

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



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INTRODUCTION BY TIM PASSMORE

This report provides an overview of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Suffolk and details what the custody visitors have delivered in this financial year.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) provide an important public service visiting the two Suffolk based Police Investigation Centres (PICs) to check on the welfare of detained persons and the conditions in which they are held. All ICVs are volunteers. They help me fulfil my responsibility to ensure policing in Suffolk is carried out fairly, in accordance with relevant legislation and Home Office guidance, and with respect for the human rights of those detained in custody.

There have been some innovative developments during the last year including significant improvements to the cells where youngsters and vulnerable citizens are detained, and exciting use of new in-cell technology. Challenges remain however, especially when tackling the challenges faced by those with mental health difficulties and specific healthcare requirements. These can be alleviated by a positive approach to partnership working and I hope progress will be made during the next twelve months.

ICVs continue to give me reassurance that, in



Suffolk, the treatment of detained persons is fair and in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (referred to as PACE) and the Safer Detention Guidelines. We should all be justifiably proud of the very high standards of care that exist in our PICs and the collective assistance provided by the ICVs is second to none.

During the next year I hope to visit our volunteers and once again must say how very grateful I am as Suffolk's Police and Crime Commissioner for all that they do – it really does make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tim Passmore'.

Tim Passmore, PCC for Suffolk

COMMENT FROM RACHEL KEARTON

The Independent Custody Visitor scheme continues to deliver valuable insight and feedback into this critical area of business. The deprivation of liberty is not something taken lightly within Suffolk Constabulary and the ICVs provide entirely independent assurance to the public that those detained are well cared for, have access to all legal provisions and understand their rights throughout.

The constabulary prides itself on consistently high standards of performance within the custody environment and the contribution of the volunteer ICVs is a key aspect of our delivery in this area.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rachel Kearton'.

Rachel Kearton, Chief Constable



COMMENT FROM THE HEAD OF CUSTODY

As Head of Custody for Norfolk and Suffolk, I remain impressed by the way that detained persons across the six Police Investigation Centres have been cared for and managed.

In the last 12 months, I have overseen improvements in the provision of detainee care and management in Suffolk. I meet regularly with Suffolk's ICV scheme manager and reflect upon the information provided to develop excellent custody services.

New in-cell technology has been installed and I have worked with Sheffield University to produce some videos which will support detainees in custody. Norfolk and Suffolk remain at the forefront of innovation and are seen as an exemplar collaboration for managing detained persons with dignity, decency and respect.

Throughout my time as the Head of Custody I have had a constructive relationship with the PCC's office and the ICVs. The ICVs provide direct feedback relating to detainee management and care which is used to ensure that custody continues to develop and improve. I am impressed with the considered, pragmatic and friendly way in which the ICVs provide feedback. I am grateful for the time given to ensure that my team are able to provide the

best possible custody provision to all users.

Regular meetings with the scheme managers enable me to share information relating to custody development and gain a real insight into the experiences of detained persons.

The ICVs are a critical part of the Independent Scrutiny Panel which reviews the use of rip-proof clothing, strip search and a variety of other custody functions. This year has seen growth within this project with all overnight remands of children being subject to scrutiny, and custody records relating to female detainees also being reviewed.

This scrutiny panel remains one of very few such groups nationally and has been identified as best practice. The fantastic work in Suffolk and Norfolk has meant that constabularies nationwide have been advised to follow our example. As a command we are currently advising a number of other constabularies on setting up a scrutiny panel.

Suffolk is lucky to have such a committed team of ICVs, and it has been a pleasure to work with them.

**Chief Inspector Rob Wicks,
Head of Custody,
Norfolk and Suffolk constabularies**

ORGANISATION OF THE ICV SCHEME

In all, there are six PICs located across Norfolk and Suffolk and they operate under a joint custody function.

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Suffolk comprises two designated Panels to ensure that visits are undertaken at the Constabulary's Police Investigation Centres (PICs) at Bury St Edmunds and Martlesham. There are 30 cells at the Martlesham PIC and 24 at Bury St Edmunds.

ICVs are volunteers who work in pairs and make unannounced visits on a weekly basis to the two PICs located in Suffolk.

As at 31 March 2025, there were 19 ICVs participating in the scheme across the county, 11 on the Bury St Edmunds Panel and 8 on the Martlesham Panel.

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 one volunteer resigned from the Martlesham Panel and one volunteer was recruited. There was one additional appointment to the Martlesham Panel in May 2025 and one to the Bury St Edmunds Panel in June 2025.

The following table provides a summary of the custody visitors by gender, age and ethnicity:

Suffolk ICVs		Bury St Edmunds	Martlesham	Total
Gender	Male	4	7	11
	Female	7	1	8
Age	50-59	2	1	3
	60-69	3	3	6
	70+	6	4	10
Ethnicity	White British			18
	Asian - Indian			1

DETAILS OF VISITS

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, a total of 102 visits were made by ICVs to the PICs. 735 people were detained in custody at the time visits were conducted and 256 of the detainees were visited. The overall throughput for the PICs located in Suffolk for this financial year was 10,398 (compared to 9,691 the previous year). Whilst detainees may be offered a visit, there is no obligation for them to speak with ICVs.

Detail in respect of visits:

Panel	Number of visits in 2024/25	Number of detainees held	Number available to visit	Number of detainees visited	% seen of those available	Number of detainees not visited
Bury St Edmunds	53	384	158	131	82%	253
Martlesham	49	336	146	125	86%	211
Total	102	720	304	256	84%	464

There are a number of reasons why detained persons are not visited. For example, the detainee might refuse the visit or the police may advise against it for health and safety reasons. The category 'not visited' is broken down in the chart below to show the reasons detained persons were not visited. 70% of the detainees not seen were 'not selected by ICVs' to focus their time on more in-depth interviews with fewer detainees and scrutiny of their custody records.

Breakdown of the reasons the 464 detainees were not visited:

Not selected for visit	326	Police advised not to visit	17
Detainee refused	34	Detainee asleep/resting/eating/exercise	17
Detainee at interview/solicitor/appropriate adult/ phone	31	Detainee in processing/virtual court/court/prison	15
Detainee with health care professional/hospital/medical/liaison & diversion	23	Language/translation issues	1

Breakdown of visit by days and times

ICVs are encouraged to vary the times and days of their visits as much as possible. Efforts will be made over the next year to ensure that the visits are more evenly spread in terms of weekend and overnight visits.

Monday:	19	07:00 - 12:00:	36
Tuesday:	23		
Wednesday:	12	12:00 - 17:00:	31
Thursday:	16		
Friday:	24	17:00 - 22:00:	33
Saturday:	5		
Sunday:	3	22:00 - 07:00:	2

DETAINED PERSONS STATISTICS

Location	Number of detainees	Gender of detainees	Number of detainees	Number visited by ICVs
Bury St Edmunds	4924	Male	8483	189
Martlesham	5474	Female	1905	67
Total in Suffolk	10,398	Unspecified/unknown	10	0

Ethnicity of detainees	Number of detainees	Age range	Number of detainees
White - North European	8509	10-17	690
Black	809	18-29	3012
White - South European	538	30-39	3122
Asian	236	40-49	2011
Middle Eastern	66	50-59	1096
Chinese, Japanese or South East Asian	33	60-69	320
Unknown	207	70-79	124
		80-89	22
		90-99	1

Since April 2024 'Self Defined Ethnicity' data has been collected rather than 'Officer Defined Ethnicity' data but inconsistency of that data means we cannot report this in any meaningful way in this Annual Report. We are working with Custody to try to address this issue.

FINDINGS OF INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS

For each of the visits carried out throughout the year, a report was provided to the OPCC detailing what the ICVs had observed, or discussed with detainees and custody staff, at the time of the visit.

ICVs also report back on what they have learned from the custody records where this is appropriate. These reports provide a useful insight into the position in custody and detainee care and enable the scheme manager to follow-up any queries or request more information from the Head of Custody.

Regular ICV panel meetings were held throughout the year. These panel meetings enable ICVs to share experiences with other panel members

and meet with the PIC Inspectors to discuss their reports. The meetings enable the Constabulary to advise of action taken in respect of any queries ICVs have raised, as well as provide key updates on the local custody position and developments.

ICVs focus on the rights and entitlements of detainees, particularly checking how well detainees are made aware of these and whether they are proactively offered by the police. Overall, findings are positive, but it is recognised that detainees may not always understand, take on board, or remember, what they can ask and therefore reminders are helpful. Detainees may give information to ICVs that they have not told custody staff, so when ICVs pass this on it can improve the care and support provided. It

is recognised that staffing levels also impact on what entitlements, such as showers or exercise, can be offered and the timing of these.

In 2024/25 some additional text was added to some cells (*pictured below*) to remind detainees of their rights and key entitlements, as well as a prompt for additional information detainees might wish to tell custody staff. This is in addition to the existing text on the ceiling of some of the cells and in the holding areas to help detainees understand the services available from Liaison and Diversion. This has continued to have a positive impact on take-up of the service.



ICVs take an active approach to checking whether detainees have been given the outcomes of their custody review in a timely manner. They also check if female detainees have been allocated a female officer/staff member that they can speak to during their stay and that they have been provided with appropriate hygiene, sanitary or menopause care products. This is fed back to the constabulary when this has not been done, or made clear in the custody record. ICVs have also helped by reporting on medical healthcare provisions at the time of visits, commenting on whether the medics have been available, or if detainees have had to be moved to access appropriate medical care. Another key area of focus is related to whether staff have been consistently carrying ligature knives and checking that additional knives are in place, and used, by staff coming into custody from other areas of policing.

Whilst all cells are suitable for every type of detainee, some cells have been designated for children, young people or those who are vulnerable. Where possible these detainees are placed in a cell area away from other detainees. The doors of those cells have been painted green and some ball targets and white board areas added to aid distraction whilst held in custody.

Initial feedback from this is positive, one example reported was a child being placed in those cells initially, but later moved to a quieter cell block, in a glass fronted cell, as they were distressed by the noise from neighbouring cells. This provided reassurance that there was still flexibility in this approach when required.

ICVs have also raised queries with regards to alternative clothing, availability of reading glasses and provision of halal meals.

There have been ongoing discussions around vulnerability, the police assessment of this and their risk assessment processes, as well as access to custody records, which will continue. Where ICVs have recognised vulnerability factors these have been recorded and passed on to custody staff for appropriate action.

As a result of conversations with detainees, matters relating to the following areas were raised with custody staff to address:

Clothes/shower/blanket/exercise/refreshments	35
Reading material/entertainment	14
Medical support/comfort box	9
Someone informed/telephone call	4
Solicitor/codes of practice/complaint	4
Female matters/female officer	2

The OPCC is satisfied that any issues raised by ICVs from their visits were considered and addressed.

Throughout the year, ICVs have regularly commented on the professionalism of staff in dealing with detainees and ICVs. There have also been several very positive comments, particularly about the care of vulnerable detainees, young people, and detainees in custody for the first time.

Part of the role of ICVs is also to check on the conditions of the facilities in which detainees are held. Given the custody facilities in Suffolk were built in 2011 there have been few issues reported. Where issues have been identified either by ICVs or custody staff, such as matters relating to cleaning or issues with the cell doors or vehicle dock doors, these have been raised and action taken. Custody visitors continue to check whether the fire doors are being closed off as compliance with this has been mixed. ICVs are regularly updated on any changes or developments in terms of the custody estate and technology.

Developments during 2024/25

The scheme managers for Norfolk and Suffolk have worked closely throughout the year given the joint custody function and have met with the Head of Custody, Custody Development Officer, and Lead Custody Trainer on a quarterly basis. These meetings are essential for sharing key issues arising from visits, custody developments, performance and learning from safer detention, adverse incident reporting or complaints. Alongside this ICV visiting statistics and findings are also shared with the Chief Inspector on a regular basis so that issues can be addressed.

In-cell technology screens (*pictured right*) have been introduced to some of the cells across both counties and the Norfolk and Suffolk custody team has been working on a project entitled 'Good' police custody: Influencing police custody policy and practice, with the University of Sheffield.

This project piloted and evaluated the impacts of an accessible digital police custody information guide for adult detainees, with the aim of trying to improve detainees' understanding, decision making and police custody practices in Norfolk and Suffolk Police. It involved the production of four animated videos which have been played directly into the cells of selected detainees, as well as a leaflet information guide, interviews and observations with detainees and staff. The videos and guide were also shared with ICVs and the outcomes of the research will be shared in the summer of 2025.

Whilst there are clear advantages of the in-cell technology for staff and partners to speak with detainees to perform reviews and checks from various locations in a more engaging way, some of the feedback from detainees has been mixed, particularly in respect of the clock displayed on the screen. This can have a negative impact for some detainees, which is being taken into consideration.

ICVs have been updated on the recent move to online remote interpreter services as the default, with face-to-face interpreters now only to be called in specific circumstances and with appropriate authorisation. Measures are also in place to ensure that different interpreters



are used for consultation and interview. Practical arrangements to support these changes are being navigated.

The lack of availability and provision of hospital beds for those held under the Mental Health Act and delays in moving people to the correct care remains a concern. The healthcare and medical services provider within the PICs changed in 2024 and regular updates on performance have been provided to the OPCC whilst ICVs have also been providing feedback on those services as part of their visits. The PCC met periodically with the Head of Custody to discuss key custody updates, including healthcare provision in custody and mental health. This discussion has helped to inform further communication on these arrangements with the constabulary at Chief Officer level as well as with appropriate partners. ICVs will continue to review and report their observations on these key issues over the coming year.

In September 2024 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) consulted on a proposed inspection programme framework for 2025-29. This resulted in Custody Inspections forming part of the wider Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy (PEEL) Inspection programme. There were some reservations that the thoroughness and focus of the custody inspections would be lost, which were shared

by the Independent Custody Visiting Association. However, reassurances have been provided that the new framework will increase the number of inspections whilst retaining the same quality with graded judgements provided and shorter, more public facing reports provided. The Head of Custody will continue to review the local position against the inspection criteria and outcomes from other forces to check compliance, drive improvements and internal scrutiny arrangements. ICVA will also continue to share custody inspection outcomes nationally.

ICVs attended various training and information sessions in this financial year, which included sessions on policing as a trans police officer and issues for trans detainees in custody, military veterans in custody, the role of solicitors in police custody and an update on managing offenders, including out-of-court resolutions and bail management and most recently, an input on the history of the development of the Appropriate Adult Scheme and National Appropriate Adults Network.

Throughout 2024/25 the OPCC has utilised the ICVA updates and training to keep volunteers engaged and informed. ICVA continues to work proactively with schemes nationally to drive improvements and offer suggestions for key areas of focus. Since 2018 ICVs have been involved in the independent scrutiny of strip search to review the written justifications for use of the power, alongside any disproportionality issues. In 2020 the panel remit expanded to include the review of the issue of rip-proof clothing, subsequently significant improvements in the quality of the information in both areas have been achieved over the period.

From April 2024 the panel has also been reviewing the overnight detention of children under 18, assessing what action the police have taken to try and move the child out of custody, where appropriate, and interactions with social services or other partners to ensure appropriate action, care and support is provided.

The OPCC continues to work with the Constabulary and Suffolk Youth Justice Service in terms of the oversight of the Appropriate Adult (AA) provision. The scheme manager receives Appropriate Adult Service performance data and all papers from the Appropriate Adult Contract Review

meetings. Following a change to personnel at the AA service, the scheme manager attended an introductory meeting in March 2025 and the review meeting in April 2025 to explain the OPCC role and involvement. An open invitation has been extended to the AA Service to attend ICV training. ICVs continue to observe and report on Appropriate Adult provisions as part of their visiting process.

In December 2021 the Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA) issued its 'Just Visiting' report which explores the effectiveness of ICVs at monitoring race and gender-equality in police custody. There were 30 recommendations contained in the report aimed at the Home Office, PCCs, ICVA and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary. One of the recommendations for PCCs was to ensure custody visitors are routinely collecting data on detainees' race and gender on their visiting report forms. There have been some initial issues with the capture of this data which we are working through with the constabularies. The OPCC will continue to consider how best to utilise the data collected and keep the other recommendations under review.

Anyone arrested under the Terrorism Act (TACT) may be detained for up to 14 days and there are provisions within the PIC estate for anyone arrested locally. An eastern region pool of ICVs for visiting TACT detainees is in place. ICVs are selected by the local area, undergo additional vetting and are trained on a regional basis.

All ICVs visiting TACT detainees report nationally to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation (IRTL). These arrangements were extended in 2024 to include National Security Act 2023 detentions, and it is anticipated that the Home Office Codes of Practice for Independent Custody Visiting will be updated in due course to formally reflect this. ICVA hosted a TACT training event for TACT trained ICVs in 2024 as well as regular TACT networking meetings for scheme managers.

The APCC provides a useful custody network to share information and key updates for police forces and OPCC/Mayors' Offices. It also supports quarterly Custody Meetings and undertakes survey work which helps to provide an understanding of the national picture on key topics such as the varied appropriate adult provision for vulnerable adults.

The scheme manager and two volunteers from

the Martlesham Panel attended the University of Suffolk Jobs Fair in October 2024, which was a great opportunity to raise awareness of the scheme and speak to students about the role.

An advert was placed on the Suffolk PCC website in November 2024, as well as on local volunteering platforms. Contact was made with various local organisations to help promote the scheme and ask if they would consider Employer Supported Volunteering. Custody Visitors themselves have also been actively involved in promoting the scheme amongst their own networks, such as Rotary Clubs.



Looking forward

The OPCC recognises the need to recruit additional volunteers and to improve the diversity of the panels to better reflect the community of Suffolk. Efforts to recruit and promote the scheme via the PCC website, local press, public meetings, local volunteering and higher education organisations will continue.

Local training inputs and monthly newsletters will continue throughout 2025/26. Plans for an online session in October 2025, which will focus on children and young people in custody and the work of local Youth Justice Services, are in progress.

The OPCC will continue to work with the Constabulary over the coming year in response to visit findings and developments in custody. This will include reviewing the research findings from the work with the University of Sheffield and Newcastle University relating to healthcare standards, and the National Police Chiefs' Council's Interim Guidance on Transgender Searching. The OPCC will also continue to monitor and support improvements in terms of mental health care, local healthcare and medical provisions.

Norfolk OPCC/ICVs started some additional work to carry out custody record review scrutiny in December 2024, with a focus at the first two meetings on female records and subsequently on immigration detainees as part of the Independent Custody Visiting Association Pilot work. From autumn 2025 Suffolk ICVs will work with Norfolk ICVs to undertake this additional custody record review work.

The OPCC will continue to meet quarterly with

regional colleagues to share developments, learning and best practice. Key areas of focus for the group include custody healthcare provisions, regional custody visiting arrangements for detainees held under Terrorism and the National Security Act (2023) legislation, and electronic reporting.

In 2019 the ICVA introduced the ICVA Quality Assurance Framework to help schemes to reflect on how they comply with the Code of Practice, celebrate areas of strength, promote custody visiting and the achievements schemes have made, drive performance and share good practice. Suffolk achieved the 'Code Compliant' award in 2019 and 2022 which demonstrated that the scheme met the statutory requirements and necessary volunteer standards. 'QAF3' launched in April 2025 so work will be carried out in 2025/26 with a view to obtaining an improved level at the next assessment.

In 2024 /25, ICVA set up a twice-yearly immigration detention network and in 2025/26 ICVA will hold an immigration detention roundtable, focussed on police custody, to review what is known about this group of vulnerable detainees, identify gaps in reporting and consider what steps need to be taken by ICVA and stakeholders to ensure that they receive equitable and specific care in police custody.

ICVA will also explore options for a national reporting form and working to improve ICV awareness through a targeted social media campaign.



If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor or would like more information please contact:

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Manager,
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk,
Police Headquarters,
Martlesham Heath,
Ipswich IP5 3QS

Telephone: (01473) 782774
E-mail: spcc@suffolk.police.uk

For more information on the role of Independent Custody Visitors and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk visit www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk.

If you require the information in this Annual Report in any other format, please contact us.