



**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
FOR HERTFORDSHIRE



**INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS SCHEME
ANNUAL REPORT
2025 – 2026**



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Foreword by Jonathan Ash-Edwards, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire



I am pleased to introduce this Annual Report for the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme for 2025–2026. The scheme continues to play a vital role in strengthening public confidence by providing independent oversight of the treatment, care and welfare of people detained in police custody.

Over the past year, volunteer Independent Custody Visitors have demonstrated remarkable dedication, undertaking regular unannounced visits across our custody suites and engaging directly with detainees to ensure their rights are upheld and their dignity respected. Their work offers invaluable reassurance to the public and supports continuous improvement within Hertfordshire Constabulary.

It is encouraging to see that the overwhelming majority of detainees reported positive experiences, with very few issues raised and high levels of satisfaction with their treatment. This reflects the professionalism and commitment of custody staff, as well as the effectiveness of scrutiny and partnership working between the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Constabulary.

This year has also seen ongoing progress in key areas such as healthcare provision, data quality, and the reduction in the use of anti-rip clothing. At the same time, the report highlights opportunities for further improvement, particularly in strengthening volunteer recruitment, enhancing diversity, and maintaining high standards in facilities and processes.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to our Independent Custody Visitors for their commitment and professionalism. Their contribution is central to ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness within our policing system.

I am also delighted to announce the scheme has been awarded Gold from the ICVA Quality Assurance Framework assessment, another testament to the work undertaken by everyone involved.

As we look ahead, I remain committed to supporting and developing the ICV scheme so that it continues to reflect the communities it serves and provides robust, independent assurance across all aspects of custody

Jonathan Ash-Edwards
Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Foreword by the Chief Inspector of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Custody Units



I am pleased to contribute to this year's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Annual Report, which highlights the continued commitment to transparency, accountability, and the welfare of those detained within Hertfordshire's custody suites.

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme provides an essential safeguard, offering independent scrutiny of our practices and valuable reassurance to the public that detainees are treated fairly, with dignity and respect. The feedback provided by our ICV volunteers plays a crucial role in helping us maintain and improve the standards of care we deliver.

Over the past year, it is encouraging to note that 99% of detainees did not raise any issues with their treatment and care when speaking with ICVs, with only a very small number of issues raised. This is a testament to the professionalism and dedication of custody staff, who work in often challenging circumstances to ensure the rights and welfare of detainees are upheld.

We have also seen positive progress in key areas, including improved healthcare provision and increased consistency in recording data, particularly around self-defined ethnicity. We have also seen positive progress in key areas, including maintenance across the suites, improved healthcare provision and increased consistency in recording data, particularly around self-defined ethnicity. At the same time, the report has highlighted areas where further improvements are needed, such as ensuring resources are consistently available, and continuing to strengthen staffing resilience.

I am grateful to our Independent Custody Visitors for their ongoing commitment and constructive feedback, and to custody staff for their continued professionalism and willingness to engage positively with scrutiny.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to building on this progress, addressing the challenges identified, and ensuring that our custody services continue to meet the highest standards of care, fairness and accountability.

**Paul Mitson,
Chief Inspector,
Head of Hertfordshire Custody**

Overview of the Scheme

Under the Police Reform Act 2002, all police force areas are required to have a custody visiting scheme. The scheme's independent checks give the public reassurance that detainees are being treated fairly, that their legal rights and entitlements¹ are given, as well as checking their welfare and dignity are being maintained. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) also review the custody suites for issues around cleanliness and maintenance. The scheme also provides assurances to detainees at a time when they may be feeling vulnerable or confused.

Following the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act (2011), the PCC assumed responsibility for the operation of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Hertfordshire. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) manages and supports the smooth running of the scheme including the day-to-day enquiries, recruitment of the volunteers and improvements and development to the scheme.

ICVs are unpaid volunteers who live, work or study in Hertfordshire – at the end of March 2026 we had 19 ICVs and looking to recruit more into the role. Recruitment will be a focus over the coming year to replace those who have already left and those who will be reaching the end of their tenure in the next 12 months. This recruitment drive will also make renewed efforts to attract volunteers from diverse backgrounds to better reflect the communities the scheme serves.

In ordinary times all visits are unannounced and can take place at any time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The ICVs are trained to introduce themselves to detainees in custody and ask questions that ensures their treatment is fair and that they have access to their rights and entitlements. At the beginning of each visit, ICVs are told how many detainees are in custody at the suite being visited. The detainees are then introduced to the ICVs and, subject to their consent and availability a visit is undertaken.

ICVs complete a report form summarising their visit to each individual detainee. This is then forwarded to the scheme manager at the OPCC, with a hard copy retained by custody staff. Concerns raised by ICVs are reported to the Custody Inspector or escorting officer at the time of the visit and then submitted to the scheme manager for review. The scheme manager highlights any concerns with the Custody Chief Inspector via email, telephone, or during regular meetings, depending on the urgency. The ICVs can also raise general matters arising from visits at their regular half-yearly meetings with the OPCC.

The position of an ICV is an unpaid, voluntary role. All ICVs are encouraged to regularly complete an expense form to allow any costs associated with visits to be reimbursed by

¹ An extensive list of these legal rights are provided under the section Rights of Detainees

the Commissioner. The Commissioner also incurs other related costs for running the scheme including, but not limited to OPCC staff time, ICV training, printing, some limited catering for panel meetings, conference booking fees, and OPCC membership of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA). Over the year, training has been carried out online so no catering has been required for in-person meetings, the scheme manager attended the ICVA National Conference in November 2025 at a cost of £150+VAT plus travel and OPCC Membership of ICVA was renewed at a cost of £1750+VAT. ICV Expenses claims have totalled £1,030.90.

Nationally, the Independent Custody Visitor Association² leads, supports and represents PCCs and police forces with regards to the Independent Custody Visiting schemes. The OPCC has developed a good relationship with ICVA and other scheme managers over several years. This has enabled the OPCC to ensure the scheme's aims and management are effective, and that they are kept informed of legislative changes and reforms. The subscription fee this year has also allowed them to develop and launch an ICV online training portal.

ICVA Quality Assurance

Framework

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) was introduced by the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) in April 2018. It enables schemes to reflect on how they comply with the Code of Practice and the legislation which underpins custody visiting. The QAF seeks to encourage schemes to celebrate areas of strength and achievement, promote custody visiting, drive performance, recognise the independent voice of volunteers, and increase sharing of good practice.

Having been presented with the silver award in November 2023, ICVA has since launched the revised standards (March 2025). Following a lot of hard work over the year to implement some of the changes specified in the framework we have completed our submission and are extremely pleased to state the scheme has achieved the Gold award.

Anti-Rip Clothing Scrutiny

In April 2023, a new scrutiny panel was established to review the use of anti-rip or safety clothing in custody – this was in response to recommendations in the most recent HMICFRS Inspection of Custody³. The panel is made up of ICVs and representatives

² [Home Page of ICVA \(The Independent Custody Visitors Association\)](#)

³ [HMICFRS Report on an Unannounced Inspection Visit to Police Custody Suites in Hertfordshire June 2022](#)

from the Constabulary who continue to meet on a regular basis to review incidents and ensure the use of the clothing is justified and proportionate.

Using feedback from these reviews the Constabulary has introduced changes to reduce the use of this clothing.

A review of the effectiveness of this panel has been undertaken given that the instances of use of the clothing has reduced dramatically. Upon recommendation the decision was taken by the Commissioner to disband the panel but maintain scrutiny by other means of monitoring such as Custody Chief Inspector reviews and ICVs recording any use they encounter.

Key Findings (1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026)

Number of Visits

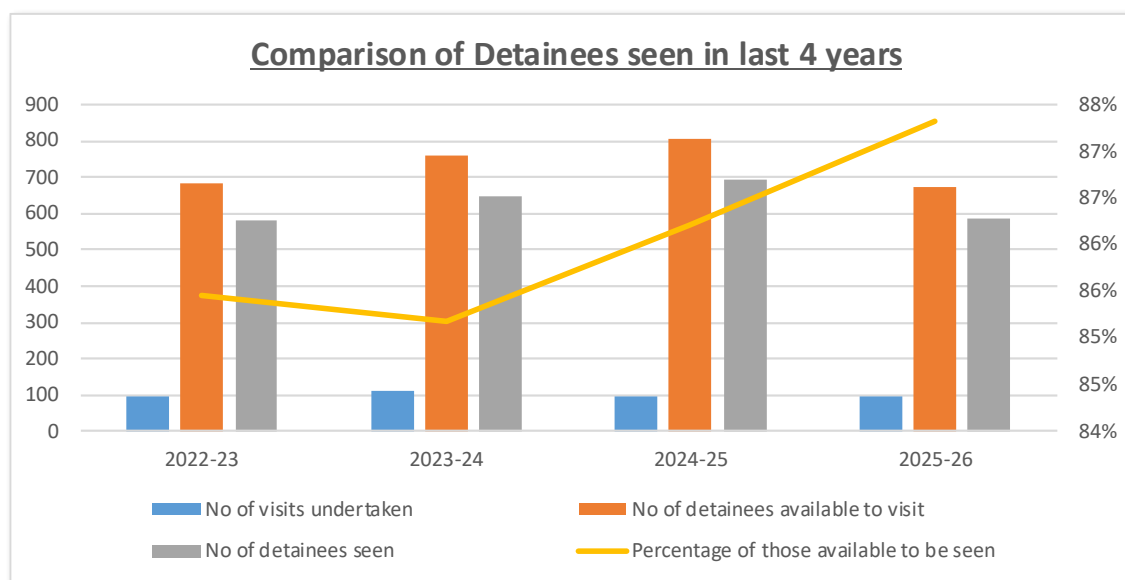
Over twelve-months, 12,699 detainees passed through both custody suites (6,563 through Hatfield and 6,136 through Stevenage).

Figure 1 shows that in 2025/26, ICVs undertook 97 custody visits, speaking to or observing a total of 586 detainees from a possible 671 who were available for a visit.

Figure 1: Breakdown of the visits for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

Custody Suite Visited	No. of visits undertaken	No. of detained persons held	No. of detainees available to visit	No. of detained persons visited	% of detainees visited (of those available)
Hatfield	45	516	378	335	89%
Stevenage	52	412	293	251	86%
TOTAL	97	928	671	586	87%

Figure 2: Comparison of detainees seen between 2021/22 and 2024/25



Declined Visits

Detainees who do not consent to a visit equates to 12% of the cohort (see Figure 1). This is a decrease on the previous figure of 14% and compares favourably with other forces;

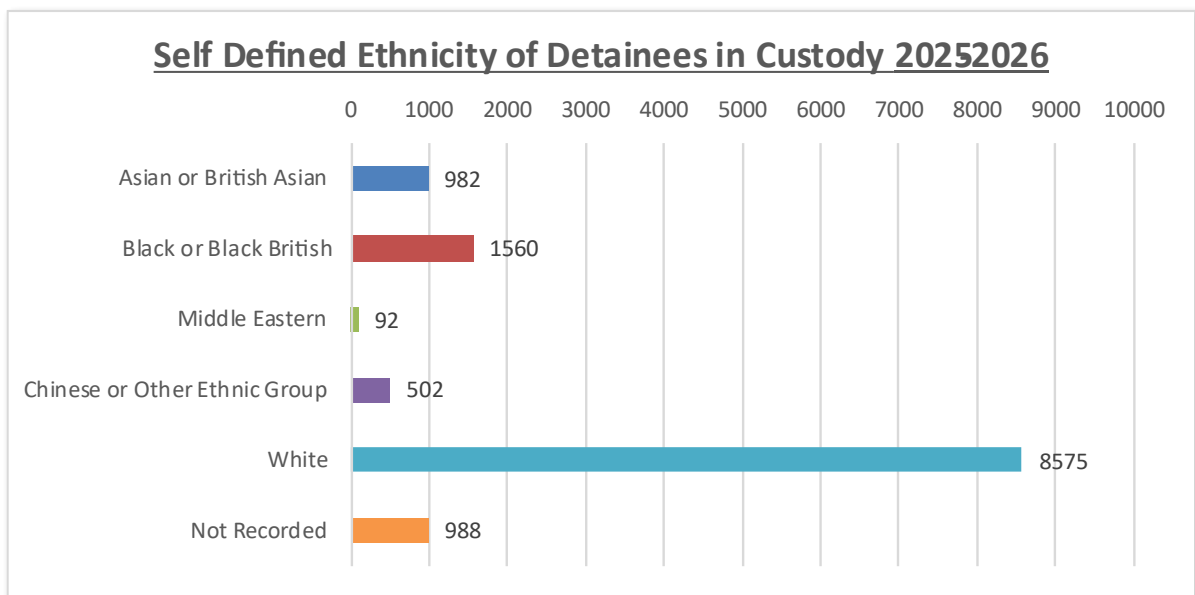
the refusal rate elsewhere is between 7% and 16%⁴. There are several reasons why ICVs are unable speak to detainees, including detainees being asleep, intoxicated or deemed too violent by custody staff. Detainees may also be unavailable if they are being interviewed, they may be in Court, with a health care professional or providing a DNA sample.

We will continue monitoring refusal data and try to find ways of improving the interactions between detainees and ICVs.

Detainee Data

Figure 3 shows that the proportion of ‘Not Recorded’ self-defined ethnicity has once again decreased significantly on the previous year and now accounts for 8% of records, down from 19% the previous year. This shows that the monitoring and addressing of the issue of non-recording has had a direct impact on the data.

Figure 3: Self-Defined Ethnicity of those passing through custody 2025-2026



Profile of the Independent Custody Visitors

At the end of 2024/25 there were 19 ICVs supporting the scheme who live in Hertfordshire. While short of our target of retaining around 30-35 volunteers, recruitment has met with challenges in reaching interested members of the community, which is being addressed through updated social media presence, the level of engagement and commitment among the existing cohort of volunteers is high, which means the scheme operates well and further recruitment will be targeted over the next year.

⁴ Taken from annual reports and direct enquiries with other forces.

ICVs are asked to fill in a voluntary information disclosure agreement. From the data available, 53% of volunteers are male, 47% are female. The breakdown of ethnicity and age can be seen in see Figures 4⁵ and 5⁶ below. Forthcoming recruitment campaigns will focus more notably on how we engage people from all backgrounds to increase diversity among our ICVs.

Figure 4: Ethnicity profile of the Independent Custody Visitors

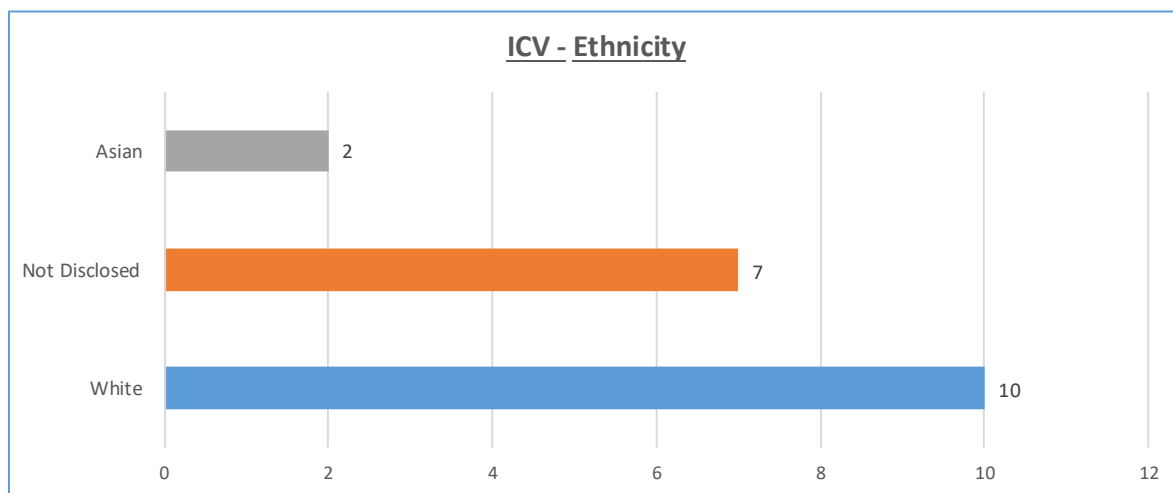
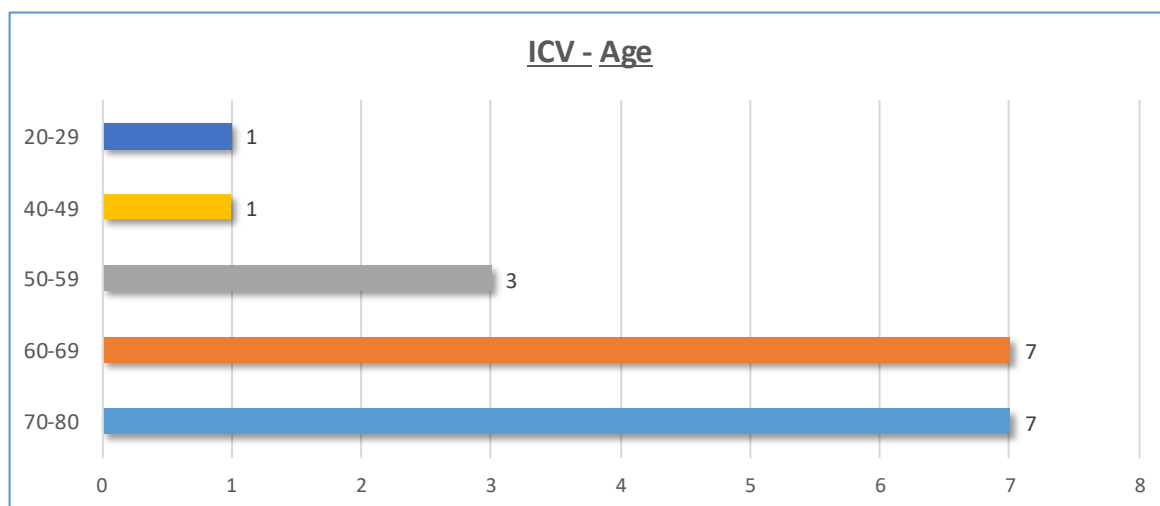


Figure 5: Age profile of the Independent Custody Visitors



⁵ According to the Office for National Statistics 2021 population denominators, Hertfordshire's population demographics shows ethnicity as: White 81.8%, Asian/Asian British 8.6%, Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British 3.7%, Mixed multiple ethnic group 3.8%, and other 2.1%. This information can be found at:

https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E10000015#section_5

⁶ According to the Office for National Statistics 2021 Census the comparable age range in Hertfordshire was represented by 11% aged 20-29, 21% aged 30-44, 21% aged 45-59, 6% aged 60-64, 9% aged 65-74 and 6% aged 75-84.

Matters arising from custody visits

ICVs have performed at least one visit to each custody suite per week, other than when these were closed for refurbishment. The visits take place over a 24-hour period which meets the minimum statutory requirement. We do undertake extra visits when availability permits but this has not been consistently possible in the reporting year due to volunteer capacity.

During 2025/26 of the 586 detainees visited, issues of note were recorded from only 7 detainees (1%). In total, 18 issues⁷ raised by detainees were reviewed and 35 raised by ICVs. Concerns raised by detainees primarily related to Detention Issues, specifically long detention time and the Rights of Detainee (see Figure 7).

It has been good to note that health care provision has improved under the new contract with detainees being seen and monitored regularly resulting in no complaints from detainees and only 3 instances where ICVs have specifically reported there was no cover at the time of the visit.

Overall, it is a credit to operation of Custody and the Custody staff that so few issues have been raised and 99% of detainees have been satisfied with their treatment and care.

Given the number of reported issues is very low and ethnicity is not recorded in every instance, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about bias relating to ethnicity.

Categories of issues raised by ICVs

1. Maintenance and Cleaning

Given the low number of issues raised by detainees, other categories have stood out this year. Unusually this category raised the highest number of reported issues. ICVs are regularly commenting on the cleanliness of the custody suites however some repeated issues were noted around the cleaning of the microwaves in the kitchens, dirty areas about air conditioning vents and a dirty towel left in a shower. While most of these were dealt with swiftly, the status of the air condition vents was only resolved following a deep clean towards the end of the year.

Of most significance were the repeated reports of showers being out of action due to a water leak reported on at least 12 occasions over a number of visits. While the issue had been reported multiple times there seemed to be an excessive delay in getting it fixed so further enquires were made.

⁷ More than one issue may have been reported by each detainee or may have been expressed by an ICV and exclude the positive comments

Following this it was confirmed by Estates and Facilities that the issue had actually been resolved but signage had not been removed so staff were not aware. Thanks to the intervention of the ICVs this was finally resolved and the showers put back into use.

2. Staff Issues

This was the next highest reported category with 7 issues noted. This is a general category for ICVs to highlight issues they witness or encounter in the custody suite or any general issues that do not fit into other categories.

3 of these related to complaints of low staff numbers on some shifts and at busy time. Following up with the Chief Inspector it was noted there had been sick leave and annual leave at these times but recruitment was on-going to ensure numbers could be maintained.

A further 2 issues were about delayed entry. This was due to ICVs arriving at particularly busy times and also noted that staffing levels seemed to be lower than previously encountered.

Another issue relate to being unable to find the translation sheets used to assist ICVs in some instances and when found these were not stored correctly and some appeared to be missing. This is has been subsequently addressed and it is noted that work is being done to establish the use of a specific custody translation tool to assist all staff. While language line translation services can be used this can also take time to arrange.

The final issue was an allegation made by a detainee against an officer during the booking in process. The custody record was reviewed and CCTV footage checked and it was found by all parties that the matter had been dealt with appropriately given the detainees behaviour at the time.

3. Rights of Detainee

Only 2 issues of note were recorded under this category. One where the detainee stated they had not been offered and food or drink and not been offered any medical attention. The custody record was reviewed and found that food and drink had been offered and the detainee had seen the onsite heathcare.

The second was a claim the detainee had not received their rights on booking in. During speaking to the ICVs it was clear they actually couldn't remember whether they had. Again the custody record was reviewed which stated that rights had previously been given but the detainee would be refreshed on this.

4. Other issue

No other serious issues of note were recorded. There were 3 complaints of long detention times, two being due to court delays and one where the case had been significantly reviewed and was deemed to be of a very complex nature such that there would be a long delay between detention and interview and this was being monitored by the Inspector.

There was one instance where there was a significant delay in identifying an appropriate adult for a Vulnerable Detainee⁸ but one was eventually located.

5. Summary

It is positive to see that there has been very few reported matters of note during the year. Healthcare coverage has improved significantly to almost full coverage. Maintenance issues were the most significant but eventually resolved.

Overall, the observations made by ICVs continue to demonstrate that the Constabulary is maintaining the welfare, dignity and needs of detainees.

6. Positive Feedback

ICVs recorded several positive comments by detainees regarding their welfare in custody. Of 11 comments worth noting, 9 were from detainees and 1 from the ICVs.

All detainees chose to comment specifically about their welfare saying they had been well treated and that their dignity had been maintained. Comments such as; “treated him well and with respect”, “staff been as nice as pie”, “looked after really well”, “Been really good here” are a credit to the work that the staff do at what can be a distressing and difficult time for many people.

The positive of note from the ICVs related to an elderly female detainee who was diabetic and although receiving regular checks from the nurse, an officer sat with her through the night for further reassurance.

Once again ICVs also noted that police staff were helpful and professional when dealing with detainees and themselves.

⁸ For a definition of vulnerability, see Appendix 1.

Areas of focus for the year ahead (2026/2027)

Recruitment

Recruitment will continue with a focus on targeting a wider age and ethnic demographic, particularly as some volunteers will reach the end of their three-year tenure period. With new outreach and social media capacity within the OPCC we will seek to utilise these skills to promote and communicate more effectively.

Additionally, we will continue to use the GoVolHerts online volunteering portal to reach out to the community and take part in their volunteering activities and there has already been some success using this. Work has been undertaken to explore other established online volunteering portals which have an extensive base of potential volunteers.

IT Systems

The Constabulary's intelligence and case management system, Athena, provides ICVs with a snapshot of the detainees in custody when they arrive to undertake their visit. There are still occasional outages causing timeliness issues with obtaining the data, resulting in delays for ICVs. This continues to be monitored as updates are made to the system.

The OPCC is reviewing how other forces use electronic reporting for their ICVs. ICVA will also be developing a standardised system which may prove more suitable and cost effective than a bespoke approach.

We have trialled an initial system in recent months and will be assessing the feedback from this to make improvements to both the data that is being captured and the overall user experience.

We will also be looking at ways of automating other scheme functions such as expenses submission and improved ways of communicating directly with the volunteers using social media applications.

Data Quality

The Constabulary continue to review the data they record about detainees. Whilst the recording of self-defined ethnicity has greatly improved in the last year, with fewer instances when it is not recorded, custody staff are being reminded to always record this information or mark it as "not stated". In parallel, the OPCC will continue to monitor and raise issues with Chief Officers to improve systems and data capture.

ICVA

ICVA monitor issues raised by scheme managers across the country to review and assess national trends and cascade details of legislative changes and reforms. The OPCC will continue monitoring any findings to inform the scheme's ongoing development.

Appendix 1

The term vulnerable⁹ applies to any person who, because of a mental health condition or mental disorder:

(i) may have difficulty understanding or communicating effectively about the full implications for them of any procedures and processes connected with:

- their arrest and detention; or (as the case may be)
- their voluntary attendance at a police station or their presence elsewhere, for the purpose of a voluntary interview; and
- the exercise of their rights and entitlements.

(ii) does not appear to understand the significance of what they are told, of questions they are asked or of their replies

(iii) appears to be particularly prone to:

- becoming confused and unclear about their position;
- providing unreliable, misleading or incriminating information without knowing or wishing to do so;
- accepting or acting on suggestions from others without consciously knowing or wishing to do so; or
- readily agreeing to suggestions or proposals without any protest or question.

⁹ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code C – Revised July 2018 section 1.13(d)

Interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor?

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor please contact:

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire Police HQ
Stanborough Road
Welwyn Garden City
AL8 6XF
Email: pccadmin@herts-pcc.gov.uk

For more information regarding the role of ICVs and that of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, please visit <https://www.herts-pcc.gov.uk/>

For more information on the role of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA), please visit: www.icva.org.uk

We welcome applications from anyone who lives in Hertfordshire. The OPCC is particularly interested to hear from younger people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.