



Independent Custody Visiting Annual Report 2019-2020



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 2019 – 31 March 2020 and includes an overview of the year's visits, as well as more information about the Scheme in general.

During my two terms as Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Dorset, our Scheme has developed and changed to support many issues. I have personally been involved in work to tackle the issues with detainee mental health in police custody and seen massive changes to the way that police tackle mental health in recent years. Detainees in crisis can now only be taken to police stations as a place of safety in the most extreme circumstances, with strong controls over their treatment and the time they are detained for. The Scheme has also worked to ensure that children are treated with dignity and respect. I know that our ICVs prioritise visits to children in custody, as well as other vulnerable persons, providing reassurance and ensuring that the appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.

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. At the end of March 2020, the UK went in to lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak. I am so proud that the Dorset Scheme continued to undertake face to face visits during this period, one of six within the UK to do so. It is yet another example of their diligence and commitment to the Scheme allowing it to continue to function at such a high level, as it has throughout my time as PCC. Due to the postponement of the PCC elections, I will continue as PCC until May 2021 and I look forward to seeing the positive results and achievements during that time.



Martyn Underhill

Police and Crime Commissioner

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 they are being held in. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) will ensure the detainees have received their legal rights and entitlements and, with permission from the detainee, will review the notes kept on their treatment during detention. ICVs are independent of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the police, and will 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 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 sent to both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Dorset Police. Serious complaints are investigated by the Professional Standards Department of Dorset Police; other matters which can be resolved at the time of the visit are recorded on the report. The findings of these reports are discussed at quarterly meetings attended by all ICVs, the PCC, the OPCC's Scheme Manager, the Assistant Chief Constable, Dorset Police's Head of Criminal Justice and the Custody Liaison Officer.



Why is Independent Custody Visiting important?

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

Independent Custody Visiting allows the police to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and provides public reassurance that policing in their area is fair and in accordance with statutory legislation and guidance.

#makingadifference

During an ICV visit, visitors observed a detainee who appeared to be sleeping, but as ICVs check to ensure sleeping detainees are breathing or moving, they waited. It then became apparent that the detainee was in fact unconscious. They immediately alerted the custody staff, who gave emergency first aid and called an ambulance. There were no indications that the detainee had been unwell, but she was taken to hospital and made a full recovery. The ICVs were kept fully informed of the situation throughout the remainder of their visit.

Dorset Custody

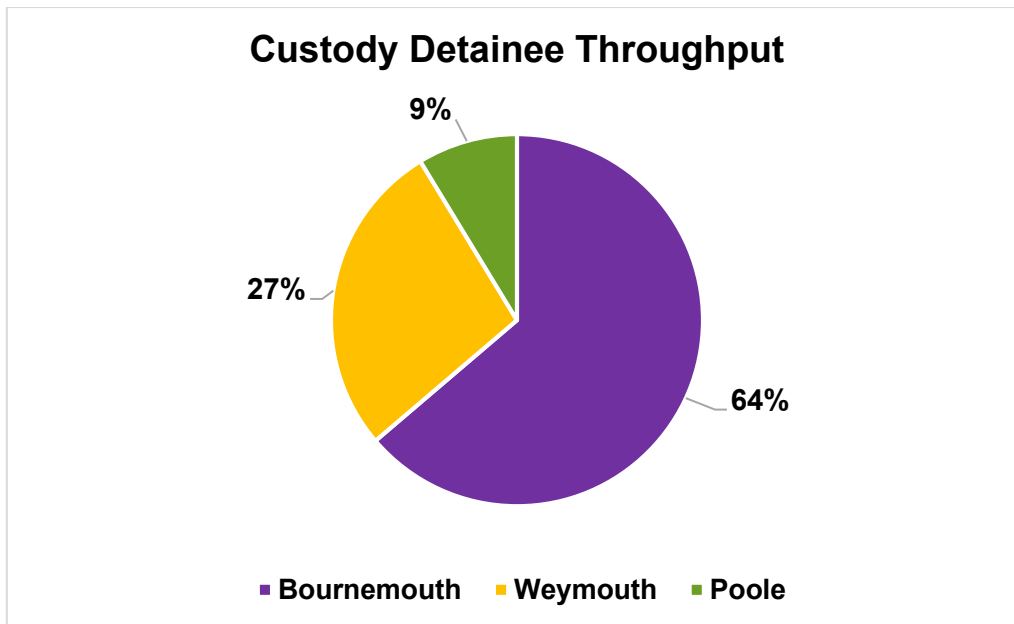
Estates

Dorset Police operates two 24-hour suites; one in Bournemouth and the other in Weymouth. A third custody suite is available in Poole. However, although this suite is always ready to be used, it is generally non-operational. Poole is usually opened when, due to operational need or other issues, such as building or maintenance work, one of the two suites is closed. Poole may also be opened and operated as a third suite during periods of high demand. The Scheme Manager is always informed of any movement away from the usual custody suites and this information is passed to visitors. When Poole is open, ICVs are scheduled to carry out visits there as well.

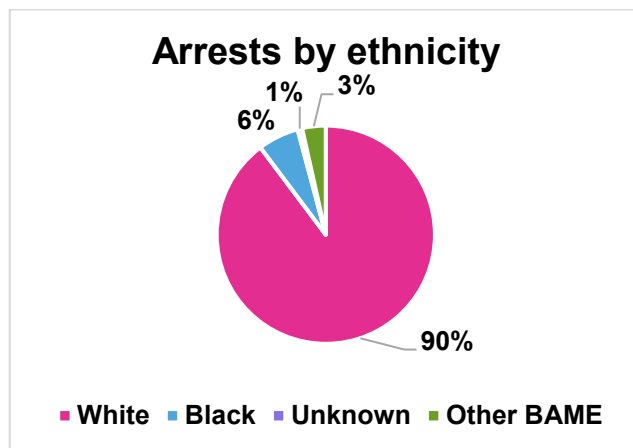
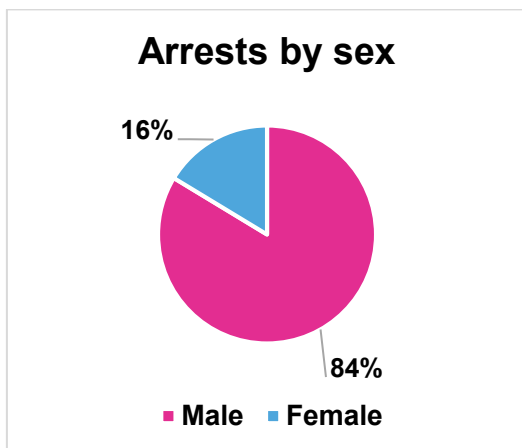


Detainees

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 just over 10,000 people were detained across the three custody suites in Dorset. Bournemouth is the busiest of the three suites, with 64% of detainees being held here. A breakdown by area can be seen in the following.



In 2019-20, 84% of all detainees held within police custody were male, 16% female. In terms of ethnicity, 90% of those detained within Dorset identified as white, 6% identified as black, 3% from other BAME backgrounds and 1% were categorised as unknown.



#makingadifference

ICVs had noted that the Appropriate Adult provision for children had been problematical for custody staff. This resulted in the ICV Panel Chair writing formally to the Commissioner sharing his concerns. The PCC raised this matter with Chief Officers and ICVs have since reported that there has been a noticeable improvement in AA provision for children.

Highlights

The custody team within Dorset manage complex detainees on a daily basis, making risk based decisions throughout each detention.

This year saw the added complication of COVID-19 arriving in the UK. Following Government advice about shielding, a number of ICVs had to step down from visits, but with the welcome support of the Force, custody visits continued as normal with visitors taking appropriate measures to protect themselves with the use of PPE and regular washing regimes. There were only six areas across the UK that continued a normal visiting regime and Dorset was one of them.

Overall, visitors have been complimentary about the care provided to detainees during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Dorset ICVs

Visiting Information

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

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

Visitors will also check that:

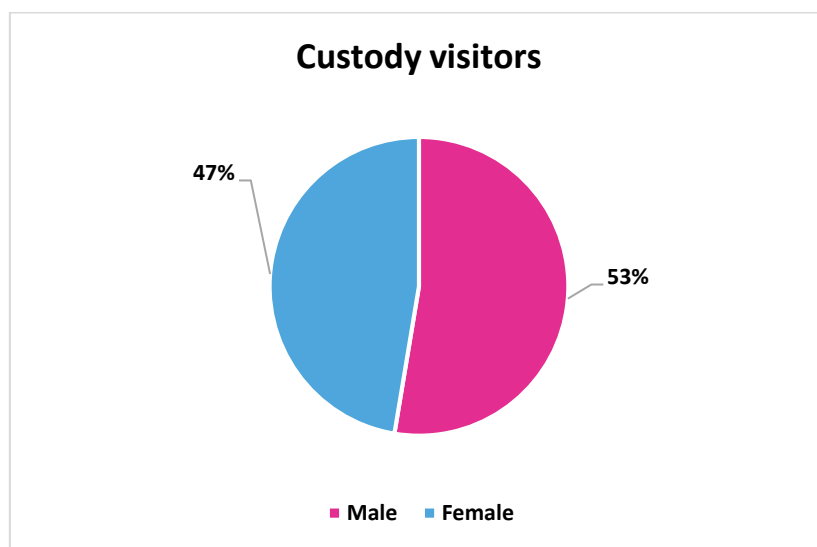
- Cells and toilets have been maintained
- Reasonable temperatures are maintained within the cells and suite
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided
- Any visible injuries have been explained
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing has been provided
- The custody facility, food preparation areas and bedding are in a clean, tidy and hygienic condition
- The detainee is satisfied with their treatment in custody
- A reasonable period of time to rest has been given if detained overnight
- With the consent of the detainee, visitors check the custody log to confirm the detainee's account of their detention.

Visitors raise matters that require immediate attention with the Custody Sergeant at the time of the visit and complete a report as a record of each visit. Copies of the report are provided to the Custody Manager for Dorset Police and the OPCC. Subsequent queries arising from the reports are discussed and feedback provided at the Panel meeting, or before if the situation requires.

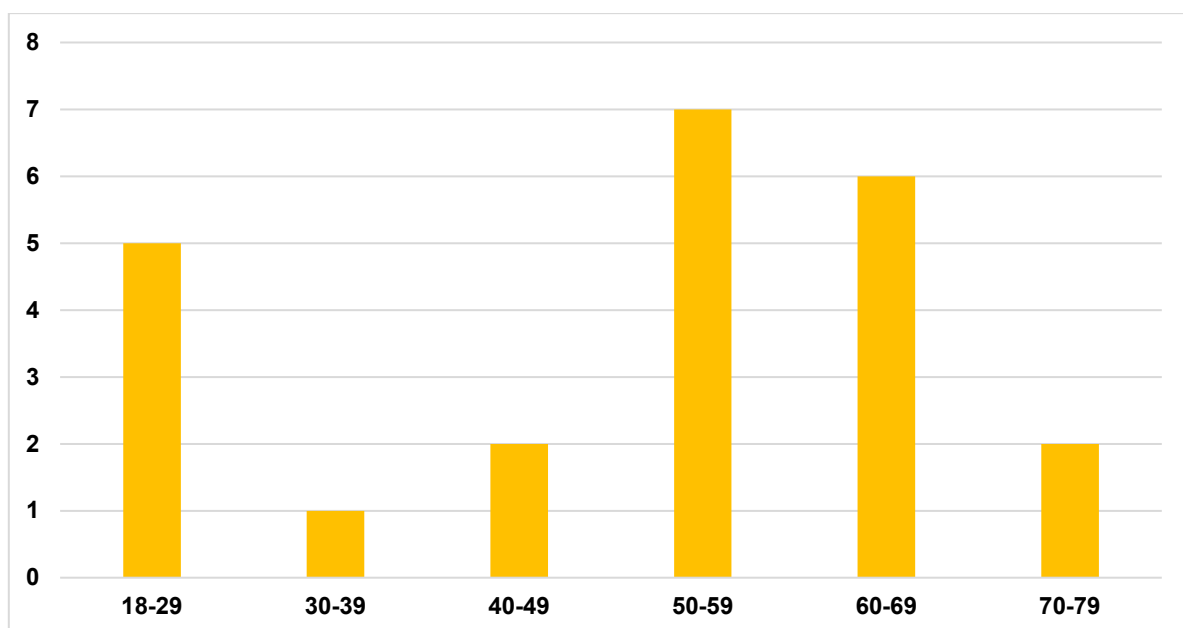
The OPCC usually provides visitors with two training days per year and also includes training as part of Panel meetings. In 2019-20, the training included a presentation on Autism by the National Police Autism Association Co-ordinator for Dorset Police. This provided the visitors with information on the specific challenges when looking after detainees with Autism, and some helpful communication tips they could use.

Volunteer Information

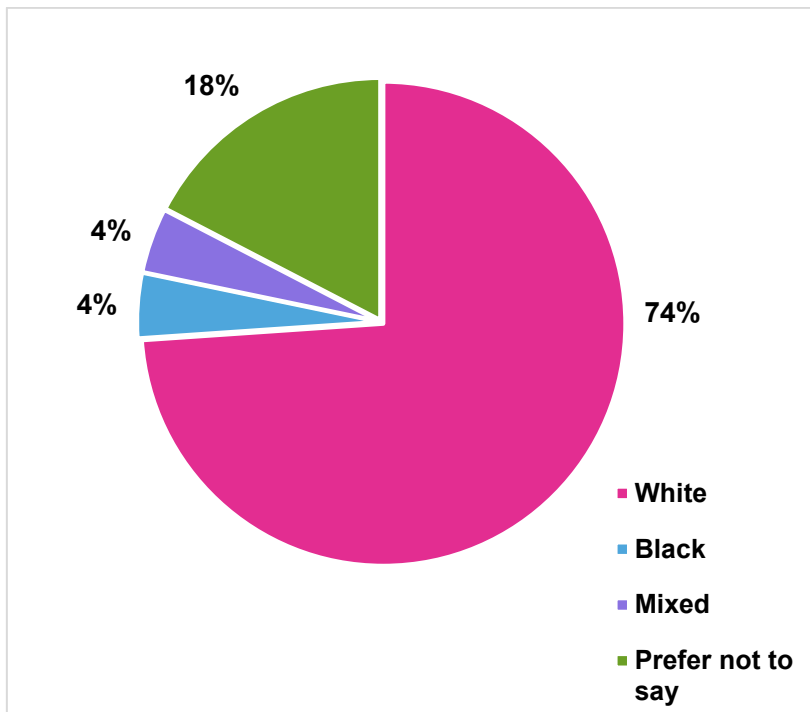
The OPCC had one recruitment campaign for new ICVs in this financial year. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has meant there has been a delay in providing the induction training required and the new visitors starting their visits. At the close of the financial year 2019-20, there were a total of 19 visitors in Dorset, comprising 10 male and 9 female volunteers.



The average age of visitors in Dorset is 49. A detailed breakdown of the age demographics of Dorset ICVs is outlined in the bar chart below.



As shown in the chart below, in Dorset 74% of visitors are white or white British, 4% are black or black British, 4% are from mixed race backgrounds and the remaining 17% chose not to provide this information.

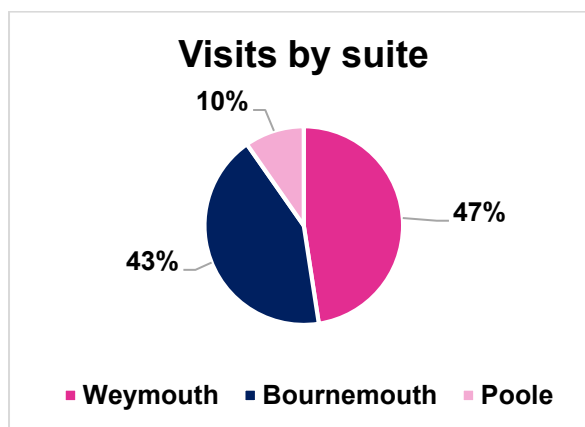


The average length of service, rounded to the nearest year, is two years and the longest serving visitor, who will step down from the team this year, has been with the Scheme for nine years.

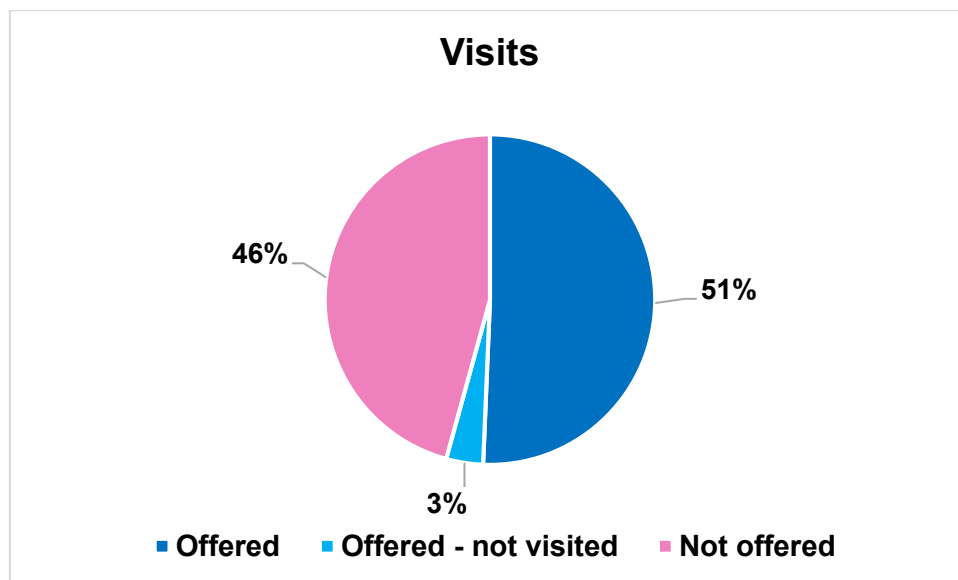
Visit Statistics

During the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, a total of 103 visits were made to custody suites across Dorset. A breakdown of this can be seen in the table below.

Visits by suites	
Weymouth	49
Bournemouth	44
Poole	10



Over the 103 visits made, a total of 421 detainees were offered a visit, and 391 of those detainees accepted and were spoken to by visitors. Detainees have a right to privacy and can refuse to speak with visitors. Detainees may also be asleep, being interviewed or processed when the visitors are in the suite. Over the last year, 51% of all those detained at the time of a visit were spoken to by visitors.



The credibility of the Scheme can be comprised if the visitors experience delays in gaining entry to the custody suites. The below table details the number of occasions delays have been experienced. A vast majority of visits saw access provided within five minutes, and only on three occasions had access been delayed.

	Number of visits	%
Within 5 mins	100	97%
Within 5 - 10 mins	3	3%
Within 10 - 15 mins	0	0%
Over 15 mins	0	0%

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 visitors may not be able to speak with many detainees as they will be 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	17
Tuesday	13
Wednesday	10
Thursday	21
Friday	17
Saturday	16
Sunday	9

Times of the day	Number of visits
00:01 - 06:00	7
06:01 - 09:00	7
09:01 - 12:00	27
12:01 - 15:00	21
15:01 - 18:00	14
18:01 - 21:00	17
21:00 - 00:00	10

Key Issues

Key issues highlighted in 2019-2020 and the actions taken on them were as follows.

Appropriate Adult Provision

Following on from concerns raised by visitors, the PCC asked Dorset Police to conduct a review into Appropriate Adult provision to determine where improvements could be made. This resulted in a new Appropriate Adult service for children and young people being introduced from 1 March 2020. It would primarily be for situations in custody where there are no family or friends that can act as an Appropriate Adult. The service would be available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year and would aim to attend custody suites within one hour.

TACT (Terrorism Act)

TACT detainees are those who have been arrested under the Terrorism Act (2000) and can be held in detention for up to 14 days pre charge. Under the revised Codes of Practice for custody visiting, specially trained ICVs can visit TACT detainees. TACT detainees should be visited within the first 24 hours of their detention and continue to be visited daily until they are either charged or released.

The Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation (IRTL) has a responsibility to Parliament on the operation of counter-terrorism law in the UK and all ICV reports relating to TACT detainees go through the IRTL.

TACT visitors must be 18 or over, live or work within the police area, have been resident in the UK for a minimum of three years and have completed a minimum of 18 months as an ICV. TACT visitors are also subject to a higher level of vetting.

In 2019-20 there were no TACT detainees held within custody suites in Dorset. However, Dorset OPCC ensures that there is a cadre of TACT trained visitors should they be required.

Further Information

Expressions of interest from members of the public to become Independent Custody Visitors are always welcome and the Commissioner's Office 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 pcc@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](#)

[Twitter](#)

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ICVA – Social Media Links

[Twitter](#)

[You Tube](#)