



**MINUTES AND ACTIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME
HELD BOTH REMOTELY ON TEAMS AND IN PERSON IN HAWTHORN MEETING
ROOM,
POLICE HEADQUARTERS ON 18th FEBRUARY 2026**

Present: Jean Munton - Chair, Independent Custody Visitor (JM)
Mike Hallinan – Independent Custody Visitor (MH)
Linda Mason - Independent Custody Visitor (LM)
David Salmon - Independent Custody Visitor (DS)
Richard Holland - Independent Custody Visitor (RH)
Andrea Williams - Independent Custody Visitor (AW)
Alex Robinson - Independent Custody Visitor (AR)

Also in attendance:

Siân Curley – Chief Executive, OPCC (SC)
Natalie Merrick - Office Manager OPCC (NM)
CDO Kevin Watkins – Custody Ystrad (CDO/W)

The meeting commenced at 6:07pm.

	Notes and Actions	Action
1.	Apologies	
	Apologies for absence were received from L Langley.	
2.	Minutes and Actions from Previous Meetings	
	The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record. The Chair welcomed the Chief Executive for the Police and Crime Commissioner's office Siân Curley (SC) to the meeting and noted that she was attending in place of the scheme manager.	

	SC introduced herself and apologised on behalf the scheme manager who normally worked with the group. The Chair asked that best wishes be passed on to the scheme manager. The Chair noted apologies for absence. The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October were presented for comment. Members were invited to raise any observations or propose amendments. MH queried some wording in the original minutes, and it was agreed that the relevant section would be amended. The Chair asked that the proposed amendment be provided either before the end of the meeting or by email to the office, specifying the wording to be corrected. Subject to that amendment, the minutes were proposed for approval.	NM/CH
3.	Scheme Update and Performance Framework Update	
	SC apologised for not having circulated the update in advance, explaining that some quality assurance work was still required. Information had been provided by the scheme administrator, but further checking was needed. SC confirmed that Alan Heywood had now left the scheme for personal reasons, reducing the number of active visitors to nine. Between the previous meeting and the present one, thirteen visits had been scheduled. Twelve visit forms had been received, with one form missing from November. SC stated that further enquiries were needed to establish whether that visit had taken place and, if so, to obtain the missing form. JM asked which week the missing November visit referred to, and SC confirmed that only "November" was recorded. The Chair advised SC to email her and LM, they had a visit arranged for Friday and could check the custody visitors' book. If the visit had taken place, they would photocopy the entry and ensure the form was submitted. She confirmed that once the visit was identified, the form could be located and forwarded. SC reported that there had been a good mix of visits across mornings, afternoons and evenings, but none at weekends during the period reviewed. Entry times had been positive, with approximately half of visits gaining access within five minutes and the remainder within fifteen minutes.	NM/CH NM/JM

	The Chair noted that this aligned with performance expectations and that, in practice, access often felt quicker. The Chair commented that five minutes from ringing the doorbell to gaining entry was not unreasonable and reflected the expected standard. Several members agreed that access had generally been very prompt and that custody staff were currently performing well in this regard. SC noted that access times had been very good recently and that this was a positive development, particularly given the longer waits experienced in the past. The Chair added that she had spoken with CDO Watkins before the meeting, and he fully understood the importance of prompt access for the visitors. She also referred back to the previous minutes, which had highlighted occasions when officers brought in to cover custody duties were not familiar with the visitors' role. Members observed that police officers had sometimes been taken off frontline duties to cover the custody desk, and that this continued to happen. SC stated that this reinforced the need for proper induction so that anyone brought in to cover understood both the ICV role and the wider requirements of custody work. CDO Watkins had indicated that, similar to the approach taken with new trainees, staff unfamiliar with custody procedures should initially shadow experienced colleagues when dealing with visitors. The Chair explained that she routinely gave a short explanation of the Independent Custody Visitor role to any new or unfamiliar staff members. SC explained that the next item was the performance framework update. Although the panel had already received a version of the report, there were some gaps and the document required further quality assurance. Additional visits had taken place since the data was first compiled, and SC wished to ensure that the information was fully up to date before it was shared more widely. SC confirmed that performance remained on track and that the quarter had been very positive overall. The Chair agreed, noting that the quality of visits and the cooperation from custody staff had improved significantly. She commented that there had been periods in the past when staff appeared reluctant to engage with visitors and when access had felt unnecessarily difficult, but that the situation had changed markedly. Recent visits had been smooth and supportive.	
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	SC then raised the matter of visitor identification cards, reminding the panel that these carried expiry dates and needed to be kept current. The Chair reported that all visitor cards had expired on 11 January. SC explained that the force had introduced a new system for issuing cards, which had caused some delays, but confirmed that the matter would be followed up and prioritised to ensure all visitors received updated cards promptly. The Chair then raised the next item concerning recruitment. She explained that the panel had received no information about whether new visitors had been recruited, whether interviews had taken place, or whether any candidates were awaiting appointment. SC confirmed that this would be checked. A panel member noted that the vacancy had previously appeared in the <i>Torfaen</i> weekly newsletter but had not been published there recently. SC explained that adverts were always circulated to all partner organisations, including local authorities, but publication depended on whether those bodies chose to include them and whether they had space in their newsletters. The Chair noted that if new volunteers had been recruited, the panel would need to prepare for training visits. She explained that the scheme manager handled the initial induction, after which new volunteers were required to complete several visits with experienced visitors before being signed off. SC confirmed that recruitment was in progress but not yet finalised. The Chair asked whether there had been any further information about the possible transfer of responsibilities to local authorities. SC confirmed that the White Paper had been published but offered no clarity in relation to the scheme and did not indicate that the scheme or workforce would transfer to local authorities. SC explained that work was ongoing with Welsh Government and the WLGA to develop a model for Wales, as the White Paper contained only minimal reference to Welsh arrangements but acknowledged that the position in Wales was differed from England. The Chair asked whether the OPCC staff would transfer to a new body if responsibilities changed. SC said this was still unknown, as no decision had been made about which organisation—if any—would take on those duties. The Chair noted that the visitor scheme must continue because it was a statutory requirement. SC agreed, explaining that although statutory functions would remain, the White Paper did not identify which body would assume them once the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) role ended, and that this uncertainty was the main issue.	NM/CH NM/CH
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	SC explained that Welsh Government had some flexibility to work with the WLGA on a Welsh-specific model, though any final decision would still require Home Office approval. She noted that UK-level policymakers appeared to misunderstand the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner, assuming it focused mainly on governance. Much of the PCC work involved commissioning diversion, custody-related services, early intervention, youth programmes, and drug and alcohol support. Most of the budget was directed toward reducing demand on policing, while holding the Chief Constable to account formed only part of the role. The Chair observed that some responsibilities might ultimately fall to the police, although this was still unclear. SC responded that the Chief Constable had been clear that if funding currently used for prevention and early-intervention work were redirected solely into police officer numbers, the force would not be able to keep pace with demand. She explained that removing preventative services would increase pressure on policing and that the value of prevention was difficult to evidence. A panel member commented that preventing crime was the core purpose of a police force. SC agreed, emphasising that prevention, rather than detection, was central to the role of the PCC. The Chair added that without preventative work, the police would be unable to manage current levels of demand, let alone any increase. The Chair expressed concern that the ICV scheme could be overlooked or absorbed into a wider administrative function during any restructuring. She noted the risk that, if responsibility were transferred to a local authority, it might assume existing staff could run the scheme without appreciating the specialist knowledge required. She acknowledged the uncertainty faced by PCC staff and the potential for job losses but stressed the importance of ensuring the scheme was not diminished or mishandled during any transition. The Chair asked to be kept updated on any developments, particularly those affecting the administration or independence of the ICV scheme. SC acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that the panel would be informed as soon as any firm information on future governance arrangements became available. She reassured members that all statutory functions, including the ICV scheme, had been formally highlighted to the Home Office as essential and must be protected. She added that every PCC office across Wales and England had submitted the same message, and the Home Office would ultimately need to determine where each statutory responsibility would sit within any new structure. SC noted that the situation was still highly uncertain and subject to change.	
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	She explained that both the upcoming Welsh Government elections and the following year's local authority elections could shift the direction of current discussions before the planned end of PCCs in May 2028. SC said the situation had been upsetting, and staff were particularly troubled by the suggestion that their work had been described as part of a failed experiment. She reported that the office had received strong support from the Chief Constable, the force, the Police Federation and Unison, and confirmed that staff were eligible to join Unison and that the union was fully aware of the circumstances. A panel member noted that union backing would be important given the uncertainty ahead. The Chair stressed that, whatever political changes occurred, an independent body would still be needed to hold the police to account, as the police could not oversee themselves. SC agreed but noted that some proposals suggested shifting accountability to larger regional bodies or even to Welsh Government. She explained that policing was not currently devolved and devolving it would require a major constitutional change. The Home Office had already indicated that it did not support devolving policing powers to Wales. A panel member asked what devolving policing would involve. SC explained that while Welsh Government already oversaw most public services, policing and criminal justice were still reserved to the UK Government. Devolution would mean transferring responsibility for policing policy and oversight to Welsh Government, but this was not something the Home Office currently supported. SC explained that policing in Wales often became complicated because most partner agencies were accountable to Welsh Government, while policing remained the responsibility of UK Government. She gave the example of the new Home Office <i>Violence Against Women and Girls</i> strategy, which operated alongside a separate Welsh Government strategy. Police forces in Wales therefore had to comply with both sets of requirements, which could create duplication or divergence depending on how closely aligned the two strategies were. A panel member asked whether this implied Welsh Government did not value policing. SC explained that Welsh Government funded additional PCSOs, showing clear support for neighbourhood policing. The issue was not a lack of value but the absence of ring-fenced funding: unless money was specifically designated for policing, Welsh Government could allocate it according to its own priorities. When funding was ring fenced it reached policing; when it was not, it could be diverted elsewhere.	
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4.	Custody Update	
	KW confirmed that the cell usage system had been improved and was now fully operational, which members agreed was a significant step forward. All custody suites had been updated. Visitors noted that staff were becoming increasingly confident with the revised processes and expectations. Overall understanding and compliance had improved markedly, and the position was now considered much stronger. KW reported that custody staffing levels remained stable, with existing shift patterns maintained and additional schedules introduced. Recruitment continued, with efforts focused on ensuring new starters understood the demands of the role. Members were informed that another new recruit was due to join the team shortly. KW explained that custody staffing levels varied between teams. Some were well resourced, while others occasionally experienced shortages. Demand also played a major role: when detainee numbers were low, staffing could be managed more easily, but high numbers increased pressure. It was reported that there were sometimes delays in receiving the cell-usage form, and that the lists provided could be long and include names already crossed out because those individuals were no longer in custody. The Chair stressed that the panel only needed the detainees actually in the cells at the time of the visit. KW explained that the system could not generate a list showing only detainees currently in custody. When individuals were released or transferred, their names were removed, but the system could not produce a filtered, up-to-date list limited to those still in the cells. The Chair noted that this differed from previous years, suggesting the change was likely due to updates in the computer system. The Chair asked when the 24-hour period shown on the form actually began. KW explained that the system used fixed time parameters, and the chosen start time could affect which detainees appeared on the list. For example, if the 24-hour window began at 06:00, anyone booked in shortly before that might not be included. He added that staff had not yet identified an alternative report that would reliably show only those currently in the cells. KW clarified that detainees held for more than 24 hours would not necessarily be missed, as those awaiting court could remain in custody longer and would still appear on the list.	

	The issue was not the length of detention but the system's inability to filter the report to show only those currently in the cells. KW asked whether the panel had further questions and sought feedback on the presence of new starters in custody areas. He explained that new staff were paired with experienced colleagues and positioned at or near the cell door. He asked if this felt intimidating during visits. The Chair confirmed that panel members did not find this intimidating and emphasised that they would not want staff to feel uncomfortable or unprepared when accompanying them. A panel member reported that their recent visit had been extremely positive. They were seen promptly, shown around the custody suite without delay, and given quick access to detainees despite staff being very busy. The Sgt and custody staff were described as helpful and efficient. The panel member said it was the quickest and smoothest visit they had experienced, and another panel member agreed. Overall, the visit left a very positive impression. A panel member sought clarification about access to dry cells after encountering two detainees held there for swabbing on a previous visit. They asked whether visitors were still permitted to enter such cells given the risk of cross-contamination. KW confirmed that entry was restricted in these situations to protect evidential integrity. The Chair added that, during the visit in question, both detainees had been asleep, so the panel had not attempted to speak with them. It was noted that communication could have taken place at the cell door, as the dry cells had large glass panels, but the visitors had chosen not to disturb the detainees. The Chair noted that the panel understood the need to avoid compromising evidence and accepted that access to dry cells would not always be possible. It was agreed that detainees could be spoken to at the cell door when appropriate, and that decisions would continue to be made on a case-by-case basis in line with operational requirements. The Chair noted that speaking to detainees at the door carried some risk, as a detainee could approach and make physical contact even without any action from the visitor. However, the panel agreed that they rarely came into close proximity with detainees and that maintaining appropriate distance was already standard practice during visits. The Chair thanked KW for attending the meeting and thanked him for his contribution. A panel member asked about reports that courts were sitting only three days a week due to staffing shortages and whether this affected the flow of detainees. KW said detainees were still being taken to court at the usual time and he had not seen any reduction in availability.	
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	The Chair noted that courts could not hold detainees indefinitely and that delays were reportedly linked to a shortage of legal advisers. The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and brought the meeting to a close. Members expressed their thanks in return.	
5.	Any Other Business	
	No other business discussed.	
6.	Date of Next Meeting	
	The next meeting will be held at 6pm, 22nd April 2026.	

Jane Mudd Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent	
My decision is as I have recorded in this paper	
Signed 	Date 04.08.2026
Contact Officer	
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Background papers	

