



# 2023/2024 ICV Annual Report

## Foreword

I am committed to ensuring that police custody is a safe place. Those who are detained should be treated with respect and their individual needs are met. I am proud that in West Mercia we have a strong Independent Custody Visitor scheme, and I am proud to support such an important volunteer led activity. Whilst it is my statutory duty to deliver a scheme, ensuring it is robust and efficient is key. The work these individuals do is crucial to the safety of those held in custody and for providing transparency and confidence in policing. An inspection, carried out in 2022 by HMCIFRS, highlighted some serious areas of concern around legal rights, safety, and welfare in West Mercia Police custody. I reinforced my commitment to not only see that the force made significant improvements but that my ICV scheme continued to provide important scrutiny. I am continually grateful for the valuable contribution these volunteers give to ensure the welfare of detainees is of a high standard, which in turn supports me in delivering my Safer West Mercia Plan.



**John Campion**

Police and Crime Commissioner

## Introduction

This report sets out the crucial work that West Mercia Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) have carried out during 2023-2024, helping to ensure that custody suites across the West Mercia police force area are a safe and dignified environment for detainees. Custody visiting was set up in response to the Scarman Report of 1981 which followed civil disorders. The scheme gave members of the public from the local area the ability to inspect custody facilities and to make sure detainees are treated properly and in accordance with the law. ICVs are appointed and overseen by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner and are totally independent of the police force. They carry out an important and highly valued role that helps strengthen police accountability. ICVs are volunteers drawn from all walks of life, and they provide an independent check on the welfare of people who are detained in police custody. They do this by making unannounced visits in pairs to police custody facilities throughout the force area and reporting their findings. ICVs play an important part in the PCC holding the force to account.

In West Mercia there are 5 Custody suites located at main police stations. The number of cells available at each suite is: Kidderminster 11, Hereford 16, Telford 15, Shrewsbury 16 and Worcester 22.

## **ICV visitors**

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers appointed from the local community. Their role is to observe, comment and report on the conditions under which persons are detained in Police custody. Their visits provide an independent check on the way Police Officers carry out their duties in relation to the statutory and other rules governing the welfare of DPs.

Each ICV panel has a coordinator. Part of their role is to produce a rota of visits; this ensures that each suite is visited on a weekly basis and that visits are conducted on different days and times. Members work in pairs and make unannounced visits to custody, reporting their findings on a report form. There are currently 37 ICVs in the West Mercia ICV scheme with several additional applications from members of the public who are currently going through the recruitment process.

The office of the PCC continues to review recruitment process to ensure there are sufficient volunteers across the custody suites, and to ensure the volunteers in the scheme are more representative of the communities in West Mercia

## **Purpose of scheme**

The purpose of custody visiting is to enable members of the local community to observe, comment and report on the conditions under which people are detained at police stations. The Scheme provides an independent and impartial check on the way that police personnel carry out their duties with regard to detained persons and is aimed to increase public confidence in these matters.

In carrying out visits, ICVs should be guided by the Home Office Codes of Practice governing custody visiting. Training is provided for all ICVs to ensure that they are aware of the law and how it applies to the detention of people in police custody, and that they have knowledge of a detainee's rights and the limits of police powers. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code C deals with the Detention, Treatment and Questioning of Persons by police officers and procedures that must be followed are of particular relevance to ICVs in their role. Copies of PACE Code C are available in all police stations.

## Visit Data

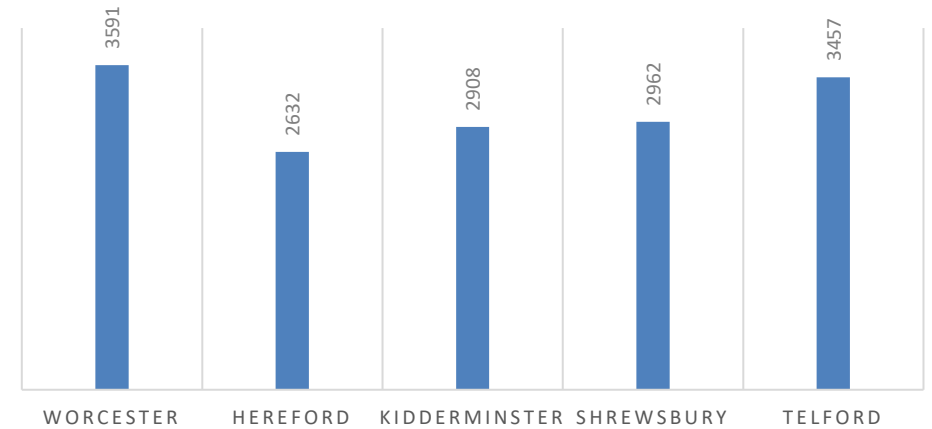
There has been a 6% increase in those in custody this year when compared to the same period last year.

Data shows that Telford and Worcester see more detainees, this is expected in line with them having more cell capacity.

Around 39% of people in custody this year have accepted a visit from ICVs with only 8% of detainees declining a visit.

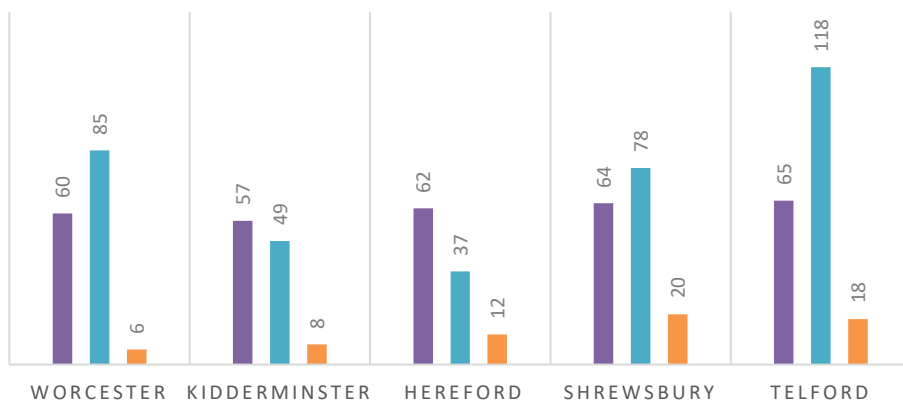
Telford see a larger number of detainees unavailable than other cell blocks, out of the 118 detainees unavailable to visit in Telford, 53% of these were unavailable due to being asleep and 19% were in interview at the time of a visit. Shropshire ICV members also attend more night visits than other suites so we would expect a higher number of detainees being asleep.

## ANNUAL THROUGHPUT OF DETAINEES IN WEST MERCIA



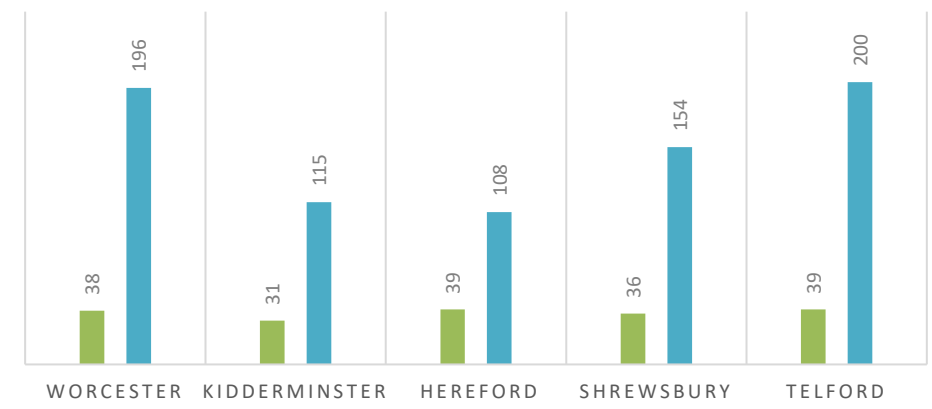
## VISITS MADE

■ Total accepted ■ Total unavailable ■ Total declined

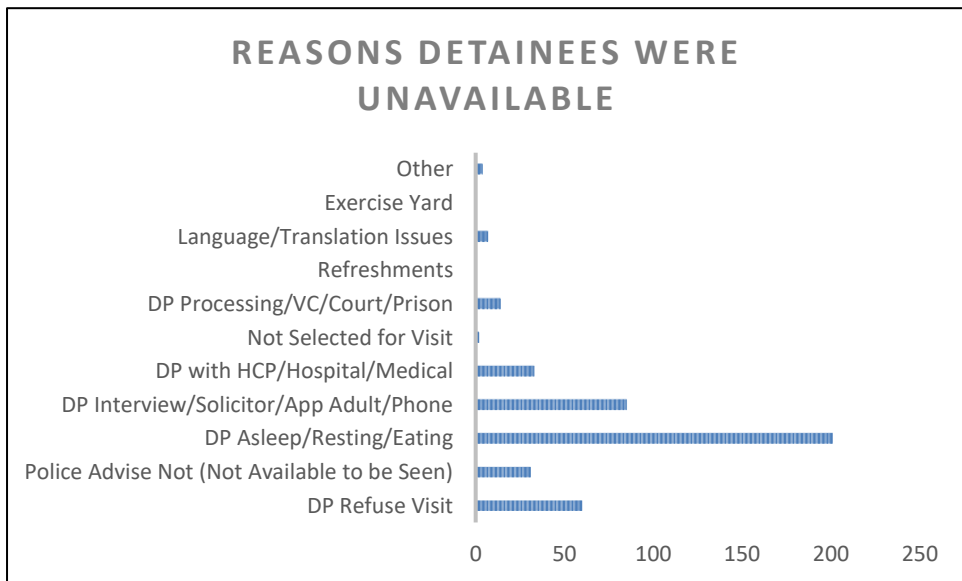
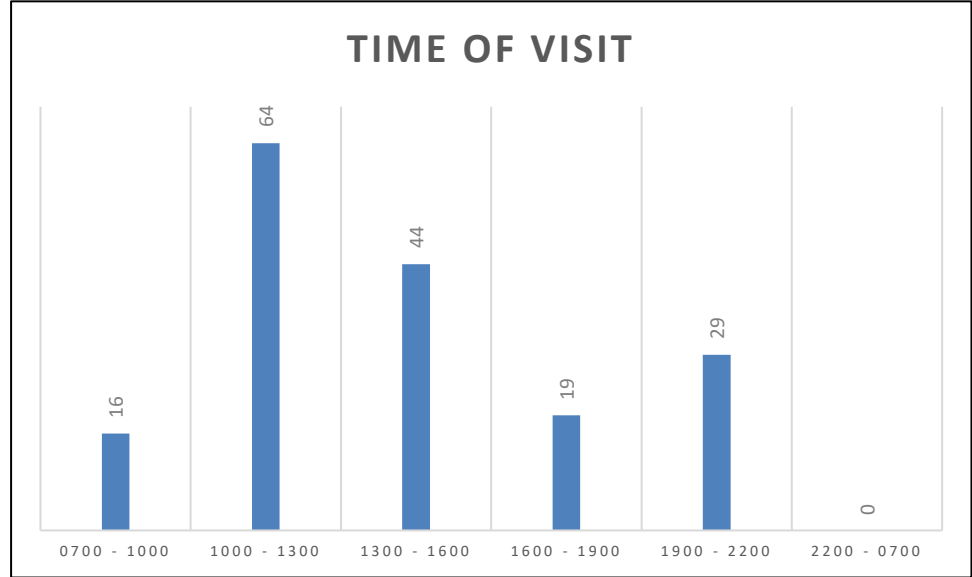
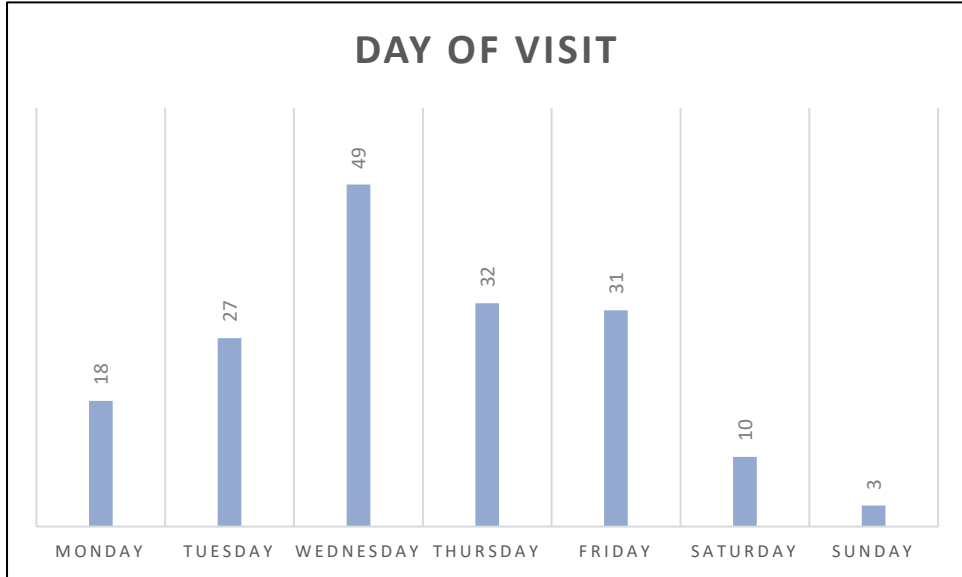


## ANNUAL TOTAL OF ICV VISITS MADE

■ Visits Made ■ Total in Custody



**Trends to visiting.**



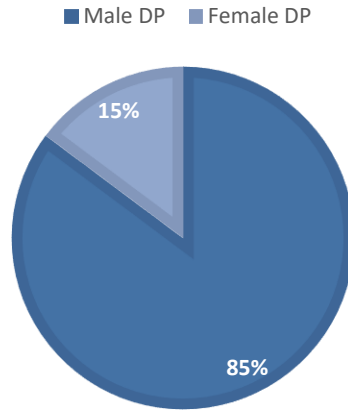
It is important to ensure visits do not form a pattern as they are unannounced. The most popular day for visits to take place have been on a Wednesday and the most common time for visits have been in the day, during the morning. ICVs are encouraged to conduct night visits however, a lot more detainees would simply be asleep during this time.

In the majority of cases, detainees were unavailable due to being asleep or in interview. This is as expected and follows trends seen in the previous years. Detainees are entitled to 8-hour rests periods and so, custody staff would not purposefully disturb them in order to conduct ICV visits.

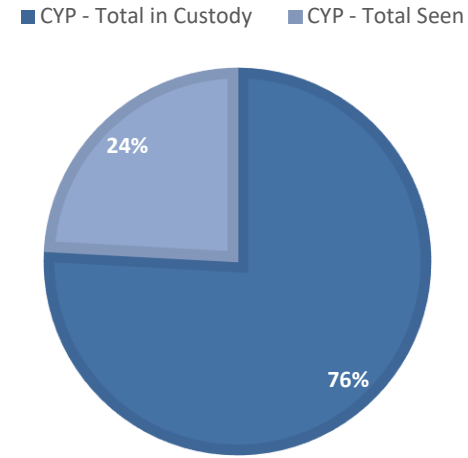
However, ICVs observe resting detainees through the spy hole in order to check that the detainee looks alive and well and that the environment of the cell looks acceptable.

## Detainee Data

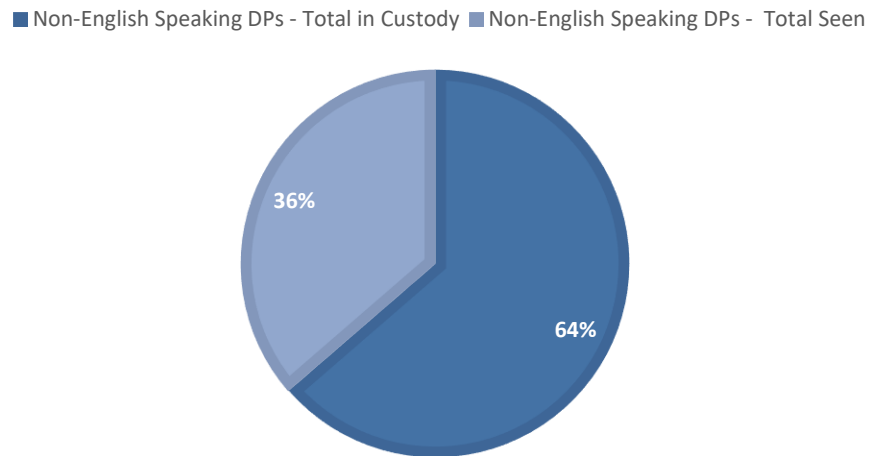
### GENDER OF DETAINEES IN CUSTODY AT TIME OF VISIT



### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CUSTODY



### NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING DETAINEES



The national drive is to see no children in police custody and to look at alternative provisions. This local data shows that very few children do come into custody although the Force are still trying to reduce this number.

In the last 18 months, ICVs have started using translation sheets to ensure visits with detainees whose first language is not English can still be made. These sheets have been extremely useful and have enabled a visit to over a third of non-English speaking detainees. We expect to see an increase in non-English detainees seen by ICVs going forwards.

If the translation sheets cannot be used for any reason, ICVs can still request a translator is present in order to conduct a visit.

## Animal welfare scheme

The Animal Welfare Visitor scheme in West Mercia was established in 2021 in partnership with the PCC Office, West Mercia Police, and the Dogs Trust. The Scheme aims to support delivery of the National Police Chiefs ' Council (NPCC) strategy to improve public confidence in police dog training methods. In West Mercia there are currently 4 trained volunteers (Animal Welfare Visitors, AWV) who make unannounced visits to Police kennels and training events. These visits are conducted once a month to check on the welfare of the dogs, as well as ensuring the kennel environment and handler 's vehicles are correctly maintained. Since the scheme began, no issues have been raised in regard to dog welfare.

In West Mercia, there are currently 47 operational police dogs. Over the last 12 months, 39 of the dogs have been visited by an animal welfare visitor.

## Data Looking ahead

- The West Mercia ICV scheme successfully received a silver accreditation by the ICVA quality assessment framework. The Scheme coordinator is now working towards the gold accreditation award for the 2025 assessment to continue to ensure best practise is achieved.
- New recruitment campaign material has been designed and produced to be used across a number of channels including the OPCC website, social media and at community events. The aim of this is to attract more volunteers to the scheme and highlight the important work the ICVs do.
- The PCC has invested in technology to support the scheme via an APP. This APP will provide ICVs with an electronic platform to record their visits which will reduce the time reports are completed. It also improves upon the current processes of how the record is shared, ensuring immediate access to Police and OPCC staff once a visit is completed. The App has the ability to capture more data, identify trends and produce reports.
- The third ICV annual Training Day is taking place in July 2024. The focus of this training day will be around faith and belief in custody, children and young people in custody and the importance of custody records. The aim of the training is to encourage ICVs to feel confident in conducting their visit to best suit the needs of the detainee.
- The Scheme Coordinator is supporting the Force with mini-inspections in custody to review areas of improvement in line with the HMICFRS requirements. This includes reviewing booking in processes, detainee transfers and inspector reviews. This supports the scheme coordinator in having more oversight in custody and understanding how the force are trying to improve Custody processes. The scheme coordinator can then share best practise with ICV members who can then help track progress of these areas for improvement during their visits in custody.
- ICVs are being encouraged to take part in the estate custody inspections in order for ICVs to have more transparency of plans and repair works in custody, such as CCTV.

### Further Information and Contact Details:

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Other Resources Further details about the West Mercia Independent Custody Scheme can be found on the PCC's website: <https://www.westmercia-pcc.gov.uk/workingtogether/independent-custody-visitors/>

Details about the Independent Custody Visiting Association can be found at the following website: <https://icva.org.uk>

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Volunteer, please email:

[Jenny.humphries@westmercia.police.uk](mailto:Jenny.humphries@westmercia.police.uk)

### To contact your Police and Crime Commissioner:

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**COULD I BE AN ICV?**

Become an independent custody visitor and make a difference in your community.

"It's a way of supporting detainees to ensure they are treated with dignity and respect."

**Volunteer today -**  
[www.westmercia-pcc.gov.uk/couldibe](http://www.westmercia-pcc.gov.uk/couldibe)

