

DORSET
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER
DAVID SIDWICK

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme



Annual Report 2025-2026

Foreword

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Dorset, has dedicated volunteers who have played a key role in supporting transparency and accountability within police custody. Over the years, these volunteers called 'Independent Custody Visitors' (ICVs) have engaged with thousands of detainees, checking on their welfare and ensuring that the conditions in which they are being held are appropriate and meet expected standards.

This report highlights the important work undertaken by ICVs across Dorset between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. It provides an overview of the visits carried out throughout the year, key themes identified, and further information about the operation and impact of the Scheme.

Independent Custody Visiting continues to provide an essential safeguard within the policing system. By offering an independent and impartial perspective, the Scheme helps promote openness, strengthens public confidence, and ensures accountability within custody settings. Through their observations and engagement, ICVs provide valuable insight into the experiences of detainees, the conditions within custody suites, and the challenges faced by staff working in these environments.

Throughout the past year, the Scheme has continued to demonstrate its value through the commitment and professionalism of its volunteers. ICVs have undertaken their role with integrity and diligence, providing constructive observations and helping to support ongoing improvements within custody facilities. Their role, alongside the positive engagement and cooperation of police custody teams, contributes to maintaining safe, respectful, and supportive environments for detainees.

I would also like to recognise and thank custody officers and detention staff for their continued dedication and professionalism. Their role can be demanding, and their ongoing commitment to the welfare and treatment of detainees is appreciated.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all ICVs, both current and former, for the time, commitment, and professionalism they bring to the Scheme. Their contribution is invaluable and remains central to the continued success and effectiveness of Independent Custody Visiting in Dorset.

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 a legal responsibility to administrate Independent Custody Visiting Schemes in their force area.

Each week, a pair of ICVs will visit 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 shared with both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Dorset Police.

Matters that can be resolved at the time of the visit are recorded in the report and any issue that requires further discussion will be raised at the quarterly ICV Panel meeting. These quarterly meetings are attended by all ICVs, senior management of the OPCC, as well as the Head of Criminal Justice for Dorset Police 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 detention in Dorset is fair and in accordance with statutory legislation and guidance.

#makingadifference

ICVs regularly check that appropriate adults are called for children and vulnerable adults when needed. This helps safeguard detainees who may require additional support.

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 for much of the time is non-operational. Poole Custody will be opened when there is an operational need or other issues such as maintenance work, or one of the two main suites is closed.

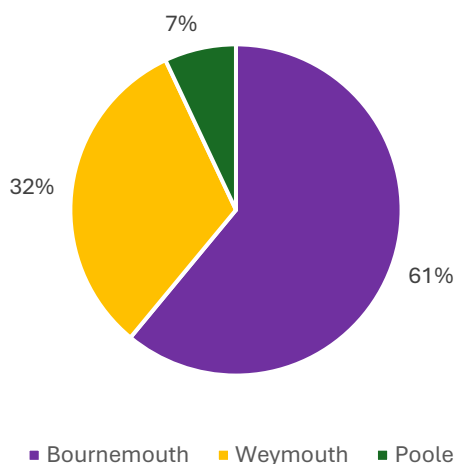
Poole may also be opened and operated as a third suite during periods of high demand. The Scheme Manager is informed of any movement away from the usual custody suites, and this information is shared with ICVs. When Poole is open, ICVs are scheduled to carry out visits there.



Detainees

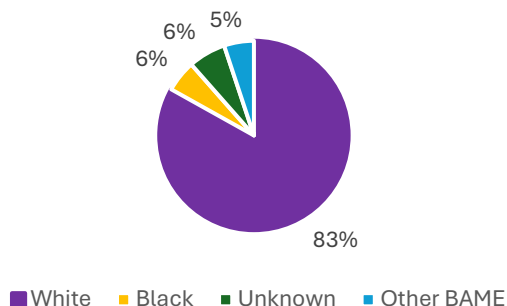
Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, just under 9,000 people were detained across the three custody suites in Dorset. Bournemouth is the busiest of the three suites, with 61% of detainees being held here. A breakdown by area can be seen in the following diagram.

Custody Detainee Throughput

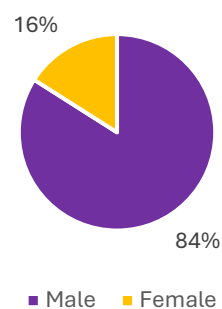


In 2025-26, 84% of all detainees held within police custody were male, 16% female. In terms of ethnicity, 83.1% of those detained within Dorset identified as white, 5.4% identified as black, 5.1% from other minority backgrounds, and 6.4% were not categorised.

Ethnicity of Detainees



Arrests by sex



Highlights

The custody team within Dorset manage detainees with complex needs daily, making risk-based decisions throughout each detention.

On one particular occasion ICVs observed positive care and consideration being given to a detainee with diabetes. Custody staff had allowed the detainee's mobile phone to remain just outside the cell so that blood sugar levels could be monitored consistently and accurately via an app. Staff also ensured the detainee was offered regular snacks to support effective management of their condition while in custody.

Improvements

Following concerns raised by ICVs regarding broken and unsafe drawers used to store religious tracts, new storage boxes have now been ordered for custody suites. This improvement will help ensure religious materials are stored safely and remain accessible to detainees.

Dorset ICVs

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 any additional training at Panel meetings. In 2025–26, training included guest speakers from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community and the transgender community, as well as induction training for new ICVs. This provided both new and existing ICVs with a broader understanding of lived experience and the importance of inclusivity within custody settings.

The session with the GRT community representative highlighted the specific barriers and experiences faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals when interacting with public services, including custody environments. The transgender lived experience session provided insight into the challenges faced by trans individuals in custody, particularly around dignity, respect, and the importance of appropriate, person-centred care. These sessions helped ICVs reflect on how custody practices can impact different communities and the importance of recognising and addressing potential inequalities.

In addition, induction training for new ICVs covered the role and responsibilities of the scheme, visiting expectations, reporting processes, and safeguarding considerations. This ensured that new ICVs were well prepared to undertake their duties confidentially and consistently.

During the year, ICVA also launched its new e-learning platform. All Dorset ICVs can access and complete training modules in their own time, providing greater flexibility and supporting ongoing learning and development alongside the existing training programme.

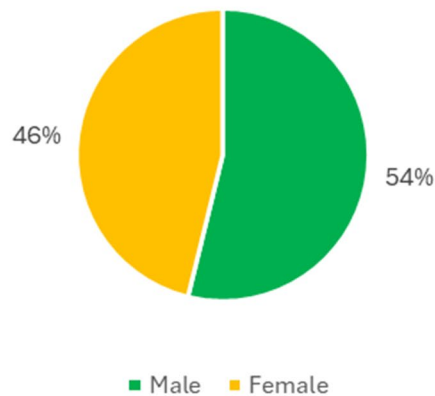
As part of Volunteers' Week, ICVA hosted a special event to recognise and celebrate the valuable contribution of our ICVs. The event featured guest speaker Nick Barnet, Regional Manager for Op NOVA, a charity that supports veterans involved in the criminal justice system, who shared insights into the challenges faced by veterans and the support available to them. Attendees were also given an exclusive first look at the new ICV E-learning site, which is being developed to enhance training and support for volunteers.

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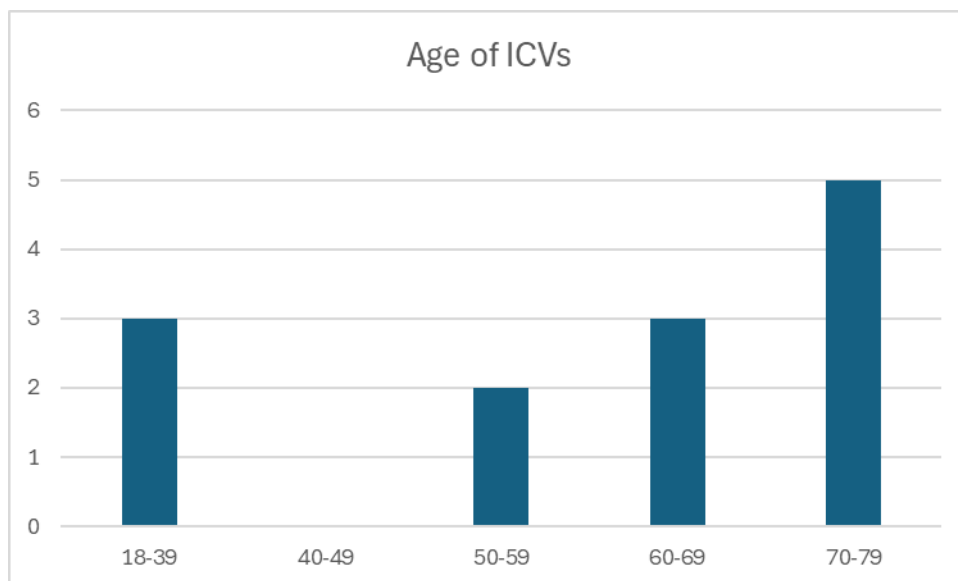
ICVs monitor whether detainees have access to healthcare when required. This helps support the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people in custody.

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.



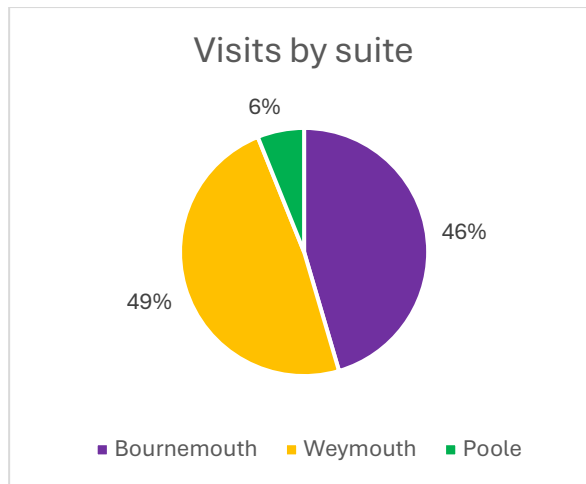
The average age of ICVs in Dorset is 57. A detailed breakdown of the age demographics of Dorset ICVs is outlined in the bar chart below.



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

Visit Statistics

During the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, a total of 99 visits were made to custody suites across Dorset. A breakdown of this can be seen in the following chart.



Over the 99 visits made, a total of 270 detainees were offered a visit, and 233 of those detainees accepted and were spoken to by ICVs. Detainees have the right to privacy and may refuse to speak with ICVs. Detainees may also be asleep, being interviewed, or being 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. Most visits saw access provided within five minutes.

	Number of visits	%
Within 5 mins	93	94%
Within 5 - 10 mins	3	3%
Within 10 - 15 mins	0	0%
Over 15 mins	3	3%

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	18
Tuesday	15
Wednesday	10
Thursday	18
Friday	20
Saturday	9
Sunday	9

Times of the day	Number of visits
00:01 - 06:00	3
06:01 - 09:00	7
09:01 - 12:00	25
12:01 - 15:00	19
15:01 - 18:00	21
18:01 - 21:00	15
21:00 - 00:00	9

The table below sets out the total number of hours spent by ICVs visiting custody suites during the last year. This provides an overview of the time committed by ICVs in carrying out their monitoring and welfare responsibilities across the reporting period.

	Length of Time ICVs spent in Custody
Quarter 1 April 25 – June 25	50 hours 39 mins
Quarter 2 July 25 – Sept 25	47 hours 39 mins
Quarter 3 Oct 25 – Dec 25	43 hours 49 mins
Quarter 4 Jan 26 – March 26	43 hours 44 mins

In addition to their visiting duties, ICVs also attended quarterly panel meetings throughout the year. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss findings, share good practice, and contribute to the ongoing development of the scheme. Collectively, panel meetings accounted for a further 8 hours of volunteer time during the reporting period.

Key Issues

Key issues highlighted in 2025-2026 and the actions taken on them were as follows.

Several reports were received from ICVs highlighting delays in the attendance of Appropriate Adults. This issue was raised with the Appropriate Adult Service, who have since recruited additional Appropriate Adults to help improve response times and reduce delays.

Late Detention Reviews – The requirement to continue the detention of individuals in custody must be reviewed by an Inspector or above at regular intervals. ICVs have continued to monitor late detention reviews throughout the year. In Quarter 1 there were 14 late reviews recorded, reducing to 4 in Quarter 2, with 5 recorded in Quarter 3 and 6 in Quarter 4. This demonstrates an overall improvement compared with previous years, although late reviews continue to occur. ICVs will continue to monitor and report on this issue.

Late Observations – Detainees are required to be observed at regular intervals during their detention, with the frequency determined by the custody sergeant based on individual risk assessments. ICVs have continued to identify occasions where observations were either recorded late or not recorded on the custody log at the required time. In most cases, delays were short and generally less than 10 minutes; however, this remains an area of concern. The issue continues to be monitored and discussed on a regular basis, and ICVs will continue to monitor and report on late observations throughout the coming year.

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

However, it must be said that nearly every report shared positive feedback including acknowledgements directly from detainees of the excellent care they received, and the helpfulness of the staff escorting the ICVs around.

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](#)