.

By working together, we will ensure Durham not only delivers the very best quality of care to detainees but is held aloft as a beacon of good practice nationally.

Thank you again to all who support and deliver this essential function, your contribution is greatly valued.

Joy Allen

Durham Police and Crime Commissioner



WELCOME FROM DURHAM CONSTABULARY

T/CHIEF INSPECTOR RORY BROOKER - HEAD OF CUSTODY

This year has been an exciting one for Durham Constabulary, especially within custody. In December 2024 we moved into the Investigative Hub, a state-of-the-art facility that has put Durham firmly at the forefront for custody suites nationally.

While this move came with various challenges, we are already seeing the benefits to the Constabulary, its staff and our detainees. The Hub has provided improved working conditions for our officers and a far safer environment for detainees. New processes and systems developed for the Hub have enhanced our service delivery and put further safeguarding measures in place to protect the welfare and legal rights of those who are brought here. Several of the cells have adaptions to support more vulnerable detainees, whether that vulnerability is through Neurodiversity or other physical or psychological needs.

There is 24/7 medical provision on site who are also able to provide support for staff and victims away from the custody site if needed. Liaison and Diversion workers from the Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust have their own space within the custody suite itself to provide support to vulnerable detainees both while in custody and after their release. Drug Test on Arrest is also in place to identify when drug use may have been a factor in offending and provide alternate pathways to offenders.

Alongside this, custody has recently adopted a new process for children who are detained whereby enhanced actions are required to provide them with support through the custody process and ensure there is enhanced scrutiny on their detention. This includes booking them in as a priority and securing support from an Appropriate Adult quickly, preferably having had one brought with them. While in custody all children are seen by a healthcare professional and either seen by or referred on to the Youth Justice Service. They have access to distraction devices, books and magazines as well as more accessible literature to explain the custody process that is specifically aimed at children. The Duty PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) Inspector ensures that the investigation is completed as quickly and effectively as possible and will record details of their detention for review.

As well as the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's own internal scrutiny processes, we welcome external scrutiny of custody and its processes. Independent Custody Visitors have their own dedicated room within custody. In addition the OPCC Custody Detention Scrutiny Panel is also in place. As a command we welcome this scrutiny and feedback as we push to ensure that our procedures and practices are as up to date as the Hub itself, and to deliver a high-quality service to the people of County Durham and Darlington.



INTRODUCTION

The Independent Custody Visitor (ICV) scheme exists to provide assurance to local communities so that they can have confidence in the way the police treat people who are held in their custody.

Section 51 of the Police Reform Act 2002 requires Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales to make arrangements for detainees to be visited by ICVs. Such arrangements may make provision for access to detainees by ICVs, examination of records, inspection of detention facilities and provision of a Code of Practice.

The Police and Crime Commissioner is responsible for an effective and efficient police service and must ensure that robust and effective procedures for establishing and maintaining the ICV scheme are in place. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) recruits volunteer ICVs through open advert to undertake the role and provides them with support and on-going training to ensure

that they can carry out their role effectively. The scheme plays an important part in maintaining police accountability to the local community and the aim of this annual report is to ensure that we operate transparently, and this information is available in the public domain.

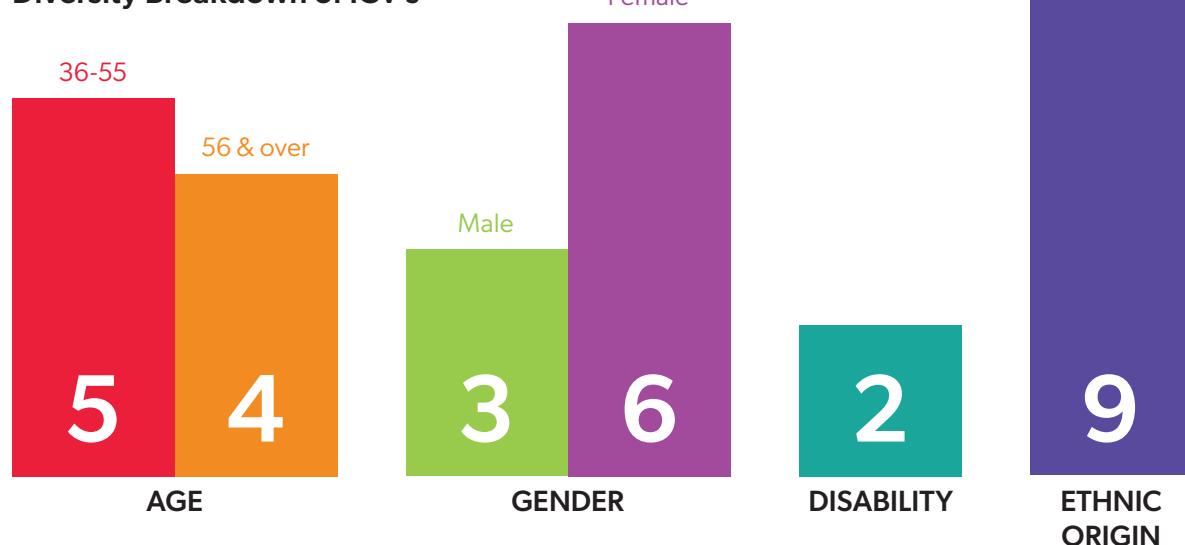
ICVs are vetted volunteers who visit our custody suite in pairs and speak to detainees who are being held in police custody. Visits are random, unannounced and can take place at any time of the day and night. They also request to see information collated about the detainee and ensure that the right processes have been followed.

A report of their findings is made prior to leaving the suite. Their work provides the Police and Crime Commissioner (and in turn the local community) with assurance that anyone held in custody is treated fairly and has access to appropriate facilities. This includes having insight into culture, diversity and equality.

OUR SCHEME

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Durham has one panel who make visits to our Investigative Hub based in Spennymoor, County Durham. There are 48 cells, each with a bed, toilet and handwash basin. As of 31 March 2025, there were 9 ICVs on the scheme. The panel is assisted by a Scheme Manager from the OPCC and a Scheme Co-ordinator (who is a custody visitor).

Diversity Breakdown of ICV's



Within their six-monthly ICV Panel meetings, ICVs are provided with data on their recent visits. They are asked to consider this data when arranging visits to ensure visits are conducted at varied days and times throughout the week. The panel meetings are also attended by a Custody Inspector who will provide ICVs with any information they may need to be aware of.



ICV VISITS

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st November 2024. 15 visits face to face visits took place across 3 custody suites.

Darlington

4

Durham

6

Peterlee

5

Of those visits...

120



detainees
were in custody

52



detainees
visited

34



refused to
be visited

18



were unable
to be seen*

*Reasons were that the detainee included being intoxicated, asleep, in a police interview

In December 2024, the transition to the new Investigative Hub began and the decision was taken to suspend custody visits during December 2024-January 2025 to allow for the safe transition of custody operation to the new purpose built facility. The pause ensured that custody staff could focus fully on the logistical and operational demands of the move, maintaining high standards of detainee care and security throughout the process.

There have been 9 face to face visits to the Investigative Hub since January 2025 to present .

Of those visits...

112



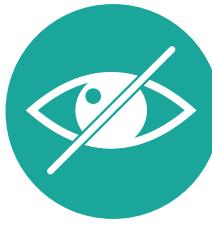
detainees
were in custody

25



detainees were
offered a visit

18



were unable
to be seen

During these visits the following were checked and raised if necessary:

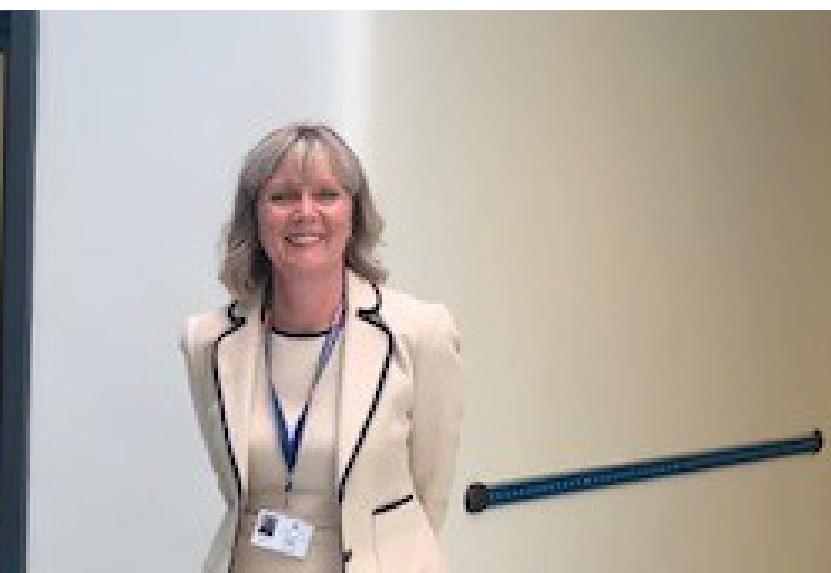
- That cells and toilets have been maintained and in working order.
- CCTV is present and working.
- Reasonable temperatures being maintained within the cells.
- Ensuring electronic signature pads were working.
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided.
- Any detainee visible injuries 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.
- The detainee is satisfied with their treatment in custody.
- With the consent of the detainee, ICVs checked the custody log to ratify the detainee's account of their detention.

ICVs have provided consistently positive feedback regarding the new custody facility. Visitors have praised the modern, well designed layout, improved detainee welfare provisions, and enhanced working conditions for both staff and detainees. Visitors have also commented on the professionalism and cooperation of custody staff during visits, contributing to a continued culture of openness and transparency.

ICVs are expected to discuss any minor welfare or environmental issues with the Custody Sergeant or accompanying officer at the time

of the visit. Custody Staff have spoken to ICV's about ICT and ipads not working (resulting in ICV's not being able to view custody records). This was raised with Custody Sergeants at the time and rectified. This has improved following the move to the Investigative Hub.

Any issues which cannot be resolved during a visit, or which ICVs feel need to be dealt with at a higher level are reported to the Scheme Administrator within the OPCC. There have been no issues that needed escalation during this period.



TRAINING AND EVENTS THIS YEAR

Official opening of the Investigative Hub

We were delighted to host the official opening of the Investigative hub in Spennymoor on 18th March 2025. The Hub was officially opened by His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Dame Sue Snowdon and the PCC Joy Allen and Chief Constable Rachel Bacon welcomed local councillors, custody visitors, custody staff and representatives from our partner agencies.



Custody Visitors Appreciation Awards

This year our Independent Custody Visitors were honoured with certificates of appreciation, presented by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The awards recognise the significant commitment and valuable contribution our volunteers have made over many years. Their continued dedication and professionalism are central to the success of the scheme.



A few words from our ICV Scheme Co-ordinator- Anne Gladstone



Anne has been an ICV with our scheme since February 2009 and our Scheme Co-ordinator for the last 6 years.

"My role has involved visiting three custody suites in Durham, Peterlee and Darlington and since January 2025 we have been making our visits at the new single site Investigative Hub in Spennymoor to check on how detainees are being treated. I go out on visits with another volunteer and together we

ensure processes are in place to support the welfare of the detainees. I feel that the most important part of my job is guaranteeing the dignity of those in custody, so I'll ask them if they're warm enough, have had enough to eat and if someone knows they're there. We're also responsible for ensuring detainees have proper access to legal advice and if they have been read their rights, with the proper forms completed.

As an Independent Custody Visitor, this year has been particularly notable with the opening of the new custody suite. Since visits have resumed, I've been impressed by the modern facilities and the clear emphasis on detainee welfare. The new suite is spacious, well-lit, and thoughtfully designed to ensure safety and dignity for everyone held there. The custody staff have continued to be welcoming and cooperative which really helps us to carry out our role effectively. It has been really encouraging to see such strong commitment to high standards of care in the new environment.

Custody Visitors are looking forward to continuing their vital role in the new custody suite and building on the positive foundations already in place."

PRIORITIES FOR THE SCHEME 2025/26

Recruitment

We have already begun the process of recruiting new Custody Visitors into the scheme with training planned in for October/November 2025.

In the following year, we will be:

- Continuing to advertise for volunteers through social media platforms, contact universities, colleges and continue to use CVS
- Continue to contact local groups to increase diversity within the scheme
- Work with OPCC partners to raise awareness of the scheme

ICVA Quality Assessment Framework

The Independent Custody Visiting Association is a Home Office, Policing Authority and Police and Crime Commissioner funded membership organisation set up to lead, support and represent PCC and Policing Authority led schemes.

The Quality Assurance Framework (or QAF for short) was first run by ICVA with schemes in 2019 and is a framework for the locally run schemes to help them to:

- Reflect on how they comply with the Code of Practice, the legislation that underpins custody visiting.
- Celebrate areas of strength.
- Promote custody visiting and the achievements they have made.
- Drive up performance of schemes.
- Increase sharing of good practice and resources across schemes.

There are four levels which schemes can attain:

- **Code Compliant**

Schemes meet the statutory requirements of the Code of Practice.

- **Silver**

Schemes have a good standard of custody visiting.

- **Gold**

Schemes have an excellent standard of custody visiting.

- **Platinum**

Schemes have an outstanding standard of custody visiting.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we are actively working towards the completion of the ICVA QAF for 2025/26. Our aim is to achieve a higher standard this year and staff are working with Custody Visitors and Custody staff to assist with this. The standard achieved will be presented in the Annual Report for 2025/26.



We will also...

- work with the ICVA and other ICV schemes to ensure that national themes are addressed.
- work with Durham Constabulary Police to continue to address concerns and record notable practice highlighted from ICV visits.
- raise awareness of and promotion of the work of the scheme.
- recruit and train new ICVs with continued focus on optimising diversity of the scheme.
- retention of ICVs through effective management, investment and support to their role.

If you would like to find out more information about becoming an Independent Custody Visitor in Durham, or for general information regarding the scheme, please use the contact details below.

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**TO MAKE OUR COMMUNITIES SAFER, STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT TO
DRUG AND ALCOHOL RELATED CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**