

SP0218

# Custody

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The Police Service of Northern Ireland is committed to ensuring that it complies fully with its legal obligations in relation to persons in police custody.

# 1. Policy Statement

In line with National Custody Strategic Vision, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) aims to develop a consistent & transparent custody operation that is safe, effective and efficient.

We are committed to the highest standards of treatment for persons arrested, detained and subsequently departing from custody, either on release or on transfer to other partners in the criminal justice system. We accept that detained persons should be treated humanely, fairly, expeditiously and in accordance with the law.

We keep people safe in custody by identifying and managing the risks they present to themselves and others.

The primary purpose of detaining an individual in police custody is to make them amenable to the investigation of a criminal offence of which they are suspected.

We recognise that the removal of a person's liberty and subsequent detention is a serious contravention of that individual's human rights, which is only justified when the circumstances are legal, proportionate and absolutely necessary.

Detention into police custody should not be automatic. Officers must carefully consider

all appropriate alternatives in reaching a decision on detention. Particular cognisance must be given to protecting the rights and addressing the needs of children, young people and other vulnerable persons.

Custody should be considered as a last resort for children.

The 6 nationally recognised strategic custody principles are:

1. Detention in Police Custody is safe and used only when necessary, not punitively;
2. Custody supports effective investigation of crime and adds value to the criminal justice system;
3. The custody experience is non-discriminatory and transparent for all that have engagement with the process;
4. Custody practitioners are professionals in their field, trained to a national minimum standard and accountable for their actions;
5. Custody practice is ethical and evolves, reflective of changing demands, identified best practice, learning from previous failings; and

6. Engagement with partners is effective and efficient in the support of the investigation of crime.

Where possible all anticipated risks should be the subject of a properly conducted Health and Safety Risk Assessment. Each designated suite will have in place standing orders relevant to the layout and infrastructure of that location. These are subject to regular risk assessment and formal annual review.

We are committed to supporting and engaging with oversight bodies in the independent monitoring of police custody suites. An Independent Custody Visitor Scheme is administered by the NI Policing Board.

We ensure that those working in custody are trained and have training refreshed in line with relevant role and responsibilities. We invest in annual refresher training for custody sergeants and civilian detention officers to reflect best practice and national standards. We will continue to monitor and develop training in line with the changing needs of detained persons in order to deliver safer custody and detention.

In addressing particular characteristics of the detained population e.g. disability, gender, nationality, age and religious background the PSNI has developed relevant policy and guidance for custody

staff. Supporting services include: translation and interpreter services; Appropriate Adults Scheme; Medical practitioner reviews; and registered intermediaries.

**Policy Links:**

[NPCC National Custody Strategy](#)

[National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People](#)

There are significant oversight bodies and pieces of legislation that set out the 'rules' of police custody, most notably:

- The Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Act 1989 (PACE), supplemented by Codes of Practice;
- Practitioner guidance issued by the College of Policing referred to as Authorised Professional Practice (APP). College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice 'Custody & Detention);
- Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT);
- The Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT Independent reviewer);
- The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI);
- The Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI-RQIA);

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC);
- The Information Commissioner (ICO); and
- The Data Protection Act 2018.

## 2. Designated PSNI Custody Estate

We provide custody provision throughout Northern Ireland. There are 9 fully operational suites:

Strand Road; Coleraine; Antrim; Musgrave; Banbridge; Lurgan; Dungannon; Omagh and Enniskillen.

There are 2 contingency suites, Strabane and Bangor, which can be opened by exception, to provide additional cell capacity if required.

Musgrave and Antrim Custody suites are designated under the Terrorism Act (2000) as Serious Crime Suites.

The PSNI custody estate reflects Home Office best practice where possible e.g. including observation cells, life signs monitoring, and ability to segregate and separate children and adults within a custody suite.

## 3. Technology

We strive to use technology to enable the custody process to be streamlined, efficient, effective and safe.

All custody systems are auditable and operate in line with the PSNI policy on Data Protection and Information Security.

Custody Information is available 24/7 on PO!NT for advice and guidance. The site is maintained and updated by District Policing Command and reflects best practice.

## 3. Contact

If you have any comment to make on the content of this Service Policy please contact:

[zDistrictPolicingCommand@psni.police.uk](mailto:zDistrictPolicingCommand@psni.police.uk)