

## MEASURING RISK AND EFFICIENCY IN POLICE SCOTLAND CUSTODY SETTINGS: A PILOT STUDY

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**Summary:** Police custody is a complex area of policing which requires Police Scotland to carefully balance the risks associated with detainees, the new localism agenda and making efficiency savings. With the move to a national Custody Division as part of Police Scotland now beginning to mature, it is an important time to assess how variation in custody practices impacts on police staff and on detainees. This pilot study used qualitative methods to investigate the challenges around risk and efficiency in two separate police custody environments – one rural and one urban. The study found that staffing, healthcare, the Police Scotland custody estate and trust are key for understanding how risks can be minimised and efficiency maximised. The study identified a series of recommendations which if implemented would help improve police custody in Scotland. The study also identifies a series of gaps in the systematic knowledge base which, if addressed, would assist in developing and supporting the recommendations we have identified.

### INTRODUCTION

Police custody serves a variety of purposes. Legally, it is the cornerstone of the criminal investigation process, acting as a fundamental gateway into the criminal justice process. From a welfare perspective, it can be an opportunity to intervene in someone's life when they are in crisis. Yet, it is also a complex area of policing, both in terms of efficiency and in terms of mitigating and managing risk (Skinns, Wooff & Sprawson, 2015). In 2013-14 the number of detainees held in police custody across Scotland was 192,848 and in the same period there were three deaths in police custody which can understandably draw attention and concern regarding the care and welfare of those in police custody. As Skinns, Wooff and Sprawson (2015) highlight, the challenges of balancing 'good' custody practices for detainees as well as creating positive staffing conditions is challenging.

Historically custody was managed by the eight legacy police forces in their respective parts of Scotland, albeit shaped in later years by a national guidance framework set by the (then) Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland [ACPOS]. Legislation provides an important context for police actions in relation to those people who come into police custody, principally the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. Other legislation also affects specific aspects of detention, with the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill about to be implemented in the summer of 2017. This has a presumption of liberation at its heart, which has implications for how Police Scotland resource and manage custody provision. Irrespective of legislative safeguards, custody is a high risk and resource-intensive dimension of what might be termed intrinsic police functions. The British Medical Association (2009) highlighted that a high proportion of detainees are made up of categories of persons that exhibit particular vulnerabilities, notably those that are mentally disturbed or under the influence of, or dependent on, alcohol or other drugs. Balancing risk against efficiency and effective custody is therefore a key challenge for police officers.

In addition to the vulnerable individuals in police custody, Scotland's unique geography can make custody processes challenging. The introduction of Police Scotland presents clear opportunities to centralise and standardise best custody practice across the country, however, with custody processes being unavoidably time consuming in certain respects, maximising efficiency and managing risk in rural locations can be complex (Wooff,

2015). A legacy of different models of health care provision across Scotland persists, although budgetary responsibility for healthcare provision was transferred from Police Scotland to NHS Scotland on 1 April 2014. This dimension is a crucial aspect of custody risk management and developing enhanced support/diversion for those who come into police care is both a key challenge and opportunity (Elvins et al, 2012).

For this pilot study, we selected an urban and a rural case study that allowed us to compare custody processes and examine the broad ways that efficiency and risk minimization may differ across Police Scotland's custody network. With the recent move by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) to focus more specifically on local custody and the opportunity to inform the national custody strategy, it is timely to undertake a study which will inform these governance structures. With these considerations, the aims of our study were to:

- Independently evaluate and appraise what 'efficiency' means in two contrasting Police Scotland custody environments (one urban and one rural).
- Identify ways of measuring efficiency to inform custody oversight within Police Scotland.
- Examine the issues and tensions arising from balancing efficiency against risk across different custody contexts, and for different stakeholders.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to develop an understanding of the varying nature of police custody across Scotland, we selected two contrasting case study locations. Our urban case study was a large inner city custody suite operating a fairly typical management structure. The rural case study operated a dispersed custody model, where the remote rural custody estate was managed by a central urban-based custody Sergeant. These contrasting locations offered varying opportunities and challenges. We jointly conducted 12 semi-structured interviews and 15 hours of observation across the two custody sites. Interviews covered Custody Sergeants, Force Custody Inspectors (FCI) and Police Custody Support Officers (PCSO).

## FINDINGS

There are a number of interlinked themes around risk and efficiency which emerge from this study.

### Staffing

A key set of themes to emerge relate to the resourcing and staffing of police custody. In particular, there are a complex set of interweaving issues related to the way in which a national police custody model sits alongside, and is integrated with, local policing within Police Scotland. The national custody model of staffing has implications for both risk and efficiency. It has helped improve flexibility, with an FCI noting that the new model '*is more flexible*'. A custody sergeant reinforced the position that things had improved, noting that

*'we are leaps and bounds ahead of [legacy forces], it was like spinning plates before, whereas at least now I can concentrate only on custody [...] it makes your decision making more independent'* [Custody Sergeant, Respondent 18]

Nevertheless, there are a couple of key challenges around staffing. As one custody officer noted '*one of the things is that melding together the national [custody] model with awareness of the local policing is a real challenge*'. Linking national custody staffing with local policing priorities is a challenge for many police officers in both local policing and police custody areas of business in Police Scotland. Findings suggest that this tension between local policing and the custody division manifests itself in different ways.

Firstly, custody staff regularly rely on local policing officers to support vulnerable detainees, including requiring them to conduct constant observation when the detainee is considered to be a high risk. Although this situation is normal and expected by many officers in local policing teams, the process could also be tedious and complex to manage, particularly in rural locations where local policing resources may be quite limited. This added a bureaucratic layer to decision making for staff in custody, with Custody Sergeants needing to negotiate with line managers who were often located elsewhere. This complexity was underlined by a custody sergeant:

*'When I was actually covering backfill, this is when we were Police Scotland, and it was a constant obs we were having to do a drugs case, because they had come in and they'd thought they had internal [concealment]*

*and at that time the guidelines were you used constant obs to watch them. So I was like "we need an officer to come", so I went in, the Inspector happened to be my Operational Inspector, I said "I need someone to do constant obs for that." He says "oh no, you don't"... [Backfill Custody Sergeant, Respondent 16]*

The negotiation of cover can be challenging when local policing provision is already stretched. With out-of-hours custody line management sitting remotely (line management is provided by Cluster Inspectors during weekday office hours, and by an FCI outside these times), the local policing and custody context can be lost in the decision making process.

A second important theme relating to staffing is the role of backfill staff. This was identified as a key challenge across the custody estate. One PCSO stated:

*'Risk? If you ask me backfill Sergeants are a big risk, they aren't always up to speed' [PCSO, Respondent 12]*

This manifests itself in a couple of important ways. Those who are doing regular backfill shifts often have the experience and confidence in custody, with one officer noting that he *'enjoyed the variation in custody'*. However those who are less frequently backfilling in custody can experience additional stress and anxiety, potentially slowing down the custody process and potentially increasing the risk to detainees:

*'Obviously, it's experience, isn't it, as with any job. If you're doing a job day in, day out, you just get used to it, you have learned decision making, whereas if you are only filling in now and again it's not as learned, you're having to deliberate about a lot of your decisions all the time, so you go through things slower [...] so I think it slows down your decision making [...] and also maybe you don't have as much confidence as you would if you were here all the time as well. For instance, you saw the phone call I had for the transfer of custody, I'm out of my comfort zone with that decision, to be honest, so it's a case that I really have to consider that at great length and then discuss it further. But probably, if I was here all the time, I'd know straightaway "this is done, this is done...", whereas, as you see, I'm putting together all my evidence for this before I make this decision about it, as opposed to a learned decision with it, and I have to ask others for advice and I have to rely on my custody officers more than I would be if I was a sergeant here full time, because they're so used to the systems and I'm not' [Backfill Custody Sergeant, Respondent 16]*

For this local policing Sergeant backfilling in custody, the experience is often stressful because of the unfamiliar surroundings, protocols and the ongoing pressures associated with being responsible for managing high risk custody populations. Some backfill officers are rarely in custody and therefore rely heavily on the expertise of PCSOs for guidance on the norms of the custody suite and the subtleties in custody processes (including any recent changes in procedure):

*'some of the sergeants rely on us, they'll say "look I'm here" backfill, or wherever, "I'm relying on you guys to keep me right." And we do, because we work so well together and we know how it works' [PCSO, Respondent 10]*

So although the backfill process appeared to work reasonably proficiently in both our case study locations, it was noted as a challenge for custody processes more broadly and was identified as a riskier way of managing the custody environment than resourcing custody from those officers that regularly work in that environment. From a resourcing point of view, the police officers who are backfilling in custody do not have their ongoing local policing workload (e.g. ongoing investigations) covered, meaning they have an additional backlog of work once they complete custody shifts. Additionally, backfilling in custody often means that local policing teams can be short of officers. This is a key example of the way that a less efficient process may also be riskier to detainees and staff.

Police Custody Support Officers are a vital component of Custody Division and they are often the ones who support the backfilled police officers. The legacy-force areas have variable practice in the way that Police Custody Support Officer roles are defined. Some PCSOs are allowed to move detainees around the custody estate, while others were based entirely within the custody suite:

*'But in terms of for staff across the country, you've still got staff across the country who are all employed in different contracts, different terms and conditions [...] So that in itself causes issues from an FCI point of view,*

*because my understanding sometimes will be clear on well a PCSO down in [name of legacy force area] doesn't do this, but one in Glasgow does this and one in Aberdeen does this. So that's really challenging. In fact, I was covering FCI just about two or three weeks ago, and I had that very thing where I discovered that PCSOs down in Dumfries and Galloway don't routinely search, because it's not part of their terms and conditions, which I was aghast at, because that's a PCSO's bread and butter and I would have thought that was top of the list of their duties, but apparently not down there' [Inspector, Respondent 21]*

Although there are complex contractual differences inherited by Police Scotland from the legacy forces, a standardisation of the PCSO role over time would enable Police Scotland to be more reactive to resourcing challenges in the custody estate and consequently less reliant on using local police officers in custody. It would also facilitate the transfer of detainees in Glasgow and allow for Police Scotland to be more flexible in staffing:

*'And that would be a massive improvement to things, if we could do that, because at the weekend when we do prisoners transfers, especially within Glasgow, you're relying on the sergeants doing it. So at the end of their shift, that crossover period, your relying on them, whereas if we had PCSO who were able to it then it would be a lot more easier to facilitate' [Inspector, Respondent 20]*

Developing PCSO contracts may also allow for professional development of this role and over time, the ability to provide career progression for staff in these roles.

While the national custody division creates a degree of consistency across the country, the challenges around staffing relate to both risk and efficiency. In terms of risk, many of the officers who backfill on an irregular basis are less confident in their role and are therefore under more pressure. This can make the custody process slower and less efficient. Additionally, the role of the PCSO could be enhanced across the estate with appropriate upskilling and opportunities to develop. Many PCSOs have been in the job for long periods of time and therefore have the institutional memory for custody. They are a key asset in supporting police officers in taking decisions. The trust between members of staff is therefore of key importance in the risk/efficiency nexus.

## **Detainee healthcare**

The ability to deliver healthcare to detainees in an effective and timely manner is fundamental to mitigating risk within a custody suite setting. Whilst the health care budget transferred from Police Scotland to NHS on 1 April 2014 we found that our two case study sites were representative of the view expressed in 2014 by HMICS (2014: 41) that "Legacy models of healthcare provision varied widely from area to area and there will continue to be a variety of models implemented after 1 April 2014". It should be noted, however, that the scope of this project did not include examination of forensic medical services. Our urban case study had on-site custody nurses available within the suite (though the nurses sometimes worked off-site too), whilst the rural case study used only on-call local General Practitioners (GPs). Each site would always call an ambulance in emergency situations.

All detainees are asked a comprehensive national set of questions to assess them against a common scale of risk, including medication, physical and mental health and other risk factors when they present at the charge bar within a custody suite. The question set had been recently updated prior to our observation visits and some staff felt that whilst the questions were necessary the pro forma could be a little inflexible in practice. We observed that the standard national questions generated consistency in practice and also engender a strong cultural pre-eminence around the issue of healthcare on first contact with all detainees. Our observation of practice found consistently high attentiveness to the issue by all staff during the 'booking-in' phase, and high levels of discussion in cases where detainees given answers were seen as evasive or contradictory. Once a welfare plan – including frequency of observation determined by the Custody Sergeant – is established then the support staff (in the main PCSOs, supported by PCs in some cases) take on immediate responsibility for monitoring detainee welfare. For high-risk detainees deemed to require constant observation we observed that operational resources are quite routinely required for extended periods to act as local observers. This has implications, as noted above, for local policing resources.

We did not interview detainees but our interviews with staff highlighted a general view that efficient and timely provision of healthcare helps to legitimise the work of custody staff. Each detainee's circumstances are unique, and in behavioural terms can vary from totally compliant to violently non-compliant, so generalisations cannot apply to their received satisfaction (most detainees can be expected to be unhappy at their loss of liberty).



Managing detainee health risks optimally is critical to mitigating custody staff stress levels, and whilst a Custody Sergeant carries overall responsibility, staff stress is contingent on a few broad factors we found:

- The experience level of the Custody Sergeant
- The precise model of healthcare implemented locally (e.g. on call doctor, or nurse-led)

For example, a backfill Custody Sergeant may well be an experienced operational officer but if their shifts are irregular then they are inherently likely to be more risk averse, in part, because they observe fewer and less diverse incidents. Nonetheless, the FCI role does help considerably in mitigating this risk, even with permanent Custody Sergeants, and not just in relation to healthcare but in the interface with criminal justice decision-making too. A good example emerged from what an FCI told us:

*'...a custody sergeant came to me and said "Inspector, can we release this person on an undertaking?" because they had verbal communication with two doctors who said they didn't have the capacity to come out and see the person. He had underlying health issues and they were actually suggesting that he get released on an undertaking. So I had to go straight back and say "well, I'm really sorry but I'm not going to make a custody decision based on lack of healthcare provision." You know, and the sergeant's like "all right, okay, okay." You know, and it wasn't his fault, because it's my day job so I know it inside out, but I had to go back to him and say "no, at the end of the day, they clinically assess this person, then if they say he's fit to be detained, that's all good and well. If he's not fit to be detained then I will make that decision in the custody disposal of it, but I'm not being driven by the fact that [healthcare advice was not available]...' [Inspector, Respondent 20] [the experience level of the Sergeant in the example was not made clear]*

This example exemplifies the importance of mechanisms to weigh fitness to release based on the advice of a Health Care Professional (HCP) (and could also play to fitness to detain or charge), as well as the simultaneous need for robust oversight in the chain of custody decision-making. The vigilance of a Custody Sergeant in busy situations – such as when multiple detainees arrive simultaneously – requires flexible team-working, often with experienced PCSOs overseeing the data entry aspects of booking-in with the Sergeant observing:

*'When we are doing the care plan, you might have noticed last night I was running two bars at the one time. I will do that as long as I stagger it so that I can hear the care plans for the prisoner because that to me is what is so vitally important, that I hear what the care plan is. The care plan is important from the words but the reason that we don't tend to do the processing all the time is because most of the care plan is coming through visual evidence. It is about body language, it's not just about the words they are saying. Their mouth is telling you something and their eyes are telling you something completely different. One by last night was saying no I've not had anything and you are like, yeah your eyes are like saucers, what have you been taking? So as I say it's all the sort of non-verbal and verbal clues that you are looking for that can help me make that decision as to what level of risk' [Sergeant, Respondent 15]*

With mental health becoming an increasingly prominent aspect of policing, it is important that custody staff are supported in the complex decision making in this area. Assessment of mental health is particularly challenging for police staff and often requires a suitably qualified HCP. In the larger of the two case study sites, custody nurses with competence in mental health assessment are able to provide more timely interventions (albeit they are not always on site, and a GP may still be required). The Sergeant quoted below encapsulates the wider social dimension of custody whilst also noting that the model of healthcare provision in this suite works only when the NHS healthcare model locally is configured appropriately:

*'...the gateway now to mental health services for people who are suicidal or threatening suicide is now, if they are under the influence of alcohol, if they have committed a crime, they will come into police custody as opposed to going straight to hospital and that is because the first link into the mental health services is through the health care hub here because the mental health nurses will make the assessments and then link them into in to either out of hours or during the day, you know within here they can link them into all the different mental health services' [Sergeant, Respondent 15]*

Custody staff were universally positive about working alongside NHS custody nurses but of our two sites only one had this system. The challenge is clearly to find a model with the flexibility that delivers optimum outcomes in all places. An Inspector interjected an important note of pragmatism:

*'I would like to see nurses in every custody centre. That won't happen, for a number of reasons, but in the main, the NHS built their own service models for each area, and that was dependent on throughput of prisoners, geography of the area and, in reality, in a police office where we've only got four cells, and they're never ever full, we're never in a million years going to have a nurse sitting there 24/7' [Inspector, Respondent 20]*

The rural case study site also showed the value of localism, where we witnessed a strong working relationship with a well-established local GP, with whom there appeared to be a strong bond of trust and – in this case – a relatively manageable response time when detainees with routine healthcare needs were identified. Engaging local healthcare arrangements in the national custody model remains variable, with police custody in many rural communities requiring locum Doctor cover. The risks associated with being, in some cases, a considerable distance from medical care can impact on the risks to detainees and stress experienced by staff. Local police-health relationships become important for facilitating appropriate and pragmatic approaches to detainee welfare. This often requires professional inter-agency working and trust.

## **The importance of trust**

A key theme running through this research is the importance of the culture of staff in police custody for managing risk. Given that the national division is a fairly recent construct, it is important to consider the variation in custody models within the division. Although this study is based on data from only two sites, the contrasts between the urban and the rural were useful for understanding the role that trust plays in the successful running of police custody in Scotland. This can be divided into internal and external legitimacy.

Internal legitimacy requires that respect, fairness and trust are at the centre of the decision making process. The remote management role of the FCI in particular relies on large amounts trust in custody sergeants and PCSOs. This is not only trust that officers will alert the FCI to the situations which they are required to report on, but also that custody staff will use their judgement to take the correct decisions:

*'I think it's probably just human nature that, although you've not met the sergeants, there's certain ones you can trust and make the right decisions, and quite often they'll "by the way, inspector, this is what we've done, just to make you aware." And that's satisfactory, and there's others that, how can I put it, you've got to keep a closer eye on, if you like' [Inspector, Respondent 23]*

In the national context, this can be more challenging because this relies heavily on trusting staff and knowing how the remote team operates, with one participant describing this relationship as 'golden' and 'built on trust over many years'. When staff in these positions are backfill, the inherent trust is not always as clearly developed, meaning that custody can function in a less positive manner and more decisions need to be deferred to the Force Custody Inspector. This can create workload issues for the FCI. In rural locations, where understanding of the local context and geography of the custody estate is even more important, inherent trust between senior management and those in the custody suites becomes even more crucial.

In the cases where a remote custody suite is staffed by a police constable, their line management is frequently removed from the immediate decision making process:

*'Where we are, trust is key. The Sergeant needs to know I'll make the right decision. I update her frequently, but she is 2 hours away at the end of the day [...] so there is more pressure, responsibility here than in other [cities]' [PC, rural community, Respondent 9]*

This means that decision-making gets devolved down to the rank of Police Constable. In the rural fieldwork location, the officer in charge of the rural custody suite had 25 years' service in that location and 8 years in custody. The officer had worked with the Sergeant and shift for a considerable period of time and there is therefore an inherent trust in the decisions being taken. This type of relationship allows the satellite custody model to work in a fairly efficient and risk-minimal manner. However, if there are backfill staff on in both the remote custody suite and in the main regional suite, *'the risks are multiplied and it becomes very stressful'* [PC, rural community]. Building in resilience to these staffing models therefore becomes important for mitigating risk and improving efficiency. Again, consideration of the PCSO roles in these models is important. As the Criminal Justice Bill gets enacted, this resilience will become even more important for custody division.

An example where staffing resilience could be improved is in the movement of detainees in the custody estate. An advantage of the national custody division lies in its flexibility to look at national capacity across the estate. However, the movement of detainees around the estate remains contentious:

*'you then have a situation where people are getting put on a bus and driven to [names of custody locations A and B] and then [name of custody location C] will transfer prisoners out to [name of custody location D], and it's just lots of people getting moved across the division and across the force. That's the madness bit of it, that's where it breaks down [...] detainees hate it and staff hate it' [PC, Urban location, Respondent 13]*

Whilst this may make sense at the national strategic level, at a practical level and in terms of risk and efficiency, it can reduce local policing capacity as officers are moving detainees around. In terms of external legitimacy and at a more theoretical level, linking internal trust with the perception of custody is important. The views of detainees and staff are key for building legitimacy and procedural justice in the custody division. In particular, recent research evidence (Skinns, Rice, Sprawson, & Wooff, 2017) shows that internal processes have a direct impact on the way(s) that detainees experience the police. This is important once people are released from custody; if detainees are treated well in police custody, then there is evidence that their trust in the police increases. This impacts on broader trust and legitimacy. Conversely, if a detainee becomes frustrated in the process and is moved through the custody estate, they are likely to behave in a more risky manner and they are less likely to view the police as legitimate. Although this may seem insignificant, over time this directly impacts on public confidence in the police.

## Estate matters

The distribution of custody facilities at any given time across Scotland reflects a series of historic management decisions that reflect population density and historical volumes and patterns of detention. With 54 primary custody facilities and 46 ancillary centres built at different times it is somewhat inevitable that conditions vary and that individual centres exhibit constraints. At one of our case study locations a cell suitable for constant observation was unusable at the time of our visit due to a broken seal around the glass, a problem that anecdotally had been diagnosed some weeks prior to the evening we were present and when a need to use it arose. Realistically, not all problems can be solved instantly nor should budgets ever be seen as bottomless. However, seemingly minor defects can have important knock-on effects such as the need to place a detainee in a less suitable cell and as a result create a drain on operational resources as officers need to be drawn from those policing the community to stand watch for an extended period of time. Staff 'workarounds' are time consuming, less efficient and usually create greater detainee risk.

A broad sense of realism tinged with resignation on estate issues was apparent in our observations, but we did not find direct evidence that risk was compromised or directly affected (albeit our evidence base was necessarily limited in this regard). However, custody staff were very supportive of CCTV within cells as a tool of risk management. The provision of CCTV – and its technical specifications – varied considerably even across our two case studies. In the smaller of the two main suites we visited the Sergeant was able to view cell cameras (in those cells so equipped) from the charge bar area, whilst the larger suite had a viewing area that was some distance away from the charge bar and impractical for the Sergeant to check. Whilst the volume of detainees was much greater in the latter, overall staffing was higher but the smaller facility had what appeared to be the more user-friendly system from the Custody Sergeant perspective. Moving towards more modern and CCTV equipped cells would help staff to more appropriately risk manage.

Policies on cell occupancy levels and detainee transfer introduce some degree of flexibility to counter short-term estate issues, but the closure of some facilities when local staffing levels are inadequate did appear to have the unintended consequence of losing team continuity and therefore trust. The variation across sites (even on our limited examples) inevitably has different positive or negative effects on both detainee and staff welfare. The working environments we saw lacked a well-defined rest area that was clearly demarcated from the cells for example, but we cannot say this is a widespread feature. Nonetheless, the psychological impact of eating and preparing staff food and detainee food in the same location serves to highlight the intensity of the environment, which generally lacks external stimuli such as natural light or views of the external environment. Considering the long-term welfare of staff here is important.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Emerging from the findings are some key recommendations, which also highlight some areas on which future research should focus in our view:

### Staff training

We understand that the staffing models used by Police Scotland are not necessarily at the sole discretion of Custody Division. We are also aware that the Criminal Justice Bill is likely going to necessitate different staffing models in the near future, particularly in relation to the FCI role. Given these structural challenges, however, it is more important than ever to support existing staff through the changes. In particular, staff training was strongly and consistently identified as an area for improvement in two key ways:

1. **Increasing the training of backfill custody supervisors:** Many participants felt that too little training is currently provided for those doing irregular backfill work or for those who had not done it previously. For those who have not done a backfill shift in the previous 12 months, we recommend that they shadow part of a shift prior to being the sole custody supervisor. This could be accommodated at the shift overlap periods on a weekend nightshift. This period of time would allow the backfill officer to become familiar with the suite, the local protocols and to shadow a more experienced staff member. Although we would consider this mandatory for those who have not completed backfill in the previous 12 months, it should be an option open to all potential backfill staff. This is particularly important as the Criminal Justice Bill is enacted and legislation around reviews changes.
2. **Increasing the training of backfill custody officers (police constables):** A key frustration for custody officers was feeling under-utilised in the custody environment. In particular, it seems very important to ensure that these members of staff have the appropriate Information Communications Technology training to allow them to book detainees in and out. It would be beneficial to upskill those undertaking regular shifts as custody officers, to support the custody supervisor in managing PCSOs, taking calls and supporting the movement of detainees as necessary.

### PCSO contracts

We understand that PCSO contracts are subject to unionised conditions and are therefore complex to change. However moving towards a more flexible PCSO contract arrangement would allow two things:

1. **Parity:** At the moment the variation in contracts across the country makes it hard for FCI's to know what PCSOs in what geographical area can do. The disparity in jobs creates different expectations at a national level and managing the role of detainee transport can be complex with variations on who does this across the estate. Moving towards a position where PCSO contracts are as far as possible generic will help facilitate the management and flexibility with this role.
2. **Upskilling:** The current model of PCSO allows little promotion or development. Thinking more holistically about the custody estate and roles within it which PCSOs could fulfil, may help with staff retention and attracting new staff in to these positions. Upskilling in this way will require consideration of remuneration, support for those who do not wish to undertake further development and significant staff and union consultation. Nevertheless, moving towards a position of upskilling those who wish will help reduce the reliance on Police Officers to backfill in custody environments and support other 'front of house' roles.

### Healthcare models

This study did not have the scope to examine forensic medical services but in respect of managing the complex welfare needs around healthcare there appear to be some clear principles that emerge:

1. **Understanding best practice:** whilst models of healthcare seem to be heavily contingent on NHS service distribution across the 14 Health Boards there is only limited understanding of the way that different models work and the outcomes that flow from them. Whether more flexible models are possible (such as custody nurses at weekends in some places) requires detailed examination and evidence both in terms of policing (and criminal justice factors such as recidivism) outcomes and healthcare. The crucial intersection between the two dimensions is, however, beyond question.
2. **Responsiveness:** despite the often complex needs of detainees much welfare-related healthcare is routine and non time-critical. Timeliness can impact upon general levels of detainee well being and



associated behaviour, which also relates to police staff well-being. Whilst a 'happy' custody suite is unrealistic there are clear benefits that emerge from healthcare that can be delivered in a responsive way. Custody nurses are particularly well suited in meeting this aspiration, but a local GP may also be capable of highly responsive care. In the case of mental health, appropriate competencies amongst custody nurses are particularly useful in helping Custody Sergeants assess risk, and to do so responsively. The availability of such competencies returns us to the previous, wider point about the optimum service models to employ in different settings.

## Estate factors

Our study was constrained by its scope and we did not generate clear evidence on the connection between estate factors and risk and efficiency, though the specific context of CCTV does generate a broad recommendation:

1. **Remote supervision:** CCTV is widely used across the estate in 'on-site remote observation' of high-risk detainees whilst they are in cells for their own protection. Whilst more user friendly systems are clearly desirable in any event (we witnessed the limitations of the system in one of our case studies) there is significant potential to use remote supervision to spread the burden of risk management 'off-site' (e.g. a CCTV feed to HCPs such as doctors or nurses, or within police line management to an FCI or Custody Sergeant managing a remote satellite custody suite such as that which occurs in our rural case study). Technical and data security challenges should not be underestimated (as well as capital cost) but should be carefully explored as new ways of using CCTV offer potentially transformative outcomes. This is particularly important with the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill. There needs to be consideration given to the way that FCIs can get visual and audio input if needed from a detainee as they are conducting their reviews. Considering the wider possibilities of technology here is key.

## Trust

The notion of trust has threaded throughout this research project. In a national division there is a particularly important focus on trusting staff to make appropriate, practical and safe decisions in a timely manner. The size and scale of custody division makes this of key importance. Ensuring resilience in staffing profiles and supporting teams to work remotely in these stressful environments should be considered a central role of the senior management team in custody. In particular, as the Criminal Justice Bill is enacted, facilitating regular training and creating a positive culture in the face of large scale policy changes will be important. The experience and dedication of many of the staff in this division will help support the senior management team implement the appropriate legislation and practice.

## Towards an efficient and risk managed custody environment in Scotland

Overall, the two case study locations that we visited appeared to manage risk very well. It is an area of policing that is particularly challenging and is undergoing significant policy changes. The introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill will put significant strain on custody initially, but will hopefully reduce throughput in the long run. The FCI role is going to become increasingly important and it is key that all staff, backfill included, are fully aware of the significant legislative changes and supported in appropriate training and learning.

With strategy 2026, localism has become a key cornerstone of policing policy. This study has identified important local practices in the custody estate, which when staffed appropriately appear to work well. It is important to build resilience into future custody models. Ensuring that existing staff are supported with the upcoming changes and developing the PCSO role in a more holistic manner should help build a robust staffing profile across the estate.

Managing risk is at the heart of the new policing strategy and nowhere is this more apparent than in a custody setting. Using technology more and in better ways will help improve this dimension of custody.

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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