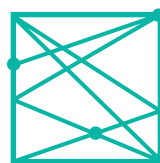




Independent Custody Visitors

Annual Report 2025-26



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NORTHUMBRIA
**POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER**

CONTENTS

- 04** Overview of custody in Northumbria
- 05** About our ICV Scheme
- 05** Overview of our visits
- 06** What do our visitors look for when visiting?
- 07** Points highlighted by ICVs and achievements throughout the year
- 08** Northumbria focus gaining accreditation through the Quality Assurance Framework
- 09** Meet our ICVs – Carol Thompson
- 10** Training our ICVs
- 10** Looking forward to 2026/27



WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION



I am pleased to be presenting this report continuing to showcase the excellent work of our Independent Custody Visitors. I am proud to hear and comment on the excellent work that has taken place over the last year in ensuring those detained in police custody are well treated and their rights and entitlements upheld.

Most importantly, I want to thank our excellent visitors for their support and dedication which makes a real difference to those detained and provides me with valuable assurances that those detained in our custody suites are well looked after and treated well.

At the start of 2025, the Independent Custody Visiting Association launched their 3rd Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which allows schemes to showcase the level that their scheme operates at. In Northumbria we have achieved the GOLD award on previous occasions, and I am happy that once again due to the dedication of you as volunteers we have retained our gold accreditation. My sincere thanks go out to ICVs and this is a testament to the time and dedication they give to the role.

As part of the QAF, we undertook a comprehensive volunteer survey during the year, providing valuable insight into the experiences, views, and suggestions of ICVs. The feedback gathered is already helping to inform improvements and shape the future development of the scheme.

We have also continued to work in close partnership with the Independent Custody Visiting Association. In Northumbria, we want to ensure that our ICVs have access to the best training possible. Towards the end of the year, ICVA launched a new online training portal with ICVs now signed up and undertaking their training digitally. I'm sure this will have a positive impact in allowing ICVs to stay up to date and increase their learning on important topics.

I hope you enjoy reading the rest of the report which includes some key facts about our scheme, the work of ICVs throughout the year and the work we are undertaking to improve our scheme further.

Best Wishes



Susan Dungworth

OVERVIEW OF CUSTODY IN NORTHUMBRIA

OVERVIEW OF CUSTODY SUITES

We currently have 3 dedicated Police custody suites which is where most detainees are detained. These are located at:

Forth Banks - 50 cells

Middle Engine Lane - 40 cells

Southwick - 28 cells

These suites cover 2,000 square miles, from the Scottish Border to County Durham and from the Pennines to the North East coast.

We also have **3 Resilience custody suites** which are only opened when one of the main suites are not operational or there is increased demand such as Christmas and New Year.

These are located at:

Etal Lane - 22 cells

Bedlington - 20 cells

Berwick - 6 cells

STATS OF THOSE DETAINED IN CUSTODY

There were over 29,970 detainees in custody during 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 which is broken down by custody suites below:

Custody Suite	Detainees
Bedlington	5,035
Forth Banks	16,146
Middle Engine Lane	6,424
Southwick	9,707



ABOUT OUR ICV SCHEME

Number of ICVs

We currently have 13 visitors overseen by a Panel Co-ordinator responsible for ICVs and visiting custody suites within their area.

ICV Training

Training of our visitors is of the utmost important to ensure that they are fully up to date with changing legislation, and they have the tools to do their work. ICVs have continued to receive virtual training through the Independent Custody Visitor Association and have recently being able to access a specific ICV online training platform.

ICV Times of Visits

Our ICVs make visits to those in custody at varying times of the day and evening including weekends and public holidays. This ensures that they see a wide range of detainees that are brought into custody at vary times of the day and night. Our ICV panel co-ordinator ensures that visits are made at varying times of the day with these visits being worked around volunteer's commitments.

OVERVIEW OF OUR VISITS

Overview

Between April 2025 and March 2026 (92) visits were undertaken to our custody suites with 313 detainees visited. This is an increase on the 86 visits undertaken the previous year.

Of the 86 visits undertaken:

- 1129 detainees were in custody.
- 313 detainees visited.
- 112 refused to be visited.
- 703 were unavailable to be seen or not in the sample of detainees that were to be visited.



WHAT DO OUR VISITORS LOOK FOR WHEN VISITING?

During their visits, ICVs will inspect a number of different areas including:

- That cells and toilets have been maintained and in working order.
- CCTV is present and working.
- Reasonable temperatures are maintained within the cells and centre.
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided.
- Any detainee visible injuries have been explained.
- Female detainee hygiene concerns are addressed.
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing have been provided.
- The 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, ICVs check the custody log to ratify the detainee's account of their detention.
- Check that detainees have not been treated differently due to their gender, age, ethnicity or sexuality and that they have not received any disparity in treatment due to these factors.





POINTS HIGHLIGHTED BY ICVS AND ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH THE YEAR

- Menopause packs have been introduced into custody with ICVs monitoring their availability and distribution to detainees that require it. These packs are in addition to the introduction of the Menopause Referral Pathway which Northumbria Police also have in operation to support those suffering whilst in police custody.
- Worked with Northumbria Police to improve detention officer training which has resulted in the role of ICVs being incorporated into future training of detention officers.
- Continued to expand the digital recording of visits which replaced a paper based system. This has improved the speed of reporting for both custody staff and ICVs.
- ICVs have continued to ensure that everyone detained no matter their gender or ethnicity are treated equally which we refer to as disparities in treatment. To ensure this was not happening we refreshed our ICV questionnaires which continues to include the collection of ethnicity and gender information and any observations ICVs may have on disparity of treatment. ICVs have reported no concerns of any disparity of treatment relating to race or gender within our custody suites.
- ICVs have proactively worked to ensure “distraction packs are available in all suites for detainees. These packs include reading materials, colouring books and foam footballs. It has been noted by ICVs that these items are welcomed by detainees in reducing stress and anxiety.
- Our ICV Panel Co-ordinator is a member of the Custody Detention Advisory Panel, ensuring that points raised during visits and suggestions for improvements to police custody can be made.
- Ensured repairs to cells or equipment were actioned promptly by the force where concerns were raised by ICVs.
- Northumbria Police have undertaken a review of the custody estate with Bedlington Custody Suite soon to become a resilience suite.

NORTHUMBRIA FOCUS GAINING ACCREDITATION THROUGH THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Throughout the year, Northumbria ICV Scheme has worked closely with the Independent Custody Visiting Association following their launch of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).

What is the QAF?

QAF stands for the Quality Assurance Framework and is a set of criteria designed to help schemes benchmark their work and strive for excellence. This is the third time that the QAF has been launched with Northumbria receiving the GOLD award previously.

What are the levels?

The QAF consists of several levels, each with a criteria to meet.

What areas did the QAF look into?

For each level of the QAF, evidence had to be submitted which covered the following areas:

- Recruitment and Training
- Managing Volunteers
- Communication
- Holding the force to account
- Transparency and Public Reassurance
- Detainee Welfare
- Volunteer Voices

What types of evidence was submitted?

Evidence of the work undertaken on each area took many forms including minutes of meetings, update reports to ICV's, training undertaken and much more.

Outcome of the QAF

Following the submission of all evidence during 2025/26, we were very pleased to receive the Gold award. This has once again been an excellent outcome which has seen the OPCC continue to be a gold standard scheme over a 6 year period.

MEET OUR ICVS – CAROL THOMPSON



Hi my name is Carol Thompson.

I am a retired nursery school headteacher. During my working life I worked and supported children and families from many different backgrounds. Some of whom faced challenges working through the educational system. I have been an Independent Custody Visitor for over 12 years. The role of an ICV is still not widely known. On retirement, I first became aware of the scheme through a friend. I volunteered to become an ICV as a way to continue contributing back to the community, in helping others who may feel in a vulnerable and confused condition. I have found some skills, such as communication, used in my working life very helpful in my visiting. It has also been interesting to learn more about how our legal and justice systems actually work. TV programmes and social media often provide a rather distorted view.

As ICVs, we are not involved of the reasons of why detainees are in custody, but the purpose of visiting is to see detainees are treated compassionately; individual needs and rights are met and to ensure welfare standards are upheld. There is no typical detainee, many are vulnerable, facing the barriers of addiction, mental health, poor education or homelessness. We introduce ourselves to the detainees, but it is their choice to answer our questions or not. I think this is important to respect the dignity of everyone. There are standard questions to be asked but it is also very important to listen and answer individual queries as well. It is those times when I feel I am able make a small difference for that individual in custody, be it a simple extra blanket for warmth or confirmation from staff that family members at home are being cared for. During a visit I hope to provide a reassuring, friendly face for the detainee.

I enjoy the fact that each visit is different, as are the numbers in custody and the demands on custody staff. There are interesting conversations with both detainees and staff. The title of the role is important as we are independent, there to support the detainees but also to give reassurance to custody staff as we note any issues which may affect their work. Following the visit, we bring any issues to staff, write a report and we can generally see the concerns being addressed. Custody staff are helpful on our visits. We see them showing kindness, respect to detainees and helping to calm emotionally charged situations.

There have been changes during the years I have been visiting and I see greater awareness of individual needs and the resources found to support them. For those for whom English is a second language we have question sheets which are translated into different languages, respect for different religions, introduction of fidget/distraction toys available to help those with mental health issues. Female detainees are allocated a female officer. I would like to think that the ICVs have played a part in this. I have found the online training helpful and giving me greater insights.

It has been a privilege to volunteer and be part of The ICV Scheme. It provides an important layer of independent oversight and monitoring of custody practices. We can give reassurance to the general public that in custody suites we will continue to ensure individual care is given and standards are good.

TRAINING OUR ICVS

TRAINING OUR VISITORS AND SUPPORT FROM ICVA

The Independent Custody Visitor Association (ICVA) provides leadership to Independent Custody Visiting schemes in the UK, helping fulfil their roles and ensuring that schemes remain up to date through regular training for ICVs.

WHAT TRAINING HAVE ICVS RECEIVED?

- Dealing with autistic detainees
- Briefing on Pregnant and Breast-Feeding detainees.
- Detainees and Alcohol and Substance Misuse Disorders
- Attended an online event by Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2026/27

Recruitment of New ICVs

We are currently in the process of recruiting two new ICVs who we will be welcoming to the team in 2026.

Full ICVA induction training will be undertaken before, the they undertaken their role accompanied by long standing and experienced ICVs.

Survey of our ICVs

As part of ensuring our ICVs are best supported we will be carrying out a survey of our ICVs to ensure they are happy in the role, what is working well and gather any ideas on areas of training they would like.

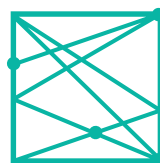


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