HMICFRS PEEL inspections of police custody
ICVA Guidance for scheme managers
2026

Introduction

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have an established programme to inspect police custody across England and Wales. These inspections of police custody will involve inspectors from HMICFRS talking to Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) schemes. This document provides guidance for scheme managers giving an overview of what to expect and how schemes can work with the inspectorates to improve custody.

What is a PEEL inspection of custody?

From 2025, the inspection of police custody has been included in the police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy or PEEL inspection programme. PEEL is the HMICFRS regular inspection of all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Forces will be inspected every four years on their provision of a safe and lawful custody environment (amongst the wider inspection). Each inspection will also result in a graded judgment.

Excerpt from the PEEL Framework

The framework outlines the criteria that the inspectorates will be examining under PEEL for custody; one area includes independent custody visiting. Inspectors will look to you for information on this criterion:

9.1.2 The force promotes fair outcomes for all detainees and is open to effective scrutiny.

How do independent custody visiting and the inspections overlap?

HMICFRS and ICVA are members of the National Preventive Mechanism – a group of independent bodies who can make unannounced inspections of areas of detention. All three bodies work under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). This international human rights treaty is designed to strengthen the protection of people deprived of their liberty, where regular independent visits can safeguard against abuses and prevent torture and ill-treatment. The inspectorates provide an in-depth dive into case audits, inspect the environment and deliver a professional analysis of local performance every few years. In contrast, ICVs visit regularly as local community representatives, examining custody records and speaking to detainees.

In short, both organisations have shared aims, but different perspectives and strengths. We can work together to complement each other and improve police custody.

What does an inspection look like?
The inspections are unannounced and, as such, the police force and OPCC (or relevant authority) will be notified either on the first day of inspection or a few days before the inspection begins.

The inspection will last approximately two weeks and will include the following methodologies:

- On site visits to inspect the estate and observe treatment of detainees.
- On site observations of critical points in the custody process e.g. arrival at the suite, risk assessments and leaving custody to court or elsewhere.
- An audit of the custody records of recent detainees.
- Interviews with key staff and stakeholders.
- Consultation with operational staff.
- An analysis of force policies and processes.
- An analysis on key issues of vulnerability in custody, including examination on use of force.

What to prepare
Prior to your discussion with HMICFRS it is good to do a little preparation.

Please remember that the interview is part of efforts to inspect the police; it is <u>not</u> an inspection of your scheme. The points below focus on how the police respond to scrutiny.

<u>Your interview as a stakeholder</u>
In order to prepare for the meeting, you should consider the following:

- Be prepared to explain the governance of your scheme – how do your volunteers raise immediate concerns, longer-term issues and national issues? How do your police contacts feedback to your volunteers?
- Does your area welcome external scrutiny? For example, do your ICVs get quick access to suites? Do staff welcome their reports? Are you aware of any other external scrutiny e.g. peer reviews?
- How responsive are your police contacts to your work? Do custody staff attend your Panel meetings? Does your custody contact respect your work? Do they resolve the issues that your scheme identifies and that you raise? Can you provide examples of issues that ICVs have raised and that the police have responded to?
- Is there effective leadership on custody in your area? Do you feed back to your PCC regularly on key themes? Do you have a nominated chief officer (usually ACC rank or above) responsible for police custody? Does the PCC(or equivalent) hold the lead chief officer to account for issues that ICVs raise?

- You may also wish to read through the last inspection report to get historical context and benchmark performance.
- What are the top issues that your ICVs report from their visits to police custody? Are there any themes?
- What are the top areas of good practice or positive feedback from ICVs?

Quarterly reporting

You provide quarterly reports that ICVA uses to collate national issues and data on visits. These will be a really useful source of information for you to review to see the themes and trends for the previous years between inspections.

Representatives of HMICFRS provide verbal feedback at the end of the inspections to the force and publish a report in the next PEEL reporting cycle.

Briefing Ends