



Bedfordshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner



2025-26

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING ANNUAL REPORT

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for
Bedfordshire

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Welcome

Police and Crime Commissioner John Tizard



The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme continues to deliver a high-quality, reliable, and professional service. The scheme has further strengthened its commitment to excellence and sustained its efforts toward maintaining Platinum status under the Quality Assurance Framework.

Independent scrutiny of police custody is a vital safeguard for human rights, forming a key part of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), which was established to meet the requirements of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

Through this role, the ICV Scheme helps ensure transparency and promotes safe, lawful, and respectful custody practices. The work of our volunteers reinforces accountability by observing custody processes first-hand. Their contribution strengthens public trust in policing across Bedfordshire, ensuring communities feel confident that custody is being independently and transparently monitored.

I am pleased to see that the scheme has continued to recruit young volunteers and individuals from across all protected characteristics. Ensuring that our panels reflect Bedfordshire's diversity—including differences in age, ethnicity, gender, disability, and lived experience.

This annual report highlights the valuable contribution and impact of Bedfordshire's ICV volunteers over the past year. I would like to formally express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all of our volunteers, whose dedication and commitment ensure the delivery of such an important and respected service on behalf of the people of Bedfordshire.

Bedfordshire Police

At 477 square miles and with 664,500 people, Bedfordshire is one of England's smallest (yet most diverse) counties and faces complex crime challenges more usually seen in large metropolitan cities.

London Luton Airport, which is the UK's fifth busiest, handled nearly 16 million passengers in 2016. The M1 and A1(M) motorways traverse the county. Two principle railway lines connect people with the heart of London in less than an hour.

Bedfordshire Police employ in the region of 1,450 Police Officers, 1,196 police staff, 40 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and 58 Specials (volunteer police officers).

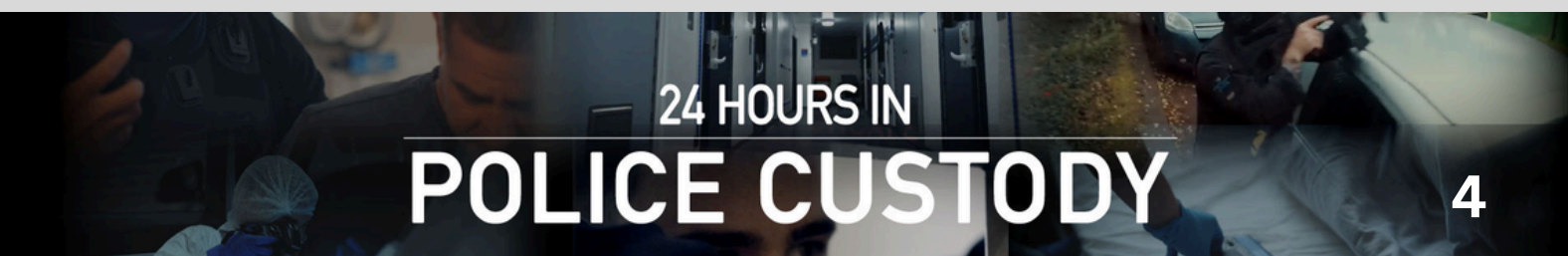
Within Bedfordshire there are two dedicated Police Custody Suites, situated in Kempston and Luton. Combined they hold 43 cells (22 cells in Kempston and 21 cells in Luton).

Channel 4 Series: 24 Hours in Police Custody

For over a decade, the BAFTA-nominated Channel 4 series 24 Hours in Police Custody has given viewers an unprecedented look at modern policing. From its beginnings in 2014 with cameras inside Luton Police Station, the series has evolved to cover major investigations across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire — including murder, sexual offences, fraud, and organised crime.

There have been 82 episodes to date, with more in the pipeline and it has reached 32.5 million viewers - that's more than 55% of the UK population.

You can read more here: [24 Hours in Police Custody](#)



What is Independent Custody Visiting?

The Police and Crime Commissioner has a statutory duty to maintain an Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme for Bedfordshire. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) oversees the scheme, supports its effective operation, recruits volunteers, and drives ongoing improvements.

Independent Custody Visitors are trained volunteers who live, work, or study in Bedfordshire. Their role is to visit custody suites to monitor the welfare of people who have been detained. They ensure detainees are receiving their rights and entitlements and are being treated fairly throughout their time in custody.

The scheme provides valuable public reassurance that individuals in custody are treated appropriately, while also promoting transparency and strengthening public confidence in local policing.

How are visits conducted?

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) attend police custody suites in pairs, making unannounced visits at any time. They are trained to introduce themselves and, with the detainee's consent, speak with them about their treatment while in custody. Any issues or concerns identified during the visit are raised directly with the custody officer.

After each visit, ICVs complete a report form summarising their findings. This report is then shared with the OPCC scheme manager as well as the Custody Inspectors and Chief Inspector. The OPCC meets monthly with the Custody Leadership Team to discuss any concerns highlighted within these reports.



About the Bedfordshire Scheme

The Bedfordshire scheme is made up of a panel of 25 trained volunteers who carry out visits across the county's two police custody suites—Kempston and Luton. Unannounced visits take place once per week at both locations and may occur at any time of day, on any day of the year.



During each visit, volunteers carry out a series of checks to ensure the safety, welfare, and fair treatment of detainees. This includes (but is not limited to) reviewing:

- the condition and cleanliness of cells and toilet facilities
- that CCTV is present and functioning correctly
- that any required medical attention or medication has been provided
- that any visible injuries on detainees have been appropriately explained
- that religious materials are accessible and stored appropriately

In addition to regular visits, four quarterly panel meetings are held each year, during which volunteers receive training relevant to their role and are updated on any developments within custody and the PCC's office.

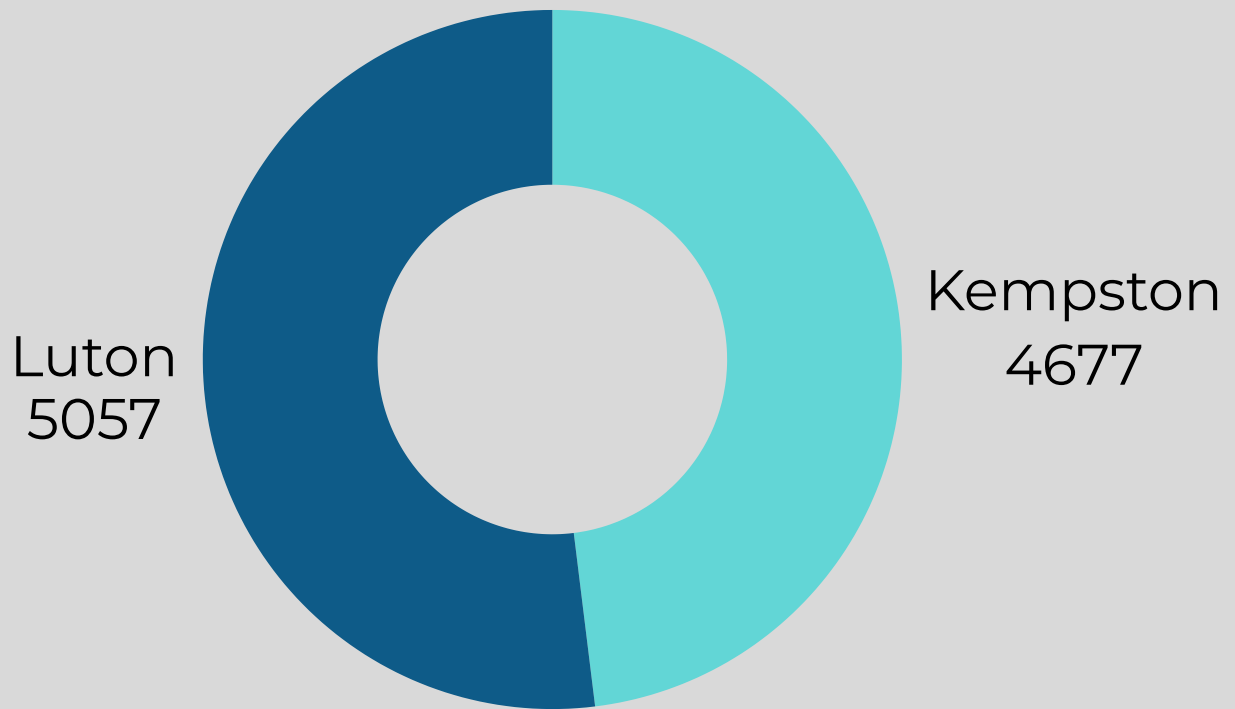


Training themes over the past year have covered a wide range of topics designed to support and strengthen volunteers in their role. Sessions have included a presentation from the Appropriate Adult service, bitesize assertiveness training, and an informative talk delivered by the Samaritans.

More recently, volunteers have been introduced to the new Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) e-learning platform.

Custody and Scheme Statistics

April 2025 - March 2026



Total amount of Bedfordshire detainees in Police Custody:

9734

82

ICV visits to Bedfordshire Police Custody Suites

439

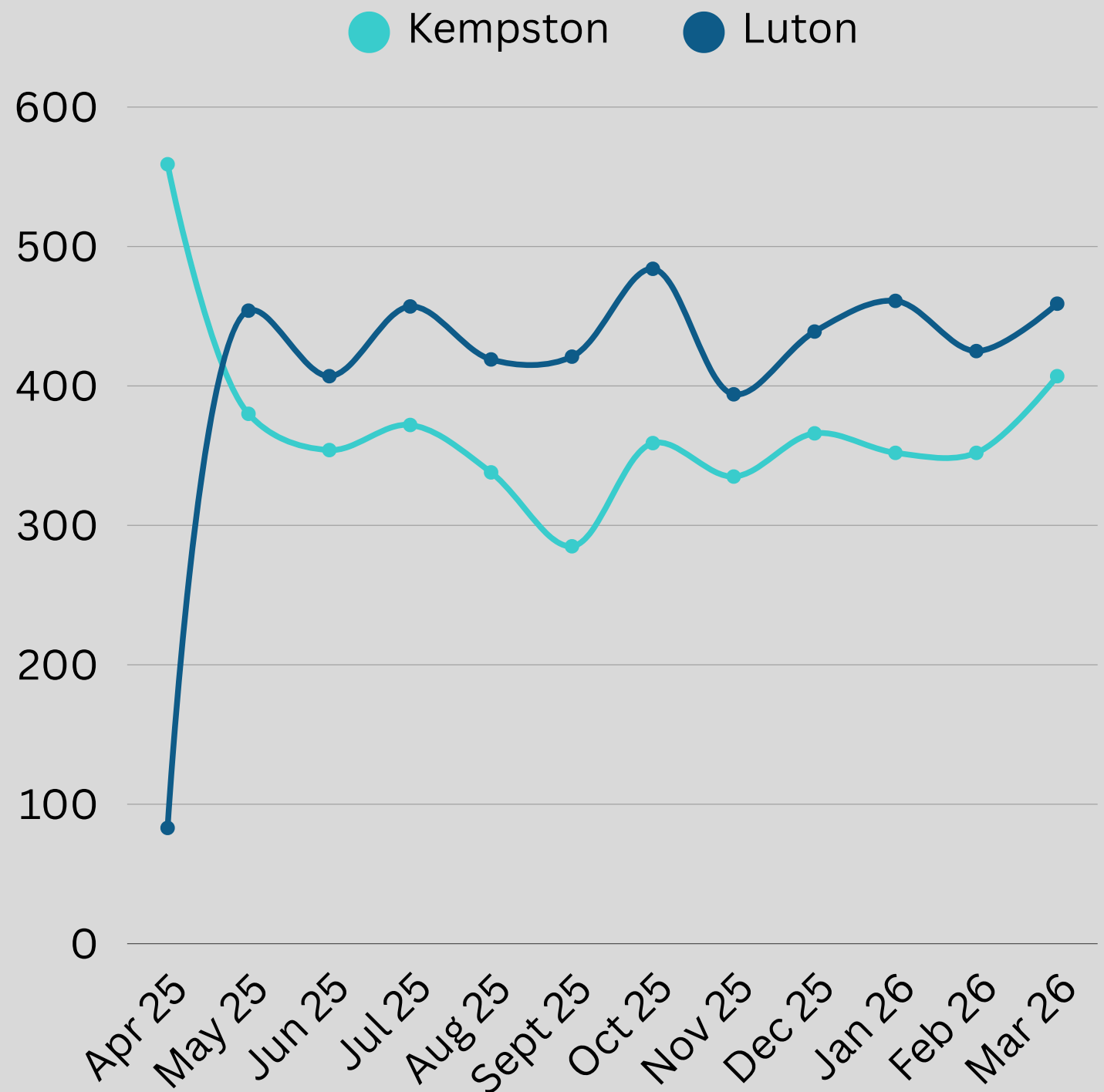
Detainees visited by ICVs in Bedfordshire

5% of detainees were visited by ICVs

Custody and Scheme Statistics

April 2025 - March 2026

Graph of number of detainees held in Bedfordshire Police Custody per month

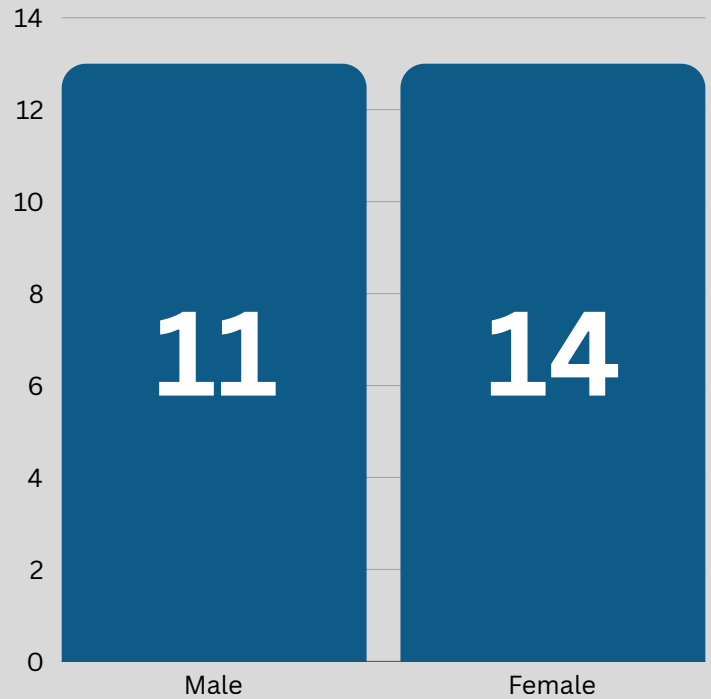


NB: Luton reopened in late April 2025 after refurbishment, which accounts for the lower figures at Luton and the higher figures at Kempston

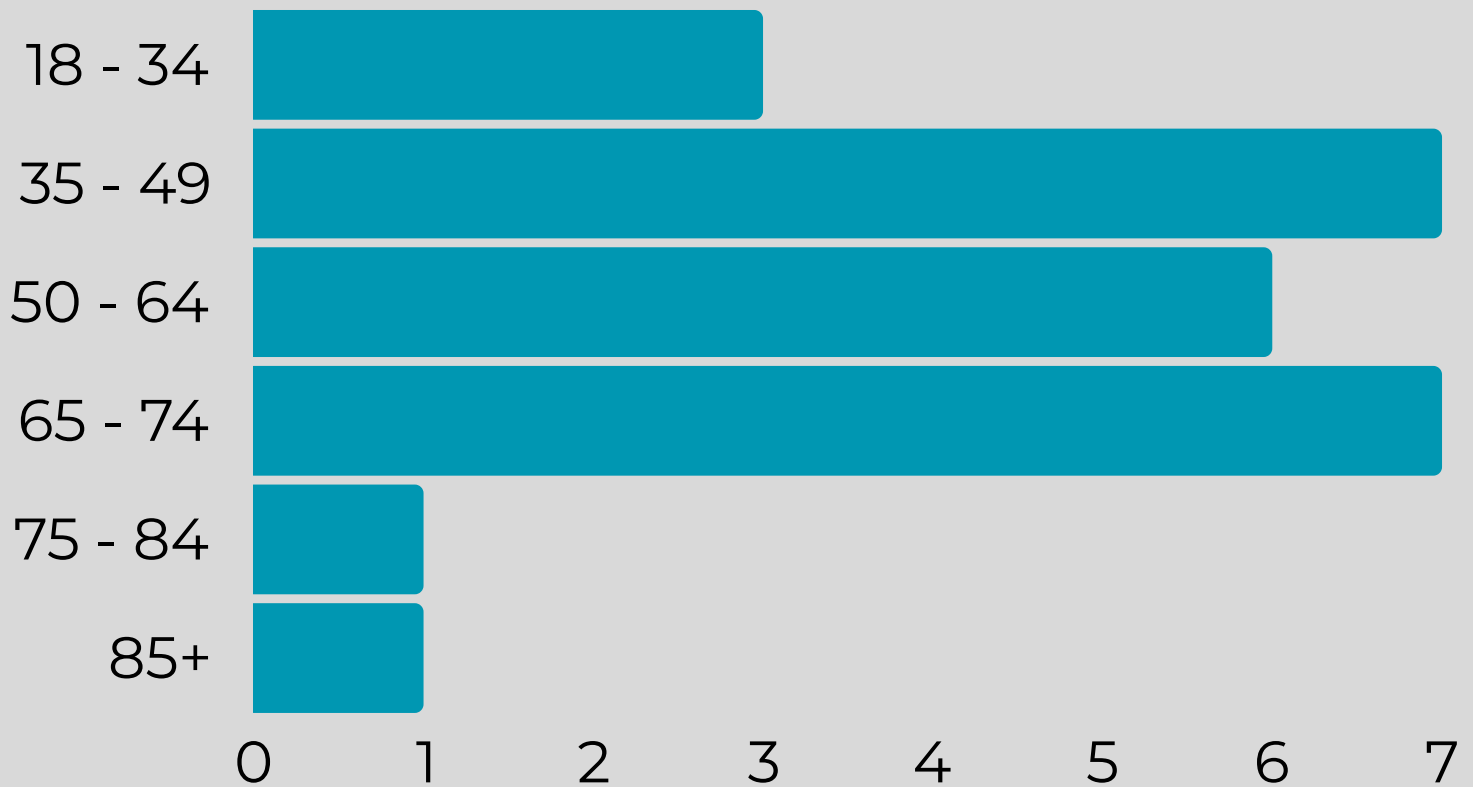
Equality and Diversity

Demographics of Volunteers

25
volunteers



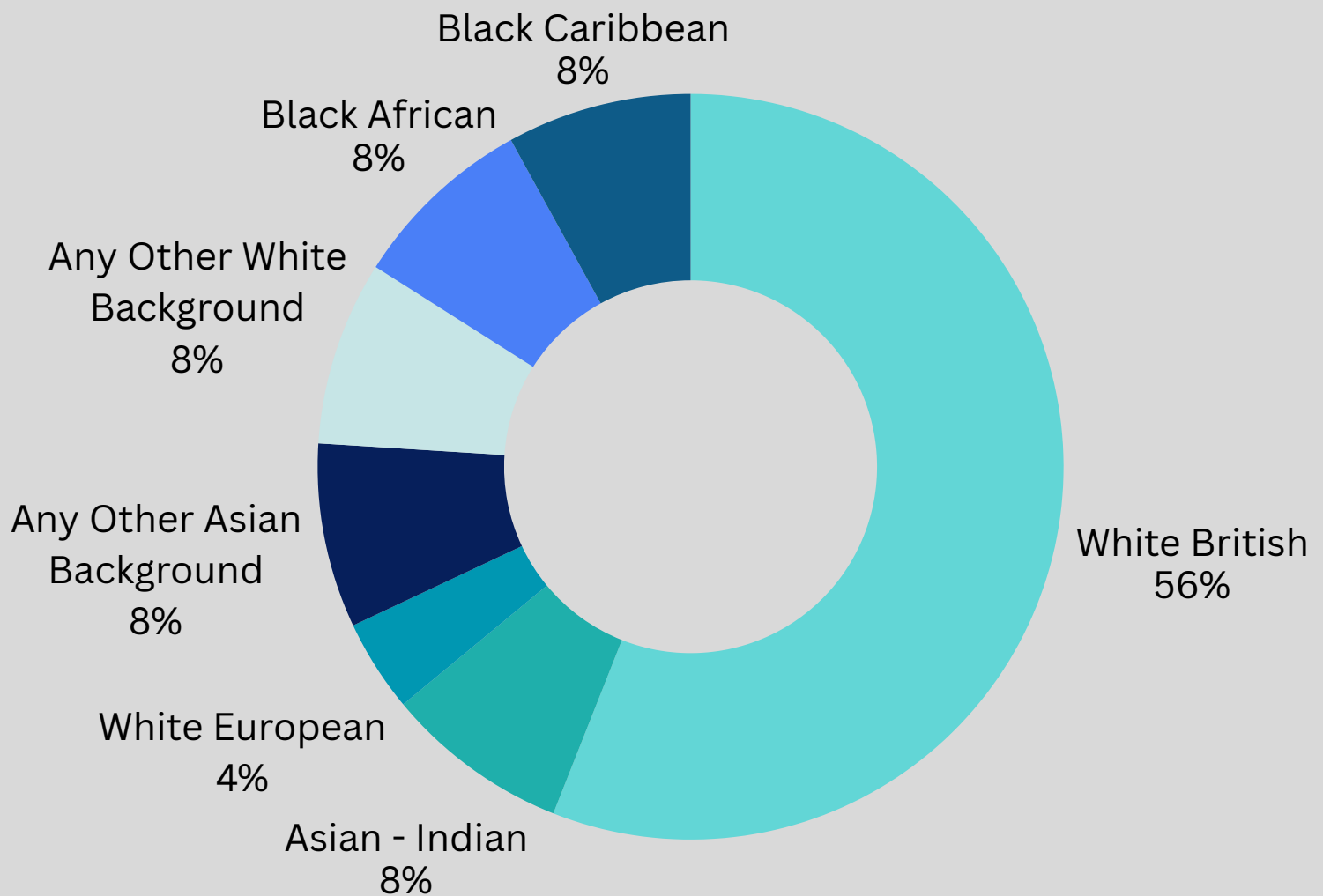
Ages of our volunteers



Equality and Diversity

Demographics of Volunteers

Ethnicity of our volunteers



Drawing on the 2021 Census, we are proud that 44% of our volunteers are from ethnic minority backgrounds, exceeding the wider Bedfordshire population figure of 28%. This highlights our commitment to representation and inclusivity within the scheme.

Meet our Volunteers

Arosh Karunathilaka

I am Arosh Karunathilaka, an ex financial services professional now working in conveyancing.

Being an Independent Custody Visitor has been a great experience so far. As a law graduate I was always interested in the criminal justice system and wanted to be a part of it since my early years in university and I thank the OPCC for the opportunity.

Being a volunteer and giving back to the society was a passion instilled in me from my younger days and have had engaged in clinics and charity events, etc. apart from my work and study.

When I arrived in the UK and was searching for suitable avenues to pursue the same, the ICV scheme was the closest feasible opportunity which I came across.

One of the highlights in carrying out our civic duty is that we, an independent third party unlike uniformed officers, are able to assure the detainees, the due process of law will be carried out regardless of the differences they may carry, preserving the values of a civilised society.

“what goes around comes around” -
This also has been a meaningful way
for me to engage with the local
volunteer community and helped with
my mental health on a personal note.”



Meet our Volunteers *Paula Clark*



I became an ICV several years ago, after experiencing a period spent in custody at Luton Police Station. I was invited to apply and train to become an independent custody visitor.

There is nothing like having your freedom and autonomy removed, for concentrating the mind on the need for a group of people to monitor and check the fairness and care detainees receive.

It is not perfect and there is always room for improvement, we do not shy away from the hard and challenging questions. Our care and focus are on all those involved in the system of detention.

It can be frustrating and difficult, however I believe systems that involves human behaviour and attitude will never be perfect. It is my role to make it as good as possible.

I believe anyone who has had their freedom removed deserves fairness and compassion. Whatever their crime is, or isn't, they should always have the right checks and balances. It is basic human rights.

I have met and worked with some wonderful people, other ICV's, detention officers and police officers. They can restore your belief in decency and humanity. It is not an easy role, you need to concentrate your mind at all points, and be completely fair and transparent.

You must be 'independent' and that is a mantra to carry with you throughout.

Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) Quality Assurance Framework

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is a tailored, evidence-based assessment tool used to evaluate and improve locally run custody visiting schemes.

Bedfordshire has completed the third iteration of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for 2025–26 and has been working towards achieving Platinum status. The scheme will receive confirmation of the outcome at the celebration ceremony in July.

The scheme's continued efforts to work towards Platinum status highlight the sustained commitment, professionalism, and dedication of our volunteers. Their dedication remains central to sustaining high standards, and we are proud to showcase their contribution as part of a consistently strong and high-performing scheme.

Bedfordshire continues to collaborate with other schemes across the region and nationally, sharing best practice to support continuous improvement. While we hope to be successful in securing Platinum status, we recognise that quality assurance is an ongoing process, and we remain committed to the continued development of our scheme.

We look forward to attending the QAF Celebration Event in July 2026, where we will have the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of our volunteers and scheme manager, and to engage with wider learning from across the ICV community.



Representing the scheme in the community

Engaging with our local communities is a vital part of promoting the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. By attending events and raising awareness of our work, we help the public understand the importance of custody visiting while encouraging local people to join the scheme.

HerSpace



We attended the HerSpace event to promote and talk about our scheme, this was a networking event ran by the deputy PCC to bring together organisations supporting women across the county.

The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration, improve the visibility of services, and create a more coordinated approach to meeting the needs of women in Bedfordshire.

University Freshers Fairs

We attend Freshers' Fairs each year to engage with students who may be interested in joining the scheme, as well as to raise awareness among those who are often unaware of its existence.

These events provide a valuable opportunity to connect with younger members of the community and promote the scheme to a new and diverse audience.



Scheme Managers Conference



We attended the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) Scheme Managers' Conference in November 2025. The event included the launch, overview, and demonstration of the new ICVA e-learning platform.

Delegates also heard from guest speaker Dr. Sue Wheatcroft, who shared her lived experience of being detained in police custody and visited by ICVs, providing valuable insight into the impact of the scheme.

The conference additionally offered opportunities for networking and reflective practice alongside colleagues from across the country.

HMICFRS Custody Inspection

As part of the scrutiny work carried out by the ICVs, we worked collaboratively with custody ahead of the HMICFRS custody inspection in March 2026.

With agreement from the Chief Inspector, we proactively arranged additional ICV visits to gather timely feedback and strengthen assurance. We also provided ICVs with supplementary, inspection-focused questions aligned to areas that HMICFRS were likely to review.

In addition, our office were invited to participate in the Force's HMICFRS Custody Task and Finish Group. This ensured that independent scrutiny feedback was incorporated into preparatory work and that the ICV perspective was represented throughout the inspection planning process. We will report on the findings once published.



Achievements and Challenges

Storage of religious items and texts

ICVs highlighted on a small number of visits that the storage of religious items and texts was not always in line with best practice and that the room was sometimes untidy. In response, the Scheme Manager worked with Custody and re-circulated the ICVA briefing on appropriate storage of religious items to support improvements.



Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) – Code C

Revised Code of Practice for the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by Police Officers

December 2023

Code C

Detainees observing Ramadan

During Ramadan, ICVs continued to promote and monitor best practice by checking whether custody officers were asking detainees if they were fasting and, where detainees were held overnight, whether they wished to be woken to break their fast. ICVs also focused on the welfare of fasting detainees by ensuring they had access to appropriate religious materials, facilities, and entitlements, and by confirming that their needs were being considered respectfully throughout their time in custody.

Usage of tablets for translation services

Custody now have access to a tablet with a translation app, and with the Chief Inspector's permission, ICVs have been able to use this during visits. This has made communication with non-English-speaking detainees clearer and more efficient, reducing the need for translation sheets and flashcards.



Achievements and Challenges

Staffing levels

Maintaining sufficient staffing levels within custody continues to present a challenge. 6 visits have had to be aborted and others delayed due to staff shortages. These concerns are regularly escalated to custody management, who remain focused on improving staffing resilience through sustained recruitment and retention efforts.

Input and feedback surrounding Custody Records System

As part of their scrutiny role, ICVs were asked to provide feedback on the custody records system replacement programme, focusing on how the new system could better support them in upholding detainee rights and welfare during custody visits.

Stock levels of menstrual and menopausal items

A small number of reports noted low stock levels for both menopausal and menstrual items. Once highlighted to custody staff, this was promptly rectified and new stock was ordered.

Storage of staff food and beverage

ICVs noted during one visit that staff were storing their own food and drinks in the detainee fridge, creating a risk of cross-contamination. The Inspector addressed this immediately, placing clear signage on the fridge and issuing communications to staff to ensure the practice does not recur.

ICVs regularly compliment the professionalism and kindness of custody staff

Quick entry, visit started straightaway, no waiting around. Everyone was friendly and accommodating. Positive visit experience.

The suite was calm and orderly. Everything was running smoothly despite the workload. Very happy with the visit and the custody officer was very thorough and helpful.

The escorting officer was very professional and patient. Everything was in order during the visit with those detained being looked after well as reported.

Good visit, allowed in immediately, visit started within 5 minutes. All personnel were friendly and professional as always.

Escorting officer helpful and patient. Lots of clothes and blankets stock available. Detainees well looked after and confirmed they have been treated well.

Looking Forward 2026/27



HMICFRS Custody Inspection Report

Following the publishing of the custody inspection report by HMICFRS, the PCC's office and ICVs will review the key findings, recommendations and scrutinise any action plans produced as a response to the inspection. This will involve working collaboratively with the Custody Detention Scrutiny Panel.

ICV Code of Practice Review

The Policing Minister wrote to the ICVA at the end of 2025 confirming the Home Office's commitment to reviewing the Code of Practice for custody visiting. Bedfordshire will actively participate in the consultation, with contributions from both volunteers and the Scheme Manager.

Platinum Award

The scheme aims to retain its Platinum level status under the Independent Custody Visiting Association Quality Assurance Framework and will continue to work proactively to maintain this standard. We expect to be provided with an outcome by July 2026.

Chief Inspector and Head of Custody Jenni McIntyre-Smith



I have spent 23 years with Bedfordshire Police and feel incredibly fortunate to have experienced such a varied and rewarding career. I joined policing with a desire to make a difference, and over the years I have had the opportunity to work across many areas of the organisation, each helping to shape how I lead and make decisions today.

I have been in my current role as Custody Chief Inspector for just over 12 months, during a period of significant change. This has included the temporary closure of Luton custody suite for refurbishment, our first formal Health and Safety inspection, the decoupling of custody services from Hertfordshire and the return to a Bedfordshire-led model, as well as an HMICFRS inspection. Custody is a complex and demanding environment, but also one of the most important points of contact between policing and the public.

Independent oversight is vital in maintaining confidence in this work. Independent Custody Visitors provide visible, independent reassurance and constructive challenge within custody suites. The ICV's oversight helps to identify learning, strengthen accountability and support continuous improvement across custody services.

I am genuinely grateful for the time, commitment and professionalism shown by the ICVs. Your dedication, insight and willingness to challenge appropriately make a real and meaningful difference.

Thank you for the important work you do and for the positive and constructive relationships you have with the custody teams across Bedfordshire.



Custody Inspector Lynsey Jackson-Harwood



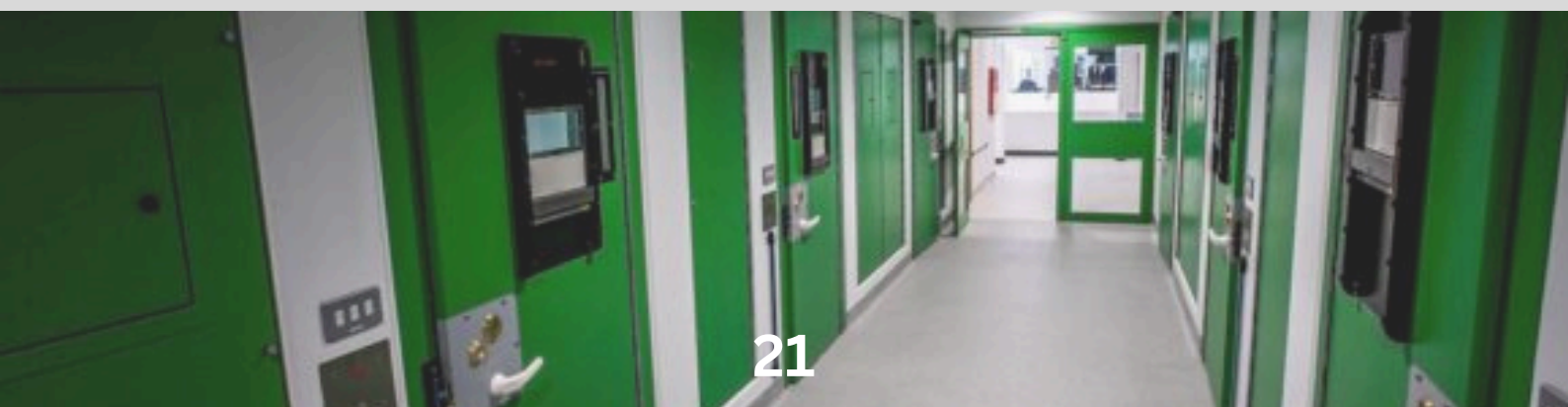
I began my policing career with Greater Manchester Police, working in Firearms, where I developed strong tactical decision-making and risk-management skills.

I later continued my career with Cheshire Constabulary, beginning my promotion journey in Community Policing before achieving the rank of Inspector. I went on to manage North Cheshire—including Warrington, Runcorn and Widnes—as a Patrol Inspector, gaining extensive experience in leading teams, managing demand, and coordinating operational activity.

For nearly two years, I have worked within the Kempston Custody Suite in Bedfordshire, where I lead four teams and act as the main point of contact for partner agencies such as the Liaison and Diversion Service (LADS) and Healthcare Professionals.

In addition, I recognise and greatly value the important work of the Independent Custody Visitors. I maintain a positive working relationship with the ICVs, ensuring open communication, transparency and a shared commitment to safeguarding detainee welfare and maintaining public confidence in the custody process.

My experience across three forces—spanning Firearms, Community Policing, Patrol, and Custody—gives me a well-rounded operational perspective and a strong foundation for effective leadership, risk management and continuous improvement within the custody environment.





If you would like to find out more information about becoming an Independent Custody Visitor in Bedfordshire, or for general information regarding the scheme, please use the contact details below.

ICV Scheme Administrator
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