

CLUSTER: Thames Vally Cluster

TIMETABLE	DATE
Date of inspection	3 – 15 March 2025
Report published	06 May 2025
Action plan submitted	30th June 2025

Rec. no	Concern	Accepted / Rejected	Response / action taken or planned	Action owner	Update / target date for completion
	Priority Concerns				
1.	The main agencies responsible for court custody did not do enough to address the reasons why some detainees were held in court custody for longer than necessary.	Accept	<p>Custodies are a priority for the Court. The Court cannot always bring defendants up due to factors involved with the case or parties involved. We do have turnaround target of paperwork to prioritise results, we discuss lack of prosecution paperwork and readiness issues at court user groups.</p> <p>The PECS enhanced reporting provides all stakeholders, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HMCTS Performance and Service Improvement Managers, - HMPPS Area Executive Director's - HMPPS Prison Group Director's - Prison Governing Governors <p>with an overview, by location, of the total duration all custodies are held in custody suites. These are utilised to determine the root cause of significant delays to drive remedial</p>	<p>HMCTS</p> <p>PECS</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed</p>

			<p>All defects will be logged with EQUANS helpdesk by HMCTS staff and escalate if necessary before it becomes an issue.</p> <p>PECS have commenced early exploration on how to implement toilet seats to all court custody suites (prisoner toilets) using prison industries. If this proves feasible a PECS and HMCTS project group will take this forward.</p>	PECS	December 2025
3.	There were too few suitably adapted custody facilities for detainees with disabilities.	Accept	<p>An Equality access compliance commission will be carried out across our estate in the Southeast. Facilities in our cells in Thames valley for detainees with disabilities will be included in this commission.</p> <p>Where new premises are developed and existing Courts re-modelled, accessibility is at the forefront of design. The department is currently working on a wider EA strategy, which will inform future accessibility improvement decision making.</p>	HMCTS Ops, HMCTS FM	December 2025
4.	Telephone interpreting services were not always used when necessary to communicate with non-	Accept	A programme of assurance checks, which includes the use of telephone interpretation, will be introduced to be completed by local managers and supported by PECS contract management team.	PECS	September 2025

	English speaking detainees.		<p>An internal survey has been conducted with court locations to ascertain what barriers exist to the use of the translation line. Results have been analysed and a working group set up to explore options and agree actions on increasing appropriate use.</p> <p>The existing Toolbox Talk on the use of the translation service has been refreshed and a short video has been created to compliment the toolbox talk.</p>	Serco	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>
	Key Concerns				
5.	Staff did not do enough to protect detainees from public view when they alighted from vehicles, which compromised their privacy and dignity.	Accept	This is a problem at Oxford Magistrates Courts, no easy solution but will investigate with the Facilities Management team.	HMCTS FM	September 2025
6.	Staff were not always comprehensively briefed about detainee risks; observation checks were often cursory and not always at the required frequency.	Accept	A Directors Red Flag Notice to Staff was issued on 30/01/25 alongside a refreshed version of the briefing sheet to include banner headlines of responsibilities. The Risk Profile Chart process remains in place. Both the daily briefing and risk profile chart use are monitored at internal audit. To support embedment of this revised process and supporting	Serco	September 2025

			<p>documentation a programme of assurance checks will be introduced to compliment the internal Serco audits which shall be completed by local managers and supported by PECS contract management team.</p> <p>The Welfare Checks toolbox talk has been refreshed and a video to complement its use is under development. SOPs outline the frequency and standard of observation required. This is monitored during internal audit.</p>		September 2025
7.	There was some excessive routine searching and handcuffing of detainees, without any individual risk assessment.	Accept	<p>Searching SOP has recently been reviewed to reiterate levels of searching required.</p> <p>Serco operate a dynamic Risk Profile Chart based on individual prisoners which is initiated from information contained on dPERs and then can be updated throughout the day. Risks are annotated and mitigation controls are clearly identified, in the case of restraints by highlighting 'standard' or 'enhanced'. The rationale for mitigation is also annotated. Compliance will be assured through enhanced audits and assurance visits completed by Serco local managers and supported by</p>	Serco	September 2025

			PECS contract management team.		
8.	The range of food was poor, very limited distraction materials for detainees	Accept	<p>Serco is currently undertaking a review of food that is offered in custody suites in collaboration with the PECS contract management team and GeoAmey, it is expected to enhance the variety of food offered in court custody suites. Sandwiches, crisps, and biscuits are available along with Alpen bars for children in our care.</p> <p>Designated distraction packs from an external provider are released monthly. Courts have access to all previous months should they be required via the Serco PECS Hub site. Items available for Children and Young People have been reviewed and refreshed and tablets have been reissued with more up to date content. Some locations have chalk boards. Courts are encouraged to source alternative reading materials and where possible hold a local library of donated books. Compliance will be assured through enhanced audits and assurance visits completed by Serco local</p>	Serco	<p>December 2025</p> <p>September 2025</p>

			managers and supported by PECS contract management team to ensure distraction packs meet the required standards.		
9.	The training of custody staff in resuscitation skills was not frequent enough to maintain their competence.	Accept	<p>There is an ongoing training delivery plan for this in place. Allowing for tracking and necessary refresher training to enable staff to remain in date. This is reviewed and discussed between PECS and the supplier on monthly meetings. First Aid training refreshers are conducted in line with national guidelines.</p> <p>Slides covering the use of resuscitation methods, and their application, have been added to the annual refresher online Learning Management System. Training is undertaken by all operational staff. Medical emergency procedures are covered in Use of Force initial and refreshers.</p>	<p>Serco</p> <p>Serco</p>	Completed
10.	Release processes were inconsistent and too often lacked sufficient inquiry into detainees' personal circumstances that might identify and	Accept	<p>HMCTS will ensure cases are resulted in a timely manner.</p> <p>Pre-release support checks are in place and support information leaflets are available. A toolbox talk on the release process is in</p>	<p>HMCTS</p> <p>Serco</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2025</p>

	<p>address problems, such as homelessness.</p> <p>Detainees were not always given sufficient means to get home, and some releases were significantly delayed, particularly for those who originated from prison</p>		<p>development, which will be complimented by a short video. The review and refresh of the support documentation has been put on an annual schedule across all geographical areas within the contract. This will be accompanied by a campaign to highlight the need for their use.</p> <p>Travel warrants and subsistence payments are provided in line with the Serco SOP which adheres to HMPPS policy. Travel warrants are given for train journeys to the home destination and if a bus journey is required then cash is provided. If the journey is expected to be longer than 2 hours, then additional cash is provided which increases in increments. Where exceptional circumstances arise such as a physical disability, taxis may be used. Compliance shall be tested through assurance checks completed by local managers.</p>	PECS	September 2025
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Recommendations	
Accepted	10

Accepted Subject to Resources/Partially Accepted	-
Rejected	-
Total	10