



## **PUBLIC SCRUTINY BOARD**

Notes of the Public Scrutiny Board held on 26 February 2026 at Runcorn Town Hall.

**PRESENT:** G Southern, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC)  
M Roberts, Chief Constable (CC)

Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner

D Taylor, Chief Executive

J Hare, Head of Communications and Engagement

A Murphy, Governance Officer

Cheshire Constabulary

B Dutton, Assistant Chief Constable

A Blizzard, Superintendent Custody Operations

P Woods, Head of Performance & Planning

*Members of the public observed the meeting online.*

### **1. Introductions**

At the Public Scrutiny Meeting held on 26 February 2026, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, Gemma Southern, chaired the meeting. The Deputy Commissioner opened the session by offering condolences to the Chief Constable and his colleagues following the tragic death of PC Alice Mayo.

The Deputy Commissioner outlined the purpose of the meeting: to widen transparency and accountability regarding police custody. She emphasised the OPCC's ongoing scrutiny work, including independent monthly reviews of custody CCTV and unannounced visits conducted by Independent Custody Visitors.

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the Public Scrutiny Board held on 25 November 2025 were approved. There were no outstanding actions.

### **3. Scrutiny Thematic – Custody**

The Deputy Commissioner invited the Chief Constable to present his opening summary for the thematic session *[see slide presentation in report pack]*.

The Chief Constable began his introduction by acknowledging the loss of PC Mayo and its emotional impact across the force. He stressed that custody is one of the most regulated and scrutinised areas within policing and outlined the improvements made in recent years. A dedicated custodial operations team was formed, lead by Superintendent Blizzard with oversight from ACC Dutton. He explained this was established to strengthen oversight, particularly as arrest volumes have risen significantly as part of the force's proactive policing approach. This includes a 44%

increase in arrests and a 92% rise in domestic abuse-related arrests, a development the Chief Constable framed as a necessary step in protecting vulnerable people. The Chief Constable explained that the Constabulary has invested more than half a million pounds in improving custody facilities, with the intention of making them safer for detainees and more suitable for staff. He also highlighted a concerning increase in assaults on officers and detention staff in this environment, noting 119 such incidents in the last year.

The Chief Constable then also highlighted the force's key initiatives and performance in governance and scrutiny of custody. He added that the Constabulary will continue to heavily scrutinise the custody environment and welcome the external scrutiny.

#### **4. Commissioner's Questions**

The Deputy Commissioner scrutinised the data presented by the Constabulary and asked the Chief Constable to respond to a series of questions.

##### **Slide 2 – Volume of Arrests**

*Question: What themes or patterns are being observed when detention is not authorised? And of the arrests that are authorised, how many ultimately lead to positive outcomes, and how many result in no further action?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that custody sergeants may decline detention where circumstances change or vulnerabilities or medical crises are identified. He said that positive outcomes include charges, cautions, restorative justice, and diversion, and added that of primary arrests: 44% are positive outcomes, 40% no further action, and 16% bail/released under investigation. He added the caveat that of the 40% no further action, the individual may have had an outcome for another matter.

##### **Slide 3 – Wait Times in Custody & Young People**

*Question: We have seen an increase in wait times, and I want to understand what is driving that trend. In addition, what multi-agency work is underway, and what engagement with partner agencies is happening, to divert young people away from custody?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable said that factors that affect wait times include increased arrests, the recent refurbishment of suites, enhanced scrutiny, Baird enquiry recommendations, and process changes for booking in juveniles which requires additional work prior to detention being authorised. He advised that despite this, the average wait times in Cheshire have reduced to around 8 minutes.

The Chief Constable advised that in terms of multi-agency and partner work, the force has liaison and diversion staff in custody from 8 in the morning to 6 at night in all three custody suites in Cheshire. He said that the NHS resource provides diversion

pathways to help deter detained people from re-offending and that 100% of children and 100% of females are referred to this service.

The Chief Constable also clarified that detainees are not taken to local police stations but instead to one of the three designated detention centres located in Runcorn, Blacon, and Middlewich. This ensures access to specialist staff and appropriate healthcare facilities.

### **Slides 7 & 8 – Arrest Demographics**

*Question: How does Cheshire compare nationally, and to forces that are similar, in respect of gender and ethnicity? And for people whose first language is not English, what additional support is provided in custody to ensure they fully understand the process and their rights?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that Cheshire's figures broadly reflect local demographics. He said that 92% of Cheshire detainees had a self-defined ethnicity as white, which is compared to 69% nationally and 77% in the most similar group; and 83% of Cheshire detainees were male compared to 85% nationally and 84% in the most similar group. He said that the increase in foreign national detainees has resulted in a rise in interpreting costs, and rapid-access interpreter technology is used to ensure detainees fully understand their rights both in custody and on the street.

### **Slides 9 & 10 – Use of Force in Custody**

*Question: The Custody Cohesion panel that I chair scrutinises the use of force in this environment. How is that feedback offered to police officers and how do you make sure that any use of force it is necessary and proportionate?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that force could range from low-level physical contact like holding someone, to more robust interventions. He gave reassurance that it is reviewed daily to ensure compliance with force policy and there is accurate recording. Every custody suite is covered by CCTV, and incidents are regularly scrutinised by both internal teams and the independent custody cohesion panel.

The Deputy Commissioner agreed that the use of force is often as much about officer safety as it is about detainee safety and it is important that it is recorded, reviewed, and learned from.

### **Slide 11 – Custody Complaint Allegations**

*Question: What themes or trends are emerging from custody-related complaints? Are these isolated issues, or are they pointing to wider systemic problems that the Constabulary needs to address?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that complaints could cover a wide spectrum of issues, although the general headings are often the length of time detained in custody, the welfare of detainees whilst in custody, the rights of detainees such as phone calls, or more general issues in relation to the attitude of officers or staff. He said that 90% of

cases required no further action or were resolved appropriately. The Independent Custody Visitor scheme received praise for its contribution to transparency and public reassurance.

### **Slide 12 – Strip Searches**

*Question: Please could you explain what we mean by strip search and how this is different to an intimate search? And what protections are in place to ensure that dignity is preserved, especially when clothing needs to be removed for safety reasons. What safeguards are built into the process, and how are they monitored?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable explained that a search should only ever be to the level required to find something. He clarified the difference between strip searches and intimate searches, emphasising that intimate searches are never conducted in custody settings. He said that strip searches are carried out only where necessary, strictly governed by legislation, and conducted with respect for the dignity of the detained person.

### **Slide 13 – Mental Health Act Detentions**

*Question: What changes, if any, have been seen in Mental Health Act detentions since Right Care, Right Person was implemented?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that there were 105 mental health detentions in 2025. He reiterated that Right Care, Right Person emphasises clinical—not policing—responses. However, he said that limited mental health beds within the NHS means that patients sometimes require temporary custody for their safety.

### **Slides 14 & 15 – Vulnerable Adults & Appropriate Adults**

*Question: Custody staff often encounter people with complex vulnerabilities. Identifying these correctly is essential, because the presence of an Appropriate Adult can dramatically change the support a person in detention receives. How are these vulnerabilities identified? And are there any difficulties in securing Appropriate Adult attendance in Cheshire?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable said that a person might be vulnerable by virtue of their age, an illness, mental health issues. He said that an appropriate adult person over the age of 18, could be a family member, could be a friend they identify, or in other circumstances it could be that the force must seek the support of agencies to provide an appropriate adult. He added that Appropriate Adults are required for all under-18s taken into custody. The Chief Constable said that the force use contracted services to provide this support, which is good, although overnight availability can be challenging.

## **Slides 16 & 17 – Baird Inquiry: Female Detainees**

*Question: The Baird Inquiry made important recommendations around the experience of females in detention, and the need for trauma-informed approaches. I would like to hear examples of how these recommendations have translated into practice in Cheshire. What specific interventions or good practice is now in place to better support women and girls coming into custody?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable said that the force took any relevant learning points from this enquiry which was into Greater Manchester Police. He outlined a range of trauma-informed measures in place in Cheshire specifically designed to support female detainees, including the allocation of a female detention officer, access to personal care products, tailored support for vulnerable and pregnant women, and ensuring a safe journey home from custody.

## **Commissioner's Wider Questions**

The Deputy Commissioner said that she wanted to look briefly beyond the slides and touch on the broader environment within which custody operates.

*Question: Custody is a challenging place to work. Staff deal with individuals in crisis, under the influence of substances, or experiencing acute mental health episodes. So, I want to ask what measures are in place to protect custody staff wellbeing in this environment?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable agreed that custody can be an emotionally demanding environment, and facilities have been upgraded with rest areas, quiet rooms, gyms, and targeted wellbeing programmes. He advised an inspector is appointed as the wellbeing lead for the specific area of responsibility supported by well-being allies across all the suites and blocks. He also added that after significant incidents, staff receive debriefs, welfare checks and follow-up support as the Constabulary seeks to do with all their officers.

*Question: Similarly, people in detention often present with addictions, vulnerabilities, or additional needs. I want to understand what interventions or services are available to them, and how they are signposted to ongoing support when they leave custody?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable advised that there is a range of liaison and diversion activities from the healthcare provider in the suites. If someone is identified with a particular need around alcoholism or drugs for example, the staff will make referrals to the relevant agencies with particular emphasis on support for children and female detainees.

*Question: With the high number of detainees identified as at risk of self-harm or mental health crisis, I want to know: what proportion of fitness-for-release assessments are being carried out by health care professionals?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable said that the healthcare provision supplies information in relation to health assessments undertaken. He said that in January 2026 there were 110 fit to release assessments undertaken by a healthcare professional which is equivalent to around 7% of all arrests made.

*Question: And finally, what training and safeguards are in place, for people who, after contacting the police for help, find themselves arrested? How does this stop the re-traumatisation of vulnerable victims, in particular women?*

*Answer:*

The Chief Constable said that there is increasing evidence of officers identifying previously undisclosed vulnerability at the point of arrest or during booking, which reflects the impact of training and cultural change within the force. He added that this work is ongoing and is about making officers and staff aware to always look beyond the obvious.

## **5. Any Other Business**

None reported.

The Deputy Commissioner thanked the Chief Constable for answering the questions raised to provide transparency, accountability, and reassurance to the public that these powers are used responsibly and professionally. She also thanked the public for joining, and the meeting was brought to a close.