

Annual Report

2024-25

Independent Custody Visiting Devon and Cornwall



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Foreword from the Commissioner

Alison Hernandez

The role of Police and Crime Commissioner was created to hold the police to account, and to be the voice of the people.

Both parts of this founding role can be seen in action through our Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) scheme, where a group of committed and dedicated volunteers - our 'ICVs' - help provide assurance that police custody centres are operating safely and appropriately.

Through their work, our ICVs help ensure that the services provided to detainees meet the standards required, and are an important part of the wide range of scrutiny and oversight that my office and I put in place to ensure that Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are policed as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Our custody volunteers come from different backgrounds and from various locations across our two counties, and I am hugely grateful to them for their dedication and professionalism, as well as for the willingness they have shown in going above and beyond what is required of them on many occasions over the past year.

Their work, and the comprehensive feedback they provide to my office, allows matters arising to be addressed before they become a problem.



It is important for me to add that this work would not be possible without the assistance of the police, and in particular the officers and staff across all of the custody centres in Devon and Cornwall, and I thank both them and the Chief Constable for the ongoing support that is given to our ICV scheme.

This report covers the period of April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025 and provides a summary of the how the ICV scheme has operated, and includes details of the positive work that has happened over the past year. I very much look forward to achieving even more, and continuing our work together in the coming year.

Alison Hernandez
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Devon and Cornwall

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act placed a statutory obligation on all PCCs in England and Wales to have in place an effective Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in their police force area. The primary purpose of the Scheme is to provide independent scrutiny of Devon and Cornwall Police to ensure those detained in custody are being treated fairly and in accordance with Code C of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE).

An Independent Custody Visitor (ICV) is a volunteer who visits people who have been detained in custody in a police station. For many people, arriving in a custody suite can be a daunting and frightening experience. ICVs make unannounced visits to police stations at any time or day of the week and can speak to anyone who is currently detained within the custody suite. The scheme offers protection and confidentiality to detainees and the police and provides reassurance to the wider community.

An ICV's main responsibility is to check on the welfare of the detainee and make sure they are being treated properly whilst in custody. An ICV ensures that a detainee understands their rights and entitlements in law, why they are in custody, that they have access to free legal advice, and that they can contact someone to inform them of their whereabouts.

Visiting in pairs, ICVs can inspect cells and the facilities within the custody suite for health and safety purposes. ICVs can also

inspect custody records with the detainees consent, which are a record of everything that happens whilst a detainee is in custody. ICVs can use this information to corroborate any statements made by the detainee and to ensure that the detainee's rights and entitlements are being followed. If an ICV discovers any issues, these can initially be raised with the Custody Sergeant present. Matters that cannot be resolved immediately or are of a serious nature and require ongoing attention are raised in the first instance with the lead Custody Inspector for ICVs.

ICVs make a report of each visit highlighting any issues discovered, and a copy of the report is then forwarded to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) staff who are responsible for the ICV scheme.

ICVs are recruited by the OPCC for Devon and Cornwall but are independent of both the OPCC and Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. ICVs come from all sections of the community. They must be aged over 18, reside in Devon, Cornwall or the Isles of Scilly, and be a resident in the United Kingdom for at least three years prior to the date of application. No specific qualifications are required as full training and support is provided, however visitors should be good listeners, non-judgmental and unbiased.

The Independent Custody Visitors of Devon and Cornwall

As of March 31, 2025, there were 16 active Independent Custody Visitors in the scheme across the two counties. These volunteers comprise of 9 female visitors and 7 male visitors- spanning a range of different ages and backgrounds.

We asked our volunteers to share what it is like to be an ICV and why they would recommend volunteering on the scheme to others:

The visits are so worthwhile and hopefully help both detainees and staff. We see first hand the pressures on staff within the Custody Suites and the effects of being detained and secured in a cell. I think our visits help to 'humanise' the experience for some detainees and lessen their anxiety.

It's a challenging role and you see challenging situations, but it is very rewarding. I always come away thinking *"that was good- I have achieved something today"*

A custodial system that treats, and is seen to treat, its detainees with respect and consideration is fundamental to a just and fair society. Across the board- from interested friends to detainees- everyone who knows that the ICV visits take place is glad that they do and feels they are important... I only wish more people knew! I have found (and still find) being a part of the ICV scheme stimulating and rewarding.

I did a visit and met a vulnerable detainee who had ADHD and various mental health issues- he started to cry when I was talking to him. I was able to verbally comfort him and I asked the detention staff for some distraction items. They were able to give him a softball and that really seemed to cheer him up.

If you have an interest in social justice and how it is implemented by the police, this is a wonderful way to view the process at first hand. The learning is valuable and the process is transparent and unbiased. We are indeed 'the eyes and ears' of the Police and Crime Commissioner as she monitors our local policing and ensures that the community is being served well.

Police Custody within Devon and Cornwall



Devon and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is the largest policing area in England, it covers nearly 4000 square miles and encompasses over 700 miles of coastline, with a resident population of just over 1.8 million.¹ Devon and Cornwall Police provides services across a diverse geography incorporating five upper tier/unitary local authorities including: Cornwall, Plymouth City, Devon County, Torbay and the Isles of Scilly and the eight district/city councils within Devon County. Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter are urban centres of significant size but the remainder of the population is spread between smaller urban clusters, market towns, seaside towns and villages.

¹ ONS mid-year population estimates 2023

² Peninsula Strategic Assessment 2022/23 Refresh

The resident population is impacted significantly by the many tourists who visit each year, increasing the demand on our services and infrastructures. Over 100,000 students also have an impact on localised demand.²

Devon and Cornwall Police fall on the list of Forces nationally that have higher numbers of custody suites to resource and manage. There are six designated custody suites in the following areas:

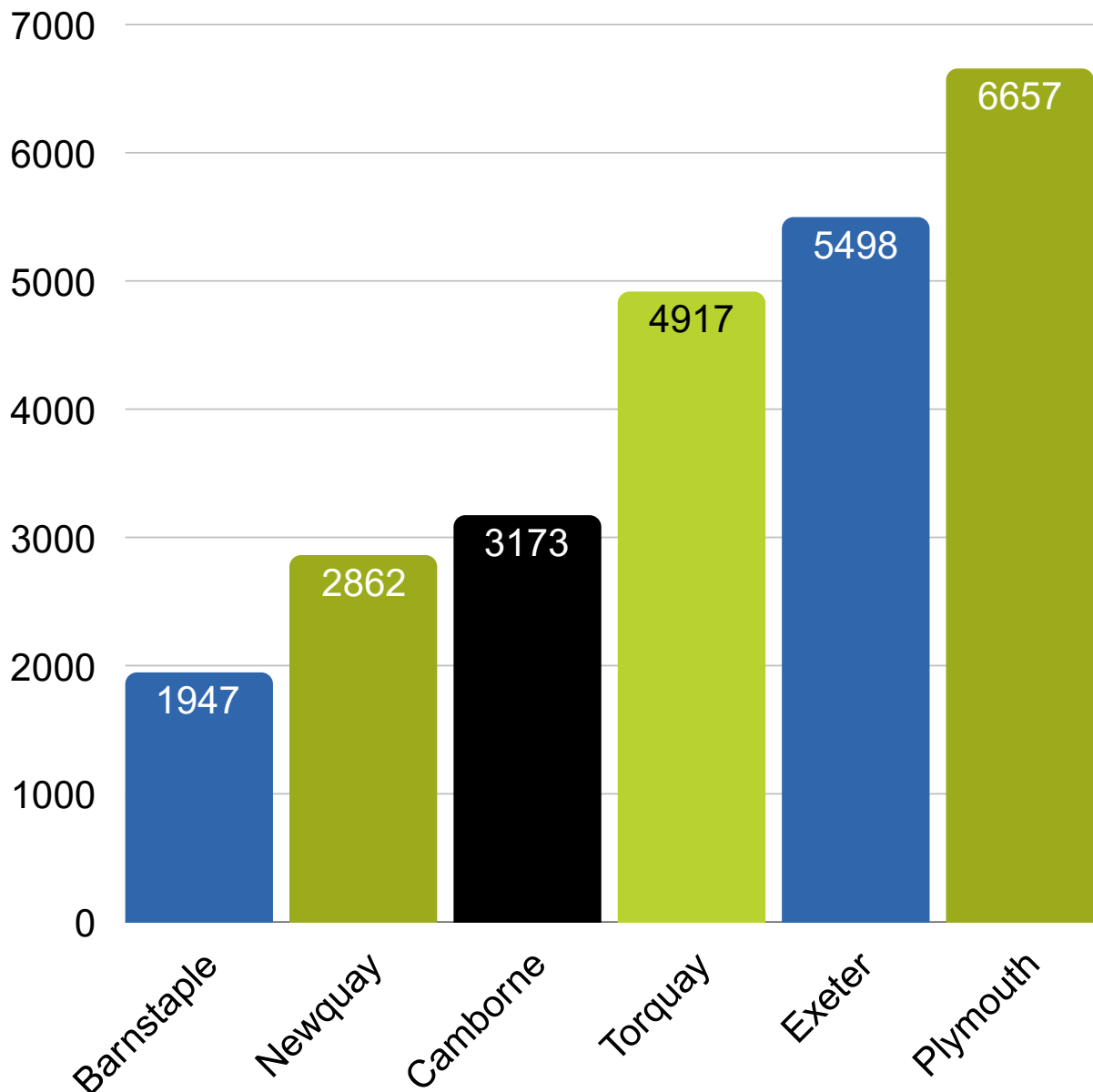
- Barnstaple
- Exeter
- Plymouth
- Torquay
- Camborne
- Newquay

Detained persons and visit statistics

April 1 2024 to March 31 2025

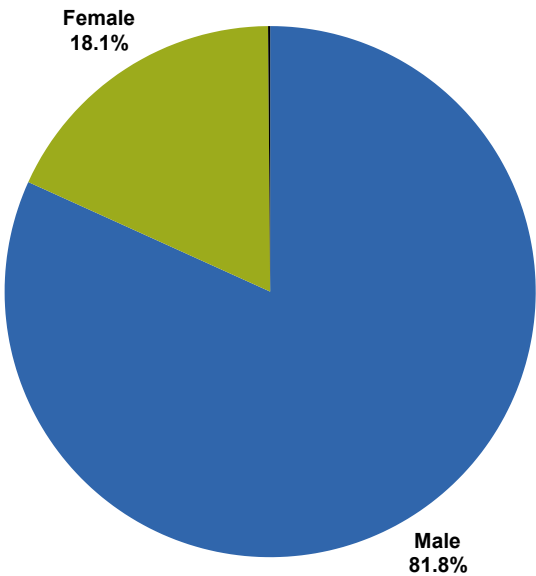
25,055 people were detained across the 6 custody suites in Devon and Cornwall. This is a 15% increase compared to 21,778 detentions in 2023/24.

Plymouth Charles Cross Custody (6,657) saw the highest number of detentions last year and Barnstaple Custody the least (1,947).



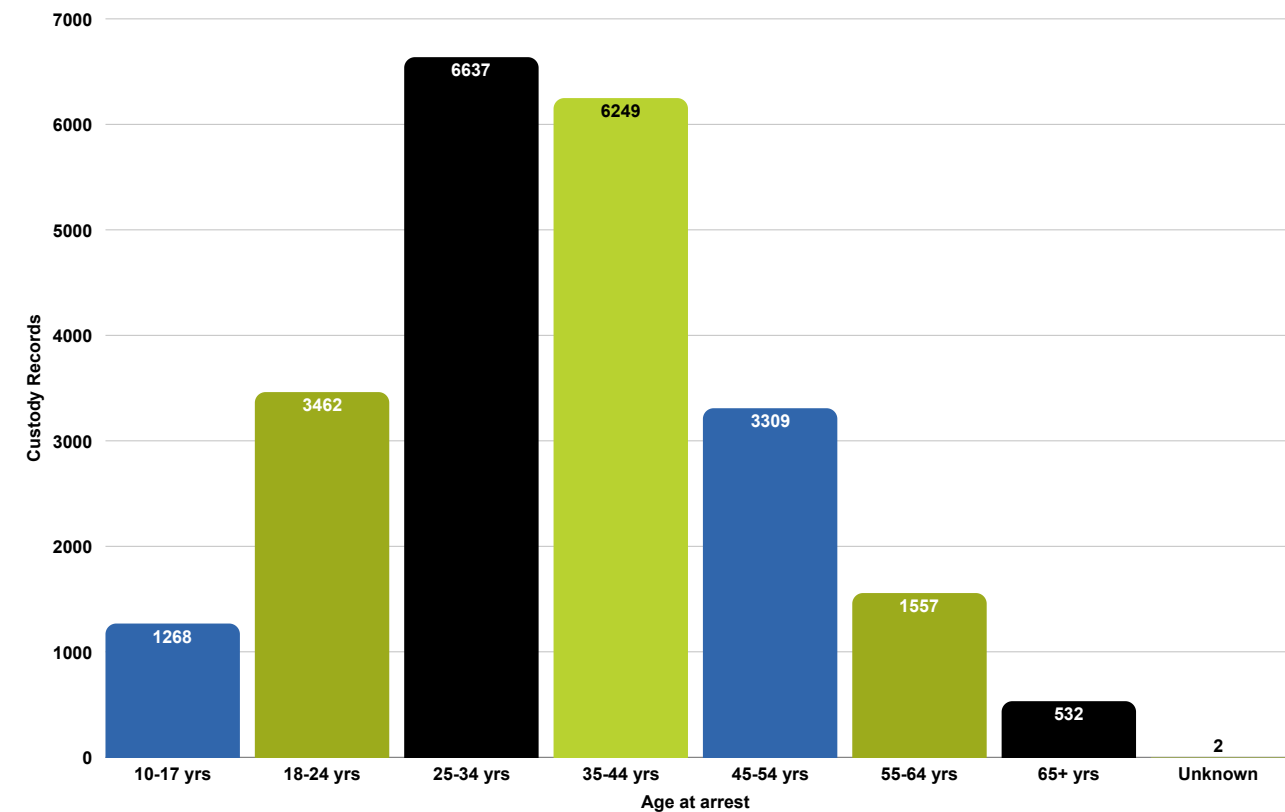
Detainee details

Males accounted for the highest proportion of detainees (81.8%). Females accounted for 18.1% of detainees.



25-44 year olds accounted for the highest proportion of detainees (56% n=12,886) and over 65s the least (2.3% n=532).

Children (10-17) accounted for 5.5% (n= 1268) of detainees last year.



Visits conducted by our ICVs

All of the designated custody suites were visited during the period. The number of visits per month ranges from 1 to 4 visits, based on a dynamic risk assessment per custody unit per month which considers detainee throughput and issues identified in recent custody visits. Additional visits can be by request of the police, for example in circumstances where there may be public concern and an independent custody visit may help to alleviate those concerns.

Records indicate that 135 visits were undertaken during the year, during which there were 738 detainees held in custody. 397 detainees were offered a visit and 284 gave consent to be visited (72%). 189 were unavailable and could not be offered a visit.

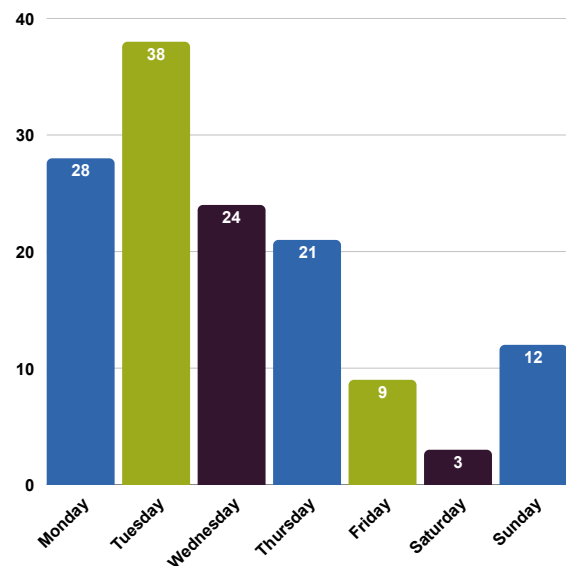
The reasons for this are varied. The majority of detainees unavailable were asleep and, where possible, visitors view these detainees through the hatch and record this on their visit reports. On a few occasions, detainees have been in custody at the start of the visit but are subsequently released before the visitors have had an opportunity to see them.

Custody visits should be random as well as unannounced. During 2024/25 visits took place as shown in the graphs.

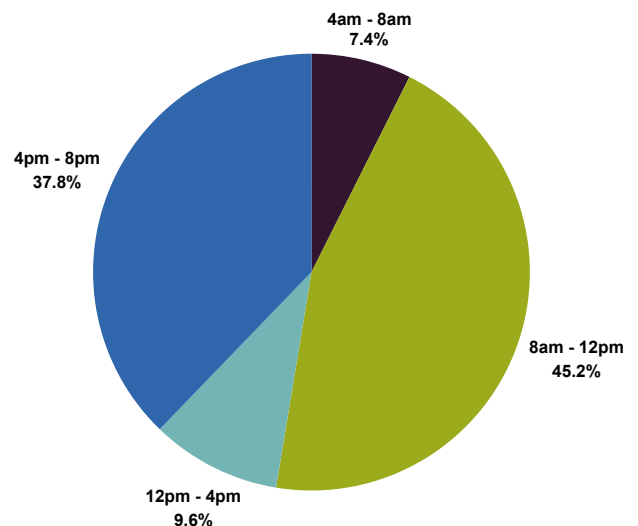
We have seen a drop in availability of volunteers over the past financial year. This has subsequently led to a decrease in the number of visits per month per suite, especially in the Newquay and Camborne suites in Cornwall. We are extremely grateful to our ICVs for their continued commitment and dedication in ensuring that each custody

suite receives at least one visit per month. ICVs have often been visiting outside of their usual suite areas to cover visits for their fellow volunteers. Our ICVs have gone above and beyond to ensure the rights and entitlements of detainees within Devon and Cornwall have been met.

Days visits took place



Times visits took place

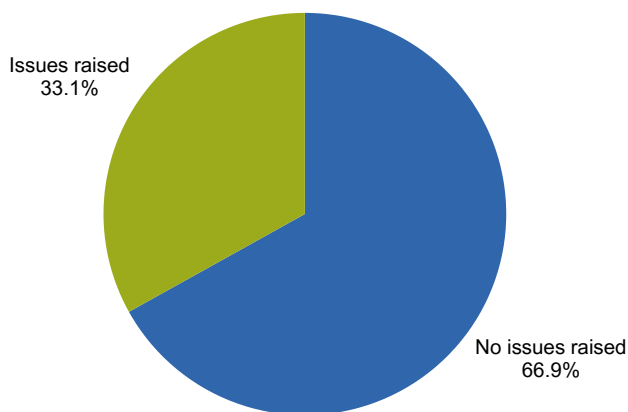


Issues raised- where ICVs have effected change

Rights and entitlements

For the majority of visits in 2024/25, ICVs have provided assurance that detainees' rights and entitlements are being observed and that the treatment and conditions in which detainees are held across custody centres in Devon and Cornwall is consistently positive. There have been no significant issues raised with Devon and Cornwall Police following ICV visits this year.

The most frequently requested items that detainees request during their time with our ICVs are distraction items, additional food, drinks and blankets.



Other issues raised

Throughout 2024/25, on several occasions ICVs have reported issues with the custody environment. Whilst these issues have already been reported to the Force's estates department, the ICVs provide an independent perspective and help to highlight any outstanding issues.

For example, ICVs reported broken CCTV in one of the custody suites, this was raised with the relevant Custody Inspector and the next time ICVs visited, the camera in question had been fixed.

On occasions, ICVs report overdue inspector reviews and the delay in informing detainees that a review has taken place whilst they have been sleeping. In these instances, this is fed back and custody records are checked.

ICVs have also reported staff shortages, and on a few occasions, this has resulted in aborted visits. If custody suites are particularly busy and there are not enough staff to escort ICVs, they are encouraged to remain in custody and observe, and undertake spot checks of the custody environment.

On occasions, ICVs are reporting that entitlements are not always offered, for example access to exercise facilities or shower/washing facilities. These reports appear to correlate with when ICVs are reporting busy custody suites.

Positive feedback from detainees

Many positive comments were received by ICVs from detainees and these included:

They had been treated fairly and with respect

They had received “5 star treatment”

The staff and their care had been “absolutely brilliant”, and “everything was spot on”

The custody staff had been professional and provided brilliant care



Feedback and Outcomes

How the police respond to findings

The ICV Scheme Co-ordinator and the Force's Custody Inspector lead for the ICV scheme met 21 times in 2024/25. These fortnightly meetings enable any issues raised by ICVs to be fed back and actioned by the force, as well as to provide a regular dialogue on custody matters. Any urgent issues are raised immediately and separately from this meeting.

ICVs continued to report on shortages of blankets for detainees. This influenced Devon and Cornwall Police to purchase additional heavy duty blankets in the first quarter of 2024/25. As a result, ICVs are no longer reporting this as an issue.

ICVs also continued to report shortages in professional healthcare cover. During 2024/25, there has been significant improvements in healthcare provision and for most shifts there is now full cover across each custody suite.

How ICVs share and discuss their findings

Throughout the financial year, panel meetings are held with the ICVs and the OPCC. These meetings ensure that all ICVs come together to receive relevant updates from the OPCC and from a Custody Inspector. During these meetings, ICVs are encouraged to raise any positive or negative feedback to both the OPCC and custody and to explore any identified themes, trends and best practice.

Within the meetings over the 2024/25 financial year, multiple themes were raised and discussed. These include, but are not limited to:

- Appropriate adult provision in custody
- Detainee confidence to ask for rights and entitlements
- Distraction items
- Inspector reviews
- Medication and mental health
- Staffing issues within custody
- Maintenance of custody suites
- Operation Safeguard³
- The Baird Inquiry⁴

³ Operation Safeguard is a crisis measure to ease overcrowding in prisons. It allows offenders to be housed in police cells when jail is full.

⁴ An independent report into the experience of people who are arrested and taken into custody by Greater Manchester Police with a focus on women and girls.

Terrorism Act (TACT)

There are provisions within the Devon and Cornwall police estate for people to be arrested under the Terrorism Act. In Devon and Cornwall, there are a few specially trained and additionally vetted ICVs who can visit TACT facilities and speak to suspected terrorist detainees. Unlike normal visits, TACT visits tend to be arranged (although can be unannounced). The police will contact the Scheme Manager as soon as practicable after

someone comes into TACT detention and the ICVs arrange to visit. Unlike standard custody, suspects can remain in detention for up to 14 days. ICVs will visit throughout this time; ideally new pairs of visitors will attend throughout the detention. ICVs provide feedback on TACT detention and they share their reports with the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism for further oversight. For 2024/25, no visits were required from our TACT volunteers.

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)

ICVA is a Home Office and PCC-funded organisation set up to lead, support and promote local independent custody visiting schemes.



Lead- ICVA provides leadership to Independent Custody Visiting schemes in the UK, helping to define their aims and ensuring that schemes remain up to date in policing reforms. A member of many nationwide groups, ICVA will continue to use this platform to lead schemes on changes to the custody arena.

Support- A crucial role in supporting local schemes and scheme managers. A key role is to provide effective, timely and consistent support to its schemes. This covers a range of activities but at the heart of ICVA's support is to ensure schemes have all of the tools they need and want to be able to deliver effective oversight of detainees rights, entitlements and wellbeing.

Represent- ICVA has an ongoing national role to represent ICV schemes as an integral part of policing. It does so as a member of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), alongside Independent Custody Visitors Scotland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

In November 2024, staff responsible for the ICV scheme attended the annual ICVA Scheme Managers Conference where they met with ICVA staff and created new relationships with schemes across England and Wales. It was a great experience to share best practice and to learn how other schemes operate.

For more information regarding the work of ICVA, visit www.icva.org.uk

Forward Plan

The ICV scheme's objectives for the 2025/26 are:

ICVA's Quality Assurance Framework

The ICVA's QAF is used for schemes to benchmark progress and achievements and to further enhance engagement with the PCC and local community. Work will continue through 2025/26 to promote our compliance.

Recruitment

It is important that our scheme is representative of the local community. We will conduct a recruitment exercise to bolster our volunteer numbers which will allow greater resilience and boost visit numbers.

Significant events for 2025/26

HMICFRS Custody Inspection within PEEL

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) will be visiting Devon and Cornwall police throughout the year to gather information for the next iteration of their Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspection. During this next iteration, custody will be included in their assessment framework and will receive its own graded judgment.

Contact Us



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<https://devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/>



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**If you would like further details on the scheme, or would like
to find out how to volunteer for the OPCC, please visit
<https://devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/>**

Useful websites:

[ICVA \(Independent Custody Visiting Association\)](#)

[National Preventive Mechanism](#)

[Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation](#)