



De Cymru

**Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throsedd**

**Police and Crime Commissioner**

South Wales

**South Wales Independent Custody Visiting  
Scheme and Animal Welfare Scheme**

**Annual Report**

**2023-2024**

This document is also available in Welsh.

## Contents

Foreword by Emma Wools, Police & Crime Commissioner	3
Introduction To Our Volunteer Visiting Schemes	4
Overview Of Independent Custody Visiting in South Wales	5
The Governance of Our Scheme	5
Police Custody in South Wales	8
Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Data	9
Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Findings	10
Scheme Development	12
Animal Welfare Scheme	16
How South Wales Police Respond to Our Findings	18

## Foreword



### **South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner, Emma Wools:**

The contribution of our Independent Custody Visitors and our Animal Welfare Visitors who monitor our custody suites and the way our police animals are treated is highly valued and of critical importance. This annual report highlights the importance of these crucial roles, and the work that goes on week in and week out to ensure that the rights and welfare of detainees in police custody are properly upheld and maintained in line with our wider commitment to human rights and a just and fair society.

It also ensures that the quality of life of the dogs and horses in the South Wales Police family and the conditions in which they live, and work are kept at the highest standards.

As the recently elected Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, I am grateful to have this early opportunity to thank all our visitors for their commitment and hard work during the past year and their continued efforts to maintain consistent oversight, ensuring the highest of standards are maintained. I am committed to this area of work and support the continuing development of the Independent Custody Visitor and Animal Welfare Scheme.

## **Introduction To the Volunteer Visiting Schemes**

In 1981, several outbreaks of unrest occurred in various cities throughout the country – including Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, the West Midlands, and London. The most significant of these disorders took place in Brixton when hundreds of young people attacked property and the police. After days of unrest, these serious incidents led to the government ordering an urgent inquiry and appointing Lord Scarman to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the events.

As part of the recommendations arising from the investigation and following report, Lord Scarman advocated a system whereby members of the public from local communities could inspect the way the police detained people in their custody. Originally referred to as lay visiting, Independent Custody Visiting is the system that has been developed to meet this recommendation.

The Police and Crime Act 2002 made Custody visiting statutory with the Home Office introducing the [Codes of Practice for Independent Custody Visiting](#). The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 introduced Police and Crime Commissioners and gave them the responsibility for operating and overseeing the scheme in their police area.

In South Wales, the Commissioner is responsible for the statutory Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and the non-statutory Animal Welfare visiting scheme. The Commissioner appoints volunteers from the local community to carry out unannounced visits to police stations and the police dog and horse mounted site.

The statutory Independent Custody Visiting scheme involves Visitors reporting weekly on the welfare of detainees held in Custody, ensuring that their rights and entitlements are being upheld. It is an effective method of oversight of police custody, and one of many aspects of the Commissioner's overarching scrutiny and oversight role.

In South Wales, the Commissioner has appointed a Scheme Manager who oversees the overall operation of the Custody Visiting scheme on his behalf. The Scheme Manager is responsible for two panels – East and West. The East panel covers the Custody Suites in Cardiff Bay and Merthyr Tydfil. The West panel cover the Custody Suites in Bridgend and Swansea.

The Animal Welfare visiting scheme involves volunteers reporting on the welfare of the police dogs and horses through weekly visits to the South Wales Police dog and mounted site.

This report provides an update on scheme activity from April 2023 to the end of March 2024. It highlights the work of our Independent Custody Visitors, the findings they have made and the value they provide to our communities.

## **Overview Of Independent Custody Visiting in South Wales**

In 2023-24, the South Wales Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme was provided by 19 volunteer Visitors split across two panels – East and West. The demographic breakdown of the volunteers is displayed in the table overleaf.

Our volunteers aim to conduct visits once a week to the Merthyr, Cardiff, and Bridgend Custody Suites, with an aim of three visits per fortnight to Swansea Central, though there has occasionally been a struggle and recruitment of more volunteers is required. The decision was made to increase visits to Swansea Central due to the age of the suite and the associated number of issues that were raised by Visitors. This is due to be reviewed again during 2024.

During this period, two recruitment drives took place to increase volunteers. Visitors are required to complete a probationary period of six months satisfactorily. The maximum period of appointment for Visitors is 9 years and all appointments are reviewed through interview and vetting procedures every three years in line with national guidance.

South Wales does not currently have facilities in which to hold detainees under the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2000. Consideration will be given in 2024 as to whether volunteers are required to undergo the necessary vetting and training to visit TACT detainees should the need arise at some point in the future.

## **The Governance of Our Scheme**

The two panels meet quarterly with the Custody Sergeant / Inspector and Scheme Manager, to raise issues of concern arising from visits, highlight good practice, and discuss any changes in policy and procedure that impact on the local Custody Suites and the visiting role. Each panel is chaired by a Visitor appointed by panel members for a period of three years.

A summary of issues noted in the previous quarter is compiled by the Scheme Manager in consultation with panel members, which is circulated to the Sergeant/Inspector and members for consideration in advance of the meeting. Additional issues can be raised on the day.

Panel meetings in 2023/24 included discussion around the following themes:

- Staffing levels
- Detainee Vulnerability
- Sanitary Products in Custody
- Visitors Training
- Young people in Custody
- Menopause in Custody
- Distraction items
- Liaison & Diversion Services
- Custody Medical Rooms
- Religious materials
- Exercise Yard in Custody
- Custody general conditions

The demographic breakdown of the volunteer Visitors is shown in the table below:

<b>South Wales Scheme Membership</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
18 to 25 years	0.0%
26 to 50 years	47%
51 to 70 years	21%
71 + years	32%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	74%
Male	26%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Asian/ Asian British	0.0%
Mixed	0.0%
Pakistani	5.26%
White - British	47.37%
White- Welsh	42.11%
Not defined	5.26%
<b>Disability</b>	
No	79%
Yes	16%
Not defined	5%
<b>Religion</b>	
Christianity	38.64%
Muslim	5.26%
No religion	31.58%
Other	0%
Prefer not to say	21.05%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual	15.78%
Heterosexual/Straight	78.9%
Prefer not to say	5.26%
<b>Welsh Language</b>	
Non-Welsh Speaker	68.4%
Welsh Learner	26.3%
Welsh Speaker	5.3%

**Police Custody in South Wales**



Image of Merthyr Custody Suite

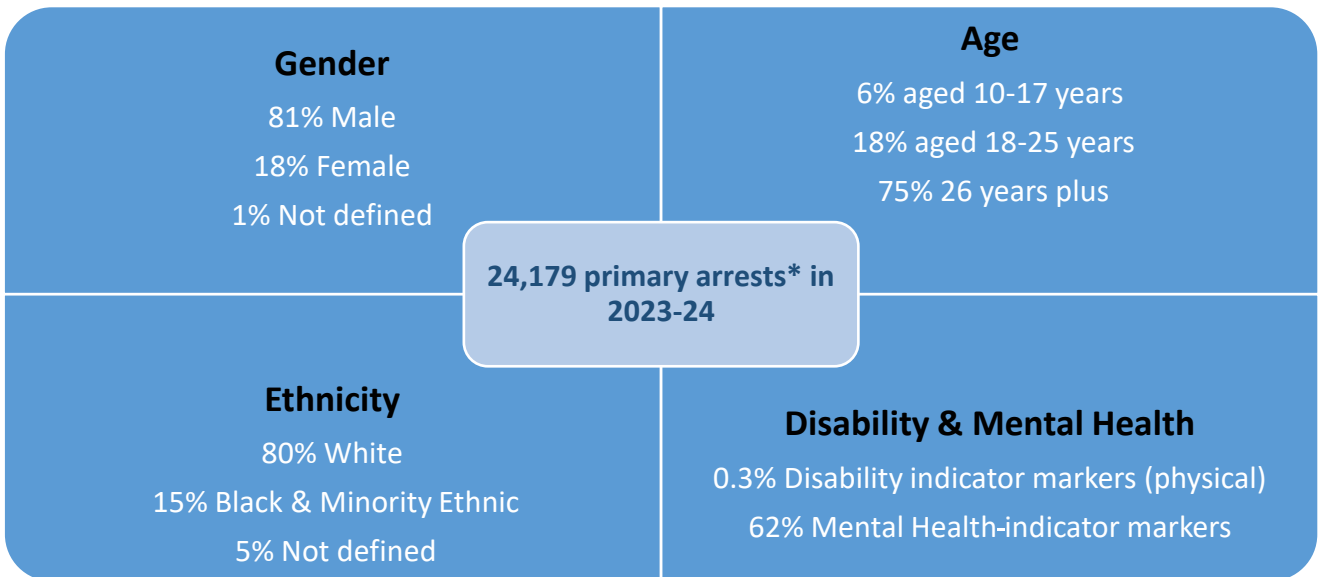
South Wales Police operates 4 Custody Suites, and these are in Cardiff Bay, Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea, and Bridgend. The Custody Suites in Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend were built in 2014 and are located away from the town centres. Each suite has 42 cells and are both identical in design. The oldest suite in the South Wales area is in Swansea with its estate being part of Swansea Central police station, with 27 cells. Cardiff Bay police station was completed in 2009 and the suite is designed over 2 levels, with 60 cells in total.

**Policing Demand**

In South Wales during 2023-2024, there were around 24,179 primary arrests\* leading to detention.

Outlined below is a breakdown of detainees in Custody in 2023-24:

**Custody Detainees (2023-24)**



\*Primary arrest refers to the offence for which an individual is originally arrested and brought into Custody. Subsequently an individual may be arrested for further offences. This term is used to avoid double counting.



## Independent Custody Visiting Data

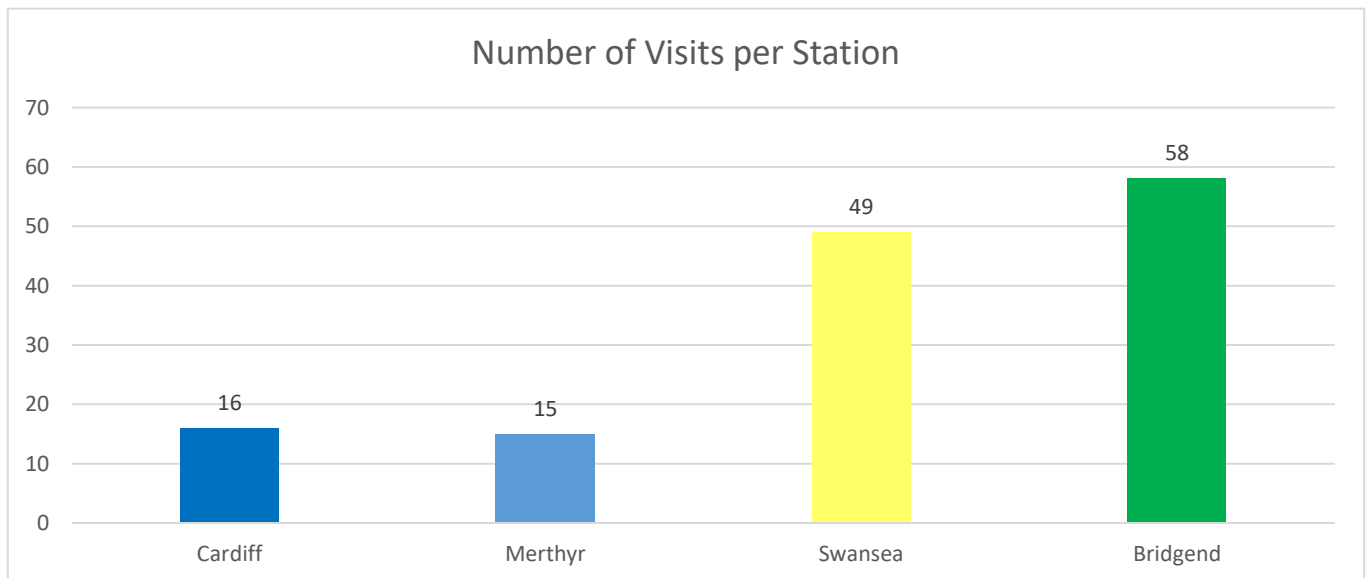
The following data refers to visits that were carried out between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

A total of 138 visits took place in 2023-24 with 32.66% of the 'available' detainees visited (a total of 983 detainees with 321 visited). Detainees may not be 'available' for a range of reasons including being asleep, intoxicated, in interview, using hygiene facilities, or because of advice not to visit specific detainees due to them being very distressed or aggressive.

As well as the 321 detainees who were interviewed by the volunteers, a further 362 detainees received some oversight either by assuming consent to view a Custody record or by viewing a detainee through the hatch, for example.

In 2023 - 24, 31 visits were carried out to Cardiff and Merthyr and 107 to Bridgend and Swansea. In previous years, panel members justified an increase in the number of visits to Swansea due to the number of building/estate issues raised during visits. This will be reviewed during 2023-24.

The chart below provides a breakdown of the number of visits per station.



There are occasions when the suites are very busy and due to time constraints on the escorting Custody staff, the Visitors prioritise detainees to interview. Visitors will prioritise females and young people. The Visitors spoke to 48 young people during their visits (8 female and 40 male).

## Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Findings



Volunteers play a vital role in highlighting any issues within Custody and ensuring these are brought to the attention of Custody staff and the Scheme Manager to be rectified as soon as possible. If the suite is busy, the volunteers prioritise speaking with young people and females first to ensure their needs have been fulfilled, before speaking with any other detainees. The issues raised by the Visitors could include any concerns for detainee's welfare and any estate/repair issues. Visitors will note apparent issues or concerns from their visits on a report form.

A copy of the report is sent to the Scheme Manager to process. An email copy of the report form is then sent to Custody. Notable issues will be raised to the Custody Sergeant at the time of visit. All issues arising are discussed during panel meetings and a police representative will provide the Visitors with an update or feedback on their findings. Thematic issues are collated by the Scheme Manager and are detailed on a report and discussed during the meeting. National themes that are highlighted by the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) are also shared and discussed with the volunteers.

Any urgent issues are addressed by the Visitors at the time of the visit and are raised immediately with a Custody Sergeant or Inspector. Visitors will then record the information on their report forms and will also inform the Scheme Manager.

When a detainee highlights a concern or makes an informal complaint to Visitors, this is followed up with a Custody staff member and the detainee's Custody record can be checked by the Visitors, with their permission. Detainees are advised that if they wish to make a complaint, they should speak to the officer in charge.

Visitors 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. Whilst overall findings are positive, it is recognised that detainees may not always understand or remember what they can ask for and therefore needed to be reminded. Visitors also monitor the distribution of distraction items and use of the exercise yard, particularly for young

people and again make detainees aware of these items should they be allowed them following risk assessment.

In the last year, Visitors have monitored the storage of religious items in Custody Suites and highlighted their findings in report forms and panel meetings. There has since been an improvement to the storage of religious items in Custody Suites and they are readily available for detainees should they need.

Detainee dignity is another key focus for Visitors and ensuring that detainees are receiving appropriate care. One example of where Visitors have made a difference was when they raised that there whilst there were sanitary pads in Custody, there were no tampons available to detainees which has caused issues with some detainees. Following feedback, tampons have been introduced into all Custody suites. Visitors are also proactive in checking that detainees are being asked if they want to speak in private with a member of the Custody staff (of the same sex as the detainee if they wish) about any personal needs or concerns that may have whilst they are detained.

Visitors have continued to raise any issues with conditions of the Custody suites and how accessible all suites are to those with physical disabilities. Swansea Custody Suite is closely monitored and often reported that renovations are required. At this year's panel meetings, Visitors have raised that renovations and defects often take a long time to be resolved. Visitors will continue to review and report their observations on these issues, alongside any others that they pick up.

It is important to note that praise and positive comments are also recorded by the Visitors and the Scheme Manager ensures these are logged and shared with police representatives. During panel meetings, Visitors will voice their praise for staff members in Custody, which they feel is important to share. Below are some examples of the positive comments that have been noted by the Visitors during the year:

- Custody staff helpful and welcoming to Visitors.
- Vast amount of food items available to detainees.
- Custody staff positive communication with detainees.

Throughout 2023-24 there were 76 reported adverse incidents in Custody across the force area. An 'adverse incident' is defined by the College of Policing as 'any incident which, if allowed to continue to its ultimate conclusion, would have resulted in death or serious injury to any person'.

These issues are brought to the attention of the Scheme Manager by Custody staff and discussed during panel meetings with the volunteers. Police representatives provided a brief



ICV Conference, the Visitors received input from both South Wales Police Custody and the Commissioner's team regarding the Inspection and any progress made so far. Visitors were placed into breakout rooms to discuss the recommendations and monitoring in further detail.

Visitors continue to report findings in relation to issues raised such as use of anti-rip clothing, children and young people in Custody and length of detention.

### Independent Custody Scrutiny Panel

In April 2023, the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) issued a joint guide they had developed, with input from Ministry of Justice, ICVA and Home Office for the Introduction of Custody Detention Scrutiny Panels. It was agreed by South Wales Police and the Commissioner's team that an 'Independent Custody Scrutiny Panel' was to be developed in line with the guidance to help monitor the progression of the HMICFRS recommendations, ensuring positive progression in this area. The first Panel meeting took place in May 2024.

### Training

In November 2023, Visitors received input at the Annual Conference from Adferiad who provide an Appropriate Adult service to South Wales Police. The training included an overview of the history of the Appropriate Adult role and its remit, real life accounts from Appropriate Adults and challenges. Visitors also received input from ICVA regarding the history of Custody visiting and current workstreams such as the anti-rip pilot<sup>2</sup> and menopause work<sup>3</sup>.

In the past year, Visitors received training from the Scheme Manager regarding physical disabilities in Custody and refresher training. Throughout this period, the Scheme Manager has utilised ICVA updates and training to keep volunteers engaged and updated. South Wales Police have also delivered training to Visitors on mental health in Custody.

Visitors and the Scheme Manager attended the Custody Detention Officer training in South Wales Police Headquarters to provide a presentation.

The presentation included a briefing on the history of the Scheme, a walk-through visit and what is expected of Custody staff during visits. This was a useful event to showcase the Scheme and provide an insight to new recruits as to the purpose and benefits of Custody Visitors.

### Future

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<sup>2</sup> [Anti-Rip Clothing - An Interim Evaluation of the Joint Pilot - ICVA](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Menopause in Police Custody - ICVA](#)

## Engagement and Recruitment

The Commissioner's team recognises the need to recruit additional volunteers in the 2024/2025 period to resume weekly visits to each Custody Suite and to improve the diversity of the panels to better reflect the community of South Wales. The Scheme Manager will continue to work with the Commissioner's Engagement Team to share ideas on how the Scheme can actively recruit to represent the community of South Wales through increasing equality and diversity.



South Wales is currently quality assured as a **SILVER** scheme!

In November 2023, ICVA awarded South Wales ICV Scheme the 'Silver' Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) award. This is an independent quality standard to assess scheme effectiveness and covers several areas including:

- Recruiting and training
- Managing volunteers
- Communications
- Holding the force to account
- Transparency and public reassurance
- Detainee welfare
- Investing in and supporting the Scheme Manager

At silver level, our scheme has developed detailed training plans for our volunteers and run governance processes that enshrine police engagement and buy in to resolving difficult issues. On the ground, silver means Independent Custody Visitors spend longer looking at custody records of detainees and focusing further on detainee welfare.



## Animal Welfare Scheme

The South Wales Animal Welfare Scheme is currently facilitated by 9 volunteers. The volunteers carry out regular unannounced visits to the Dog and Mounted Section of South Wales Police to observe and report on the welfare, stabling and kennelling arrangements for police horses and dogs.



Image of a Police Horse with Animal Welfare Visitors at the Waterton Site

Visitors note the number of dogs and horses on site and any specific health or welfare concerns, as well as reporting on the physical condition of the site, the condition of animal transport vehicles and any repair issues. Panel meetings are held twice a year and are attended by staff, officers, volunteers, a local veterinarian, and a representative from the Dogs Trust.

Visitors can highlight any concerns they have, and all issues are discussed with Police representatives. An experienced Visitor, appointed by the members of the panel, currently chairs all panel meetings.

Visitors are guided by the 'five freedoms' for animal welfare which are annexed to the Scheme Guidelines:

- 1) **Freedom from hunger and thirst** – ready access to fresh water and a healthy diet.
- 2) **Freedom from pain, injury, and suffering** – prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- 3) **Freedom from fear and distress** – conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.
- 4) **Freedom to express normal behaviour** – sufficient space, proper facilities, and company of the animal's own kind.
- 5) **Freedom from discomfort** – an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting and sleeping place.

During 2023/24, the Visitors made 32 visits to the Dog & Mounted section at the Waterton site to check on the police dogs and horses. This is a significant increase from 2022/2023 whereby 11 visits were carried out. This increase is due recruitment of more Visitors, both from existing ICVs and members of the community.



The following issues and areas were noted by the Visitors in 2023-24:

- Kennels and stables in need of repairs.
- Storage of food for animals.
- Appearance of dogs' coats.
- Defective dog runs, one of which caused injury to a dog.
- CCTV and Security Cameras.
- Shortage of staff.
- Minimal staff first aid trained.
- Staffing hours.
- Temperature controls in kennels.
- Shaded areas required for kennels so that dogs can shelter from the elements.

All issues were identified and shared with the Yard Manager. Following Visitor's reporting of the necessary works required, extensive renovations have and are continuing to take place to fix the issues with the kennels and stables. For example, 40 kennels have now been fitted with underfloor heating and temporary work has taken place on the dog runs. The Commissioner's team will continue to monitor the progress of all issues identified.

During this period, Visitors identified that two dogs appeared unwell. The Commissioner's team are in ongoing communication with the Yard Manager as to the health of the dogs.

The following positive comments were noted by the Visitors and fed back to staff and officers:

- Warm reception from the staff on arrival to the yard.
- All vehicles in good condition.



Image of a Police Dog with Animal Welfare Visitors at the Waterton Site

Visitors also monitor any dogs in kennels who are awaiting re-homing, in instances where they may have been rejected as police dogs or awaiting the retirement of their handlers. Visitors note any illnesses, injuries and look out for any indications of stress. The cleanliness of kennels, stables and the site are also noted.

## **How South Wales Police Responds to Our Findings**

“Independent Custody Visitors (ICV’s) play an essential role for SWP custody services acting as a scrutiny group overseeing the work undertaken with our Custody units.

The feedback we get from them goes a long way to ensuring we are abiding by PACE and practising ethical standards for our detainees.

The working relationship we have with the ICV’s is certainly very strong with regular interactions both within the custody units and with their management team within the Police and Crime Commissioners office.”

**Chief Inspector Anwar**  
**Custody Services, South Wales Police**

## **Conclusion**

The Commissioner and their team express gratitude towards all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to ensure the welfare and rights of detainees in South Wales Police custody have been upheld. All Visitors are thanked for continuing to bring their knowledge and expertise to the scheme and playing an essential part in our work and oversight of South Wales.

To find out more about your commissioner or how to apply to become an Independent Custody visitor, visit us via:



**/commissionersw**

**[www.southwalescommissioner.org.uk](http://www.southwalescommissioner.org.uk)**

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