



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

SUBMITTED TO: OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

SUBJECT: JOINT CUSTODY SERVICES
SERVICE DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE – NOVEMBER 2025

SUMMARY:

1. This report provides an update from Joint Custody Services identifying key performance information and any significant operational or organisational issues.
2. There are no significant financial implications to note within this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is asked to consider the progress made by the Constabulary and raise issues with Chief Constable as appropriate to the PCC's role in holding the Chief Constable to account.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 A Brief Description of the Role and Responsibilities of Custody Services

1.2 Custody services provide the starting point for most criminal investigations managed by Suffolk Constabulary.

1.3 The key roles and responsibilities that relate to the custody service are defined by the principles within the nationally published Authorised Professional Practice for Detention and Custody and include:

- There is a strategic focus which promotes the safe, dignified and decent delivery of custody;
- Detention is appropriate, investigators and custody staff operate lawfully and in accordance with relevant legislation;
- Detainees are treated with dignity and respect taking account of their diverse needs;
- Detainees have access to emergency medical care, health and social care services as necessary;
- All areas of the custody suite used by detainees are clean and safe, meeting required standards.
- All detained persons have access to support from Liaison and Diversion (L+D) with a focus on support and preventing re-offending.

1.4 There are six Police Investigation Centres (PICs) in total, four in Norfolk and two in Suffolk, with an overall capacity of 146 Cells.

1.5 The two Suffolk PICs are based at Martlesham (30 cells) and Bury St Edmunds (24 Cells). Persons arrested in the east of the county are taken to Great Yarmouth PIC (30 cells).

2 OVERVIEW

2.1 The resourcing of the PICs is dictated by the Custody Deployment Plan which was reviewed and revised in September 2022. It outlines resourcing for the entire year and focusses on key days where demand on the custody provision is anticipated to be higher than usual, for example Weekends and Bank Holidays. There is an ongoing review of the deployment plan which will result in a change in shift pattern for staff and demand managed based on a resourcing profile rather than an arbitrary 'minimum staffing level'.

2.2 The operational management of custody each day is the responsibility of the 'Custody Bronze' Inspector. This Inspector will be one of the 6 PIC inspectors across both counties and the 'Custody Bronze' role is covered between the hours of 0700-0000 every day on a rota basis. Where incidents need to be managed by a senior officer, they will be raised to the relevant force Silver for the day.

2.3 Daily Management Meetings are chaired by 'Custody Bronze' and these provide an opportunity to raise and discuss operational demands. These are then compared with available resourcing and resource allocation to ensure demands and priorities are met. Flexibility exists to move staff between PICs as the need arises.

- 2.4 On occasions where gaps in resourcing exist, to ensure safe detention is still available, the Custody Bronze will authorise the use of a “managed service” at the relevant PIC. This in essence means that the capacity of the PIC will be temporarily reduced. In the event its capacity were met, any further detained persons would be diverted to another (the nearest) PIC.
- 2.5 Should any PIC identify that the needs or volume of existing detainees present a risk, they may move to operate under an Amber or Red state in conjunction with an assessment by the Custody Bronze Inspector. State Amber describes a managed service through the Control Room - as each detainee is arrested the PIC where they can best be safely accommodated is identified and communicated to arresting officers. State Red indicates a temporary closure owing to detainee numbers. State Black is the closure of custody and results in the relocation of all detainees to alternative PICs. Black status is generally implemented owing to an operational or safety need. State Green describes when PICs are operating as business as usual.

Custody Services – Summary of Detentions in Custody

- 2.6 The following section shows Custody information based on:-
- Total number of detentions
 - Use of Police Custody as a Place of Safety under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983
 - Levels of Strip-searching, Use of Force and Other Control Measures
 - Use of Police Custody as a Place of Safety under the Children Act 1989
 - Numbers of Children detained in Police Custody and for How Long
 - Numbers of Children to be transferred to Local Authority Accommodation under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE)
 - Numbers of Children transferred to Local Authority Accommodation.
- 2.7 The reporting period for the data is 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025, unless otherwise stated.

Total Number of Detentions

- 2.8 The throughput of detainees for Suffolk for the period 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025 was 11,059, an increase of 1084 detainees from the previous year. This data is based on Suffolk detainees using the six PICs across Suffolk and Norfolk.
- 2.9 Of the total throughput figures for the period, 4.8% relate to voluntary attendance. This is a slight increase of last year’s figure (4.6%).
- 2.10 10,354 (93.6%) of the total throughput were adults and 705 (6.4%) juveniles (under 18). This is a very similar percentage to previous reporting period and remains low nationally.
- 2.11 Of the total number of adults, 81% of detainees were male and 19% were female. Less than 1% were not recorded or ‘unspecified’. This is the same split to the previous years.

Levels of Strip-searching, Use of Force and Other Control Measures

Strip Searches

- 2.12 There were a total number of 437 strip searches under Section 54 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act between 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025, an increase of 21 from the previous year. It is worth noting that a number of these also include the College of Policing’s Authorised

Professional Practice requirement of recording changes of clothes (even in private) as a strip search. In terms of gender and age splits, this is broken down as follows:

Gender / Age	Strip Searches
Female	69
Under 18	1
18 - 29	22
30 - 39	28
40 - 49	13
50 - 59	5
Male	368
Under 18	13
18 - 29	161
30 - 39	104
40 - 49	63
50 - 59	22
60 - 70	5
Grand Total	437

- 2.13 The proportionate use of strip search is reviewed by the independent scrutiny panel which has enabled learning and the identification of best practice. Suffolk and Norfolk have been identified as an exemplar force regarding their provision of a scrutiny panel. The Panel's role is to act as a constructive friend to the Constabulary and to assist in improving standards, trust and confidence in the Police. The most recent report highlights that whilst there are still some areas for improvement, issues are being tackled and the use of both rip proof clothing and strip searches is generally well justified. Strip searches are also audited by the custody Inspectors with appropriate feedback given to the authorising Sergeant.
- 2.14 Rip Proof clothing was used on 39 occasions during the reporting period. This type of clothing is used to ensure the safe detention of individuals who present harm to themselves whilst in the custody environment. This an increase from 29 in the previous reporting period. There is a trend nationally for the removal of rip proof clothing for detainees. Whilst scrutinised and well justified it is something being considered within Norfolk and Suffolk.

Transgender Searching

- 2.15 Following the High Court ruling regarding definition of Transgender individuals, the policies within Norfolk and Suffolk were updated. However, the practical processes within custody when searching have remained the same in that those who define themselves as a certain gender will be searched by an officer of the same gender following a discussion and agreement between the detainee and officer searching.
- 2.16 To date we have not had any Suffolk detainees who have been subject to a search who identify as Transgender. We have had 2 in Norfolk where consent was obtained by both detainee and officer, and the search was conducted by officer of the same sex as the detainee identified themselves as.
- 2.17 This process has been fed back to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) lead and identified as good practice despite the rigid definitions set through High Court decision.

Use of Force in Custody

- 2.18 There are 361 Assault Force Incidents (AFI) during between 01 August 2024 and 31 July 2025 in PICs. This includes compliant handcuffing.

Use of Police Custody as a Place of Safety under the Children Act 1989

- 2.19 Excluding any young person (under 18) arrested and brought into police custody, there were no instances where police custody has been used as a place of safety under the Children Act 1989.

3 KEY BUSINESS/RISKS

- 3.1 The management structure of Custody consists of a Chief Inspector (Head of Department), six PIC Inspectors, a dedicated custody training Sergeant, one Business Support Officer (Police Staff) and a Custody Development Officer (Police Staff). These are referred to as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- 3.2 The SLT are all responsible for a number of 'Standing Orders' which cover a range of aspects covering custody which include:-
- Training;
 - Operations Management;
 - Wellbeing;
 - Audits and Scrutiny;
 - Vulnerable persons;
 - Managing Offenders;
 - Contracts Management.
- 3.3 The SLT meet every six weeks to discuss portfolio updates and to monitor overall performance. This meeting is chaired by the Head of the department. Additionally, at this meeting any new national custody practises which are being introduced are discussed and adopted.

Partners

- 3.4 The NHS Liaison and Diversion (L+D) provision came into operation in May 2015. Teams work across all PICs to conduct enhanced risk assessments on detainees. The emphasis is on removing the influences that cause them to commit crime, therefore reducing reoffending. L+D are commissioned to operate between the hours of 8am-7pm, 7 days a week. Locally a Twilight Liaison and Diversion (L+D) service is offered, providing an enhanced diversionary service to custody users. During this review period we have a service until 00:00, however in most cases this is a remote service for all PICs, except one location where the worker is stationed, using the in-cell tech to remote into cells across all 6 PICs.

PIC	Seen by L&D
Bury St. Edmunds PIC	1659
Adult	1466
Juvenile	193
Great Yarmouth PIC	1822
Adult	1598
Juvenile	224
Martlesham PIC	1493

Adult	1279
Juvenile	214
Grand Total	4974

- 3.5 The Appropriate Adult (AA) service in Suffolk is provided by the Anglia Care Trust. The team of AA's operate up to 2300hrs everyday but can provide 24-hour provision with the authority of a Police Superintendent. The table below identifies the number of times appropriate adults were required during the reporting period (Suffolk detainees only)

PIC	Detainees requiring an AA
Bury St Edmunds	492
Great Yarmouth	188
Martlesham	543
Total	1223

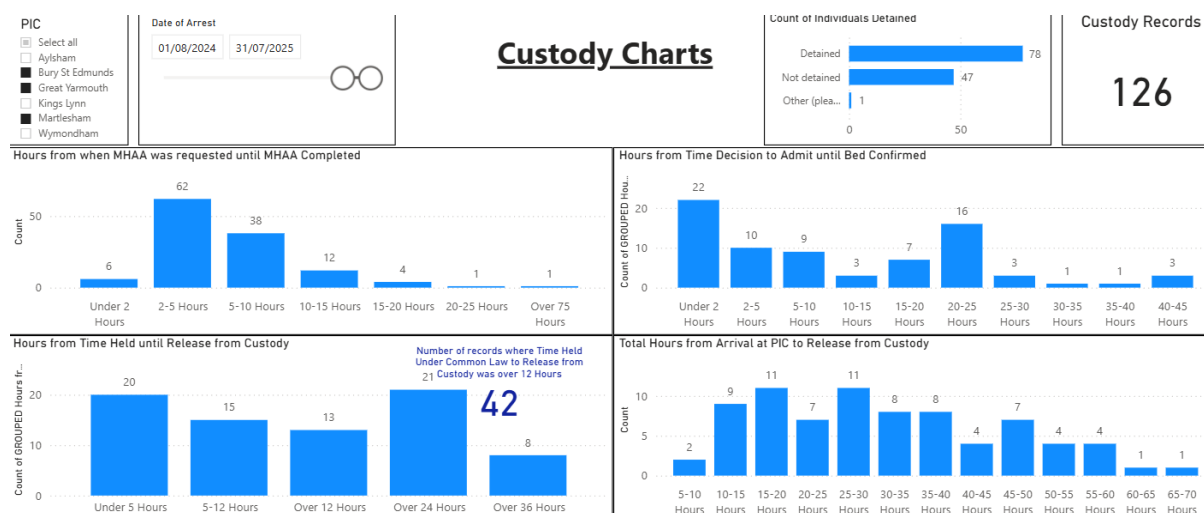
- 3.6 Independent Custody Visitors (ICV) work closely with the management team. They provide invaluable assistance in ensuring that standards of detention remain high and give legitimacy to the detention process. ICVs identify ways that a detainee's stay can be made more comfortable and assist in continued innovation in relation to care.
- 3.7 In February 2024 collaboration with Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire contract for embedded healthcare in the five main PICs across Norfolk and Suffolk (not Aylsham) was continued. This is managed through the 7-force commercial / procurement team although operational oversight is held within each force by Heads of custody or appropriate staff. The initial transfer of services has had its challenges, especially considering the resourcing model that was already in place, however this is now working with almost full rota and coverage.

Mental Health

- 3.8 There were no instances where police custody was used as a place of safety under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act. However, there were occasions where detainees were sectioned under Section 136 of the Act following arrest relating to Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) matters. This occurred when it became clear that detainee was suffering from mental ill health. These cases are referred to colleagues in the Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust. Police stations are no longer deemed a primary place of safety (although they legally can be), with Health Authority locations having primacy for such detentions.
- 3.9 Following Home Office guidance, but currently pending formal sign off, The Mental Health Act is due to be amended which will remove police stations as a place of safety. This will likely dictate some of the practices within custody where partners will be given a reasonable amount of time to locate beds before those suffering with mental health crisis are removed to more appropriate settings such as dedicated mental health suites or the A&E.
- 3.10 Following consultation with Constabulary Mental Health Co-ordinators, a dashboard has been created to allow tracking of detainees who have been subject to all formal Mental Health Assessments, assessment wait times, decisions, and subsequent movement into relevant authority area beds. There are significant current issues with bed availability within the Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust resulting in some lengthy stays in custody for detainees suffering with mental ill health. It is becoming increasingly common practice for individuals who have been detained under the mental health act to remain in custody, utilising common law powers for several days despite universal recognition this is not appropriate. The longest recorded stay to date was 8 days.

- 3.11 A joint Mental Health policy regarding detention in custody has been agreed with an escalation process when the provision of secure accommodation or transport is not immediately available.
- 3.12 Norfolk and Suffolk manage mental health in a manner which is not consistent with other Constabularies. Persons remaining in custody whilst waiting for beds is not commonplace within wider Policing. This is a matter of ongoing discussion.

Mental Health – based on Martlesham, Bury and Great Yarmouth (Unable to split by constabulary)



Numbers of Children detained in Police Custody and for How Long

- 3.13 Total throughput of children (under 18) in police custody for the period from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025 was 705 (6.4% of all detainees). This is a similar percentage from the previous reporting period (7%).
- 3.14 Of the total throughput of children for the period, 8.7% relate to voluntary attendance.
- 3.15 77% of juvenile detainees were male, 22% were female. This is the same percentage of female juveniles, although it is worth noting this includes multiple instances of the same individuals coming through custody.
- 3.16 The average length of detention for a child (under 18) in custody was 10 hours and 5 minutes, 45 minutes less on average than the previous reporting period which was already a reduction in average detention time.
- 3.17 All children who attended custody were provided with a solicitor unless they opted out with good reason (this is a reversal of the right to opt to have a solicitor appointed free of charge)

Numbers of Children to be transferred to Local Authority Accommodation under PACE:

- 3.18 During the period there were a total of 18 child remands requested for transfer to Local Authority care (under 18). This is a reduction of 23 since the last reporting period.
- 3.19 In all cases, the juvenile was not moved to alternative accommodation due to insufficient capacity from the local authority, or it was impractical to move due to the timeliness of the arrest to present to court from custody.
- 3.20 Since the last reporting period, Suffolk continue to recruit and train foster carers who are PACE trained who should be able to offer a more frequent service to take juveniles from custody on remand.
- 3.21 A Custody Safeguarding Multi-Agency Forum is held to debrief all cases where transfer did not take place. This meeting is attended by the custody Inspector who holds the vulnerable persons portfolio.
- 3.22 The Independent Scrutiny Panel has begun reviewing cases of children staying overnight in custody. This has enabled learning opportunity for Police and partners. Early findings indicate that the Constabulary usually request the correct accommodation for the child's needs.

4 INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Managing offenders

- 4.1 In 2021 Custody introduced the portfolio role for Managing Offenders. This position has been introduced to oversee the management of several key priorities including Bail management, restorative justice, use of civil orders and encouraging officers to use voluntary attendance where appropriate. The Managing Offenders lead is also responsible for out of court resolutions (OOCR) across both forces. This strategic piece of work compliments the national drive to reduce the number of offenders going through the court system. It is hoped that this team will continue to grow and work with external stakeholders to reduce the number of entrants into the judicial system. Line management of this team has recently passed to the Head of Criminal Justice Services.

Cell Transformations

A programme of works is currently underway to transform our Child cells. It is recognised as best practice that children should be separate from the adult population within custody. Whilst a completely separate 'wing' is not feasible a number of cell doors have been painted a different colour to signify that they are juvenile cells. Within these cells there are a number of distraction items painted, including a target for kicking / throwing a ball, a whiteboard area for drawing. Further rollout is imminent.

- 4.3 Additionally, decals are being added above every cell intercom which is a constant reminder of ongoing rights and entitlements. This area has been selected as it is out of view when in the main part of the cell but easily read when at the intercom. It also serves as a timely reminder for any visitors to the cell to remind the detainee of their rights.



Nudge theory

4.4 Nudge theory has been introduced across all PICs. Information has been displayed within half the cells with a view to prompting more persons to utilise the help of liaison and diversion teams. Early indications are that this trial is being successful and will lead to the decals being displayed across the entirety of the estate. This project is being academically reviewed by the University of East Anglia.



Biometrics Officers

- 4.5 The primary function of the Biometrics Custody Detention Office (BCDO) is to improve the quantity and quality of biometric submissions, Fingerprints, Photographs and DNA.
- 4.6 The role requires the sharing of best practice with their colleagues through support, guidance, and education. By collaborating with colleagues, they observe how detainees' biometrics are obtained, giving an opportunity to provide feedback, guidance or identify a training need to individuals where their knowledge or experience may indicate such. This has been effective in reducing error rates and improving standards within custody.
- 4.7 The BCDO also assists the custody command in improving standards of fingerprinting by providing bespoke one to one training with new custody staff, discussing common errors, different techniques for resolving issues, and providing opportunities to practice. During this training, there is an opportunity to explain and reaffirm the importance of taking good quality fingerprints and taking them on every relevant occasion.

Peer Reviews

- 4.8 Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies are at the forefront of development and have forged relationships with other constabularies in the region. The custody command has developed an inspection framework based upon the previous and joint inspections with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS). This is used to conduct peer review and to ensure that within the region there is constant learning and improving.

In Cell Technology

- 4.9 Over 50% of all cells across Norfolk and Suffolk PICs have been transformed to include in-cell technology. This is a screen which is embedded into the cells and enables remote PACE reviews, tele medicine, consultation with Liaison and Diversion, mental health / drug workers etc. This also allows for digital content to be played to detainees. The Custody Senior Leadership Team is currently working with the University of Sheffield to create videos and evaluate their effectiveness in ensuring detainees understand the custody process. More information on the project can be found - <https://sheffield.ac.uk/law/research/good-police-custody-influencing-police-custody-policy-and-practice>



5 HIS MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY AND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES (HMICFRS) CUSTODY INSPECTION

- 5.1 The previous HMICFRS inspection of custody was carried out in 2018, with the custody inspection regime being rolled into the force PEEL process which is likely to begin for Suffolk early 2026. As such, there have not been any updates directly from HMICFRS since previous reports were published.
- 5.2 The recent HMICFRS inspection relating to children and young persons has identified some areas for consideration. This includes the number of children remaining in custody overnight.
- 5.3 An escalation policy is required in relation to young persons who are remanded following charge. There is an obligation placed upon the Local Authority to provide housing provision which is normally not available. It is suggested that child friendly cells are created (all cells are approved for use with children, but decoration is in the process of being commissioned).
- 5.4 The HMICFRS recommend that a dedicated Custody Officer is responsible for being the single point of contact for each child and female in custody, to look to generate trust and gain information associated to exploitation and vulnerability. This is included in audits which are completed monthly by randomly assigning a number of records to Sgts, meaning around 300 records per month are reviewed.
- 5.5 Recent reviews outside of Norfolk and Suffolk identify that some constabularies have room for improvement in the way they manage bail. Current processes are subject to review and will result in updated procedures being introduced.
- 5.6 The Custody Command Team review all HMIC reports relating to custodies within other forces to ensure that areas for improvement are assessed against local practices. Any necessary changes are then implemented to ensure local operating processes reflect what is identified as best practice.

6 DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURY (DSI) INCIDENTS

- 6.1 A review of the serious incidents which have occurred in relation to detainees arrested or recently released from PICs within Suffolk, for the period 1 August 2024 and 31 July 2025 identified 20 cases.
- 6.2 A total of 18 were referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) as Death or Serious Injury. Four were assessed as suitable for local investigation by the Professional Standards Department (PSD) and the remaining 14 were returned to the Force to deal with.
- 6.3 Two DSI cases relate to deaths of the individuals. In both cases the detainees had been released from custody and were found within 24 hours having taken their own lives. The cases have been reviewed and identified no missed opportunities in the risk assessment process or to safeguard the individuals involved.
- 6.4 In seven cases the detainees had seizures (five due to epilepsy) whilst in custody and in all cases the detainees were taken to hospital.
- 6.5 Five detainees became unresponsive/unconscious in the holding area or within the custody suite. One detainee was being transferred between PIC's when they became unwell.
- 6.6 Four detainees self-harmed whilst in the cell by tying clothing around their neck, punching the cell wall, headbutting the cell door and punching themselves in the face causing injuries.

6.7 The other incidents which have resulted in DSI cases refer to a detainee swallowing drugs and a detainee who fainted whilst being booked in and then went on to have chest pains.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No financial implications.

8 OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

8.1 No other implications or risks.