



25 August 2021

Dear HMICFRS

I acknowledge that the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) team published on the 20 April 2021 – Custody Services in a Covid-19 Environment.

Bedfordshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner notes that HMICFRS have made recommendations, to the police and other bodies, which are intended to:

- increase the police service's national and local understanding of how custody services operate in a COVID-19 environment;
- show how services have been/are affected and how police forces are responding; and
- establish what improvements forces and the wider Criminal Justice System can make.

You developed six lines of enquiry to help us assess how custody services have been/are affected by COVID-19, including how the police:

1. divert people from custody and minimise the time that detainees spend there;
2. manage custody services during the pandemic, looking in particular for a strategic approach;
3. manage detainees' risks;
4. care for detainees;
5. meet detainees' legal rights; and
6. provide a safe custody environment for detainees, staff and visitors.

The OPCC is aware that HMICFRS made the following custody-specific recommendation in the report, Policing in the pandemic: The police response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Forces must immediately make sure that they record clearly and consistently on custody records information about how/when/if detainees are informed of the temporary changes to how they exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. The record must make clear how any consents are obtained about the way in which legal advice and representation are provided.

You also suggested the following action:

Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Police Headquarters | Woburn Road | Kempston | Bedford | MK43 9AX

Tel: 01234 842064 | Email: pcc@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

Web: bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk | Twitter: [@BedsPCC](https://twitter.com/BedsPCC)



Forces should collect enough of the right information at the right level and detail about the continuing effects of the pandemic (costs, new/additional demand, absence, annual leave, custody and detainees etc) so they can resource their work appropriately.

In this report specifically you made additional recommendations.

To help clarify the custody information that forces collect and use, we recommend that forces:

- track the numbers of detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19;
- record and monitor the length of time detainees remain in police custody, and any additional detention times due to waits for virtual remand hearings;
- record and monitor the way in which detainees receive their legal rights, and how many receive them by virtual means rather than a solicitor attending in person; and
- record the use of bail and released under investigation, and assess any increases in pre-charge bail.

You further recommended that:

- The police service should evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual remand hearings. It should use this information to help the wider Criminal Justice System learn from its experience and develop better working arrangements that meet the needs of justice and make best use of public money.
- The NPCC, working with the National Health Service (NHS), should consider how to minimise the risks of spreading the virus in the community when releasing detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19 and what arrangements can help achieve this.

Bedfordshire Police has a collaboration agreement in place with Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire (BCH) for our Custody arrangements.

Bedfordshire OPCC will be working with Bedfordshire Police and the Collaborated Tri-Force Function (Bedfordshire/Cambridgeshire/Hertfordshire - BCH) in the consideration of all recommendations which will be monitored through board meetings. The Covid actions are due to be updated for the next learning demand and futures board.

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Yours Sincerely

Festus Akinbusoye
Police and Crime Commissioner

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