

DORSET
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER
DAVID SIDWICK

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme



Annual Report 2024-2025

Foreword

Since the introduction of an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Dorset, our volunteers have visited thousands of detainees to check on their welfare and the conditions in which they are being held whilst being detained within police custody.

This report details the invaluable work that the Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) have carried out across Dorset from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 and includes an overview of the year's visits, as well as more information about the Scheme in general.

Independent custody visiting is a vital safeguard within our policing system. It provides transparency, reassurance, and accountability—both to the public and to those who find themselves in custody. Our visitors offer an impartial perspective and provide valuable insight into custody conditions, the treatment of detainees, and the daily realities faced by custody staff.

Over the past year, the Scheme has continued to demonstrate resilience, professionalism, and integrity. ICVs have carried out their duties with diligence and independence, offering constructive feedback and helping to drive continuous improvement across custody suites. Their observations, alongside the cooperative engagement of police custody teams, contribute to a safer and more humane environment for all.

I would again like to take this opportunity to thank the custody officers and detention staff for their continued professionalism and dedication. Their role is not without challenges, but their treatment of detainees remains exemplary.

My special thanks go to all ICVs, past and present, who carry out this important role with passion and professionalism. Their diligence and commitment to the Scheme allow it to continue to function at such a high level, as it has throughout my time as PCC.

David Sidwick
Police and Crime Commissioner



Overview

Located on the south coast of England, Dorset is known for its outstanding natural beauty. It is home to a large stretch of the Jurassic Coast, England's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. With a population of over 770,000 residents, Dorset includes busy towns, seaside resorts, and extensive rural areas, creating varied and complex policing demands.

Dorset Police has two operational custody suites, located in Bournemouth and Weymouth. There is a third suite available as a contingency in Poole. Together, these facilities provide essential custody provision to support policing across Dorset's mix of urban, coastal and rural communities.

The ICV Scheme ensures regular oversight of these custody environments, with trained volunteers making unannounced visits to check on detainee welfare and custody conditions.

These visits allow ICVs to provide valuable feedback to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), helping to:

- Identify good practice
- Highlight areas for improvement
- Promote a preventive approach to safeguarding

Through their work, Dorset's ICVs help maintain transparency, build public confidence, and ensure that everyone held in custody is treated with dignity and respect.



Background

What is Independent Custody Visiting?

Independent Custody Visiting is a national initiative, supported by the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA), whereby trained members of the public make random and unannounced visits to custody suites to check on the welfare of detainees and the conditions in which they are being held.

ICVs ensure that detainees have received their legal rights and entitlements and, with permission from the detainee, review the notes kept on their treatment during detention.

ICVs are independent of both the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the police and have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system. PCCs have responsibility for running and maintaining Independent Custody Visiting Schemes in their force area.

Each week, a pair of ICVs visits each of the 24-hour suites. On completion of each visit, they compile a report outlining any comments or concerns they may have. This report is sent to both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Dorset Police.

Serious complaints are investigated by Dorset Police's Professional Standards Department, while other matters that can be resolved at the time of the visit are recorded in the report. Findings are discussed at quarterly meetings attended by all ICVs, OPCC management, Dorset Police's Head of Criminal Justice, and the Custody Development Officer.

Why is Independent Custody Visiting important?

Independent Custody Visiting provides protection to detainees and the police, and reassurance to the wider community.

Volunteers across the UK independently check on the welfare of detainees who may be feeling vulnerable or confused, providing independent scrutiny of their treatment and the conditions in which they are being held.

This process allows the police to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and provides public reassurance that policing in Dorset is fair and in accordance with statutory legislation and guidance.

#makingadifference

ICVs regularly check that any religious tracts held in custody are stored appropriately and with care. This helps ensure detainees can be confident that religious tracts they are provided with are handled respectfully, maintained in good condition and available to support their religious needs .

Dorset Custody

Dorset Police operate two 24-hour suites, one in Bournemouth and one in Weymouth. A third custody suite in Poole remains available but is generally non-operational. Poole is opened when, due to operational need or other issues such as building or maintenance work, one of the two main suites is closed.

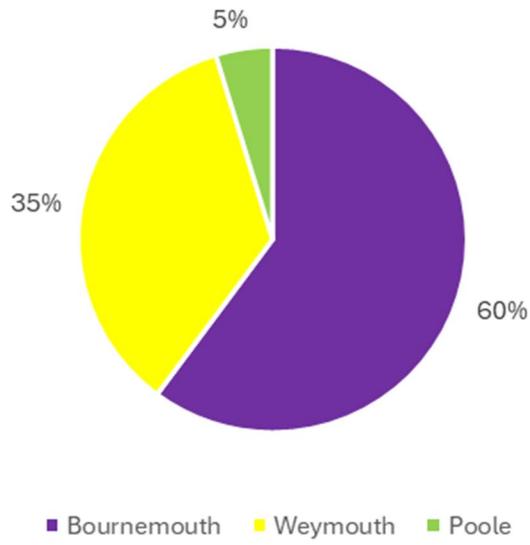
Poole may also be opened and operated as a third suite during periods of high demand. The Scheme Manager is informed of any movement away from the usual custody suites, and this information is shared with visitors. When Poole is open, ICVs are scheduled to carry out visits there.



Detainees

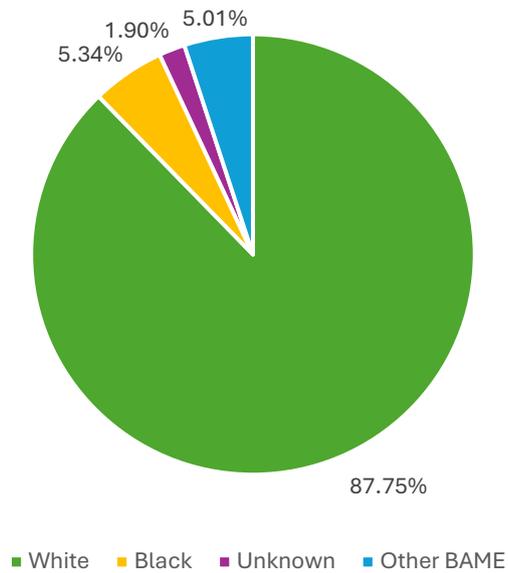
Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, just under 9,000 people were detained across the three custody suites in Dorset. Bournemouth is the busiest of the three suites, with 60% of detainees being held here. A breakdown by area can be seen in the following diagram.

Custody Detainee Throughput



In terms of ethnicity, 87.75% of those detained within Dorset identified as white, 4.34% identified as black, 5.01% from other minority backgrounds, and 1.9% were not categorised.

Ethnicity of Detainees



Visiting Information

On average, each operational suite within Dorset is visited once a week. ICVs make unannounced visits in pairs and must be admitted to the custody facility immediately upon arrival.

During visits, detainees are given the opportunity to discuss their treatment whilst in custody. ICVs check that detainees have been informed of their legal rights and that they understand them.

ICVs also check that:

- Cells and toilets are clean and well maintained.
- Temperatures within cells and suites are reasonable.
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided.
- Any visible injuries have been explained.
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing have been provided.
- Food preparation areas and bedding are clean and hygienic.
- Detainees are satisfied with their treatment.
- Detainees held overnight are given a reasonable period of rest.
- With detainee consent, custody logs are checked to confirm their account of detention.

Matters requiring immediate attention are raised with the Custody Sergeant at the time of the visit. An electronic report is completed for each visit, with copies emailed to the ICVs who carried out the visit, the Custody Sergeant in charge at the time of the visit, the Custody Manager for Dorset Police and the OPCC.

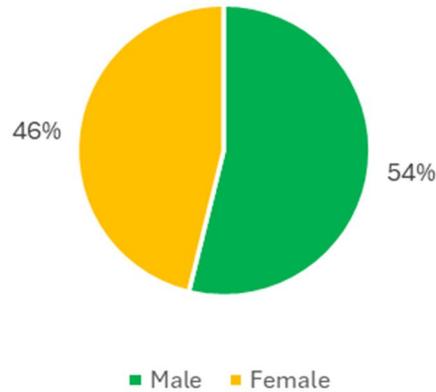
The OPCC provide ICVs with two training days per year, alongside additional training at Panel meetings. In 2024–25, training included a guest speaker from the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and a refresher on mental health in custody. This provided ICVs with a deeper understanding of the broader purpose of the ICV Scheme and its role within a preventive approach to safeguarding detainees' welfare. The NEF session explored how early intervention, and systemic thinking can help reduce harm, while the mental health refresher reinforced how ICVs can recognise signs of distress, challenge unsafe practices, and promote wellbeing in custody environments. These sessions encouraged ICVs to consider the real-world impact of their visits and how such observations contribute to preventing harm and improving standards across the custody estate.

#makingadifference

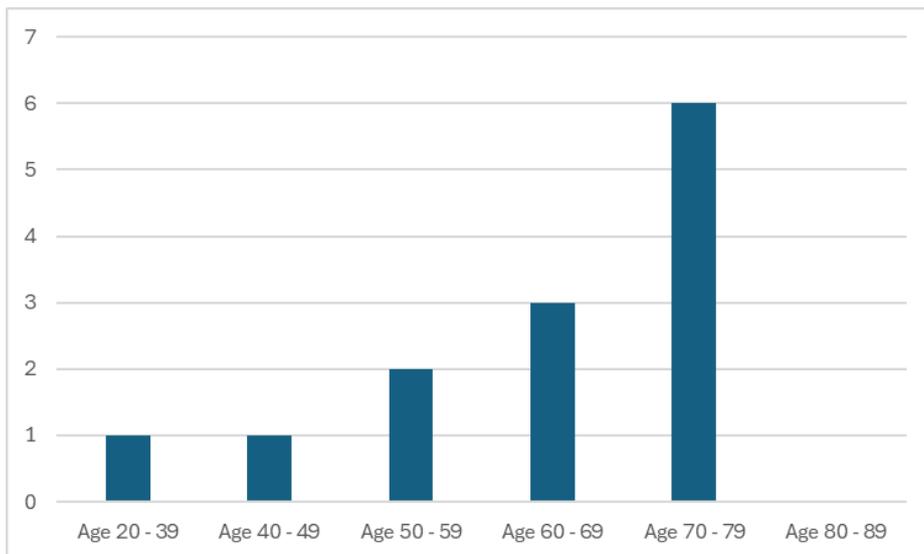
ICVs regularly check that females held in custody have a named female officer. This helps ensure detainees are treated with dignity and respect.

Volunteer Information

At the close of the financial year, there were a total of 13 ICVs in Dorset, comprising 7 male and 6 female volunteers.



The average age of ICVs in Dorset is 64. A detailed breakdown of the age demographics of Dorset ICVs is outlined in the bar chart below.



The average length of service, rounded to the nearest year, is four years, and the longest-serving ICV has served eight years.

Visit Statistics

During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, a total of 104 visits were made to custody suites across Dorset.

Over the 104 visits made, a total of 345 detainees were offered a visit, and 303 of those detainees accepted and were spoken to by visitors. Detainees have the right

to privacy and may refuse to speak with visitors. Detainees may also be asleep, being interviewed, or processed when ICVs are in the suite.

Timeliness of Access

The credibility of the Scheme can be compromised if ICVs experience delays gaining entry to custody suites. The majority of visits saw access provided within five minutes.

	Number of visits	%
Within 5 mins	98	94%
Within 5 - 10 mins	4	4%
Within 10 - 15 mins	1	1%
Over 15 mins	1	1%

The days of the week and times of the visits undertaken are shown below. In Dorset, we continue to maintain a spread across the various days and times. Fewer visits are conducted between the hours of 9pm-6am as during these hours interaction with detainees tends to be limited as many are asleep. However, visits during this time do provide the opportunity to conduct a thorough review of the conditions of the suite.

Days of the week	Number of visits
Monday	23
Tuesday	21
Wednesday	14
Thursday	12
Friday	14
Saturday	9
Sunday	11

Times of the day	Number of visits
00:01 - 06:00	2
06:01 - 09:00	7
09:01 - 12:00	26
12:01 - 15:00	27
15:01 - 18:00	15
18:01 - 21:00	18
21:00 - 00:00	9

Key Issues

Key issues highlighted in 2024-2025 and the actions taken on them were as follows.

Late Detention Reviews – The requirement to continue with the detention of individuals in custody must be reviewed by an Inspector or above at regular intervals. ICVs have reported that such reviews have been repeatedly late, sometimes with a rationale for the delay included within the custody log, but sometimes without explanation. For this reason, we now specifically monitor the number of late reviews and report and discuss the findings on a quarterly basis. There have been improvements reaching a peak in

Quarter 2 at 14 and reducing to 9 in Quarter 4 of 20245-25. ICVs are continuing to monitor.

Late Observations – There is a requirement for detainees to be observed at regular intervals during their detention, the frequency and amendment of which is decided by the custody sergeant. ICVs have noted that these observations have not been recorded on the detainee’s custody log or have been late. Again, the decision has been made to record and discuss these findings as a recurring issue on a quarterly basis. It should be noted that although the observations have been late generally it is less than 10 minutes.

The OPCC continues to work with Dorset Police to improve both these issues.

Further Information

Expressions of interest from members of the public to become Independent Custody ICVs are always welcome and the OPCC is keen to recruit volunteers from a wide spectrum of society to reflect the diverse communities in Dorset.

Volunteers must be 18 years of age, independent of the police and willing to carry out the role objectively and impartially. Enquiries from members of the public interested in the Scheme should be directed to opcc-governance@dorset.pnn.police.uk

Useful Links

Dorset OPCC

<https://www.dorset.pcc.police.uk/>

Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)

www.icva.org.uk

Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation

<https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/>

National Preventative Mechanism

<https://www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk/>

Dorset OPCC-Social Media Links

[Facebook](#)

[X](#)

[You Tube](#)

[Linked In](#)

ICVA – Social Media Links

[X](#)

[You Tube](#)