

**Cheshire Constabulary's response to Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services
(HMICFRS) inspections**



Inspection Details:	
Inspection:	Policing the Pandemic: Custody Services in a Covid19 Environment
Date Published:	20 th April 2021
Deadline for Response:	15 th June 2021

Type of Inspection		Recommendations	
Cheshire Specific		National	X
National	X	Local	
Thematic	X		
Other			

COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSE:

Our police service has had to adapt to the challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic and our custody services are no exception. Like many front line services during the pandemic, police custody does not have the option to cease its operations. Staff working in this environment have had to rapidly change to new ways of working in order to keep themselves and detainees safe from harm. Staff had a responsibility to ensure that detainees received information around their legal rights and managed the risk of those spending longer than usual in custody while waiting for virtual hearings. The report into custody services during the pandemic rightly notes that services have been affected and recommends the improvements that need to be made.

Some of the most vulnerable people can find themselves in custody, and their welfare must remain a priority. Officers have had to consider whether the use of the temporary interview protocol would affect the detainee's ability to communicate effectively with their solicitor and I am pleased to see that guidance provided by the NPCC has been effected in Cheshire and that their custody records will reflect that these discussions have taken place.

The booking in process in custody suites in Cheshire Constabulary has been developed to risk assess those potentially infected with Covid19. The length of time detainees remain in custody has been built into the custody performance pack while they wait for virtual demand hearings. The suspect management group are closely monitoring the use of bail and Released under Investigation (RUI) and I am reassured that these measures are being overseen by senior offices, with confidence testing with a neighbouring force underway.

The Constabulary are reviewing the use of virtual courts, which have been resource intensive at the height of the pandemic and will consider their use going forward in a balanced way to ensure operations are both Covid19 safe and an effective use of public money.

People held in custody are entirely reliant on others for their care, and during a pandemic this can be an additional source of anxiety. I have a group of committed Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) who provide scrutiny for me to hold the Chief Constable to account. During the pandemic, a system was devised to ensure this scheme operated in a Covid19 safe manner and our ICVs would make unannounced telephone calls to detainees to check on their welfare. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their work.

I will continue to monitor how the Constabulary responds to the recommendations in the report through my scrutiny programme and through feedback from my ICVs. I would also like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all in custody services for their hard work and resilience during the most challenging of times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Dwyer', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

John Dwyer
Police & Crime Commissioner