ACTION PLAN – Report on an inspection visit to court custody facilities

CLUSTER: Devon, Cornwall & Dorset

TIMETABLE	DATE
Date of inspection	02-14 March 2026
Report published	05/05/26
Action plan submitted	28/08/26

Rec. no	Concern	Accepted / Rejected	Response / action taken or planned	Action owner	Update / target date for completion
	Priority Concerns				
1	**Leaders from the three main agencies were not always working effectively together to support consistent delivery of a safe and decent custody provision.**	Accepted	New regional Custody Focused Stakeholder Meeting has been established - a quarterly multi-agency forum bringing together HMCTS, HMPPS, Police, custody providers, prisons and lay observers to review custody performance, address risks and issues, and improve outcomes for detainees across the Southwest. Terms of reference produced and meetings minutes, these will be maintained and Terms of reference to be reviewed quarterly. **Update 18/8/26** To strengthen multi-agency leadership and collaborative working across the custody pathway, a new quarterly Custody Focused Stakeholder Meeting has been established for the Southwest. The forum brings together senior representatives from HMCTS, HMPPS, Police, custody providers, prisons, estates teams and	HMCTS	**July 2026**

			Lay Observers, providing a formal structure for joint oversight and decision-making. The Terms of Reference set out a clear expectation that all agencies work collectively to deliver a safe, respectful and effective custody service. The forum promotes shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, encourages positive working relationships and communication between partners, and provides a mechanism for jointly resolving operational issues escalated from local discussions. All members are expected to contribute constructively, take ownership of agreed actions and assume collective responsibility for successful outcomes. The meeting reviews a standard performance data pack, including Prison Turnaround Times, Late Arrivals to Court and Late Sittings, together with current risks, issues and action plans. Progress is monitored through risk and action logs, and where matters cannot be resolved locally, they are escalated through the appropriate regional or national governance routes. The arrangements will remain under review to identify emerging themes, support continuous improvement and provide ongoing assurance regarding the safe and decent treatment of detainees. Serco/PECS representatives continue to attend daily stakeholder meetings, ensuring regular operational engagement between agencies alongside the new strategic quarterly forum. This strengthened governance framework provides greater multi-agency accountability, improved communication and clearer	PECS, Serco	

			escalation arrangements, helping leaders work more effectively together to support the consistent delivery of a safe and decent custody provision.		
2	**The main agencies responsible for court custody did not do enough to address the reasons why some detainees were held in custody for longer than necessary.**	Accepted	Without precise dates and times, it is difficult for local managers to be specific in summarising what the reasons behind delays could be. Reasons for delays could include any of the following: • Delays in resulting • Delays in checking before sharing result • Delays in getting paperwork through to Serco • Delays in legal attending custody for pre and post interviews • Delays in bespoke transport i.e. youths, females, man movers • Lack of bed spaces and ambiguity about remand locations Mitigations (including out of court resulting staff) are in place. There is out of court resulting staff, as well as new permanent Compliance Officers in post to mitigate this risk by supporting with resulting and checking to ensure this proceeds in a timely manner. **<u>Cornwall</u>** Prisons receive lists with timings. Only one run occurs from Prison to Courts in Cornwall in the morning. It can take a few hours for females to arrive from prison to Truro Crown due to geography, so females usually not listed until 12 noon to give them time to arrive. Listing practice will endeavour to use times that coincide with transport to reduce custody times. **<u>N&E Devon</u>**		

			Prisons receive lists with timings - if prisoners arrive at 9am for 2pm list. There is only one van drop from the prisons to the courts each day and therefore they arrive in the morning and need to wait until their hearings are scheduled. Listing practice will endeavour to use times that coincide with transport to reduce custody times. PECS and HMCTS to collaborate and coordinate arrivals with listings. **<u>S&W Devon</u>** Listing practice will endeavour to use times that coincide with transport to reduce custody times. PECS to liaise with HMP to ensure escalation process for processing releases is effective. Serco to re-brief staff (contract wide) on the requirement to liaise with HMCTS to ensure defendants with vulnerabilities/increased risk are prioritised. Serco/PECS team to feed back to monthly or quarterly HMCTS stakeholder meeting examples of where defendants have not been prioritised. PECS contract and prison operation does not support additional discharges of prisoners listed for afternoons. This will be considered as part of the contract re-procurement for the Generation 5 PECS service. **Update 18/8/26** • Delays, performance data and emerging themes will be reviewed through the quarterly Custody Focused Stakeholder Meeting. Additional time can be allocated	PECS/HMCTS PECS/HMPPS SERCO Serco/PECS	**July2026**

			within the meeting where a particular issue requires more detailed multi-agency discussion. • It is also proposed that local custody issue meetings are reintroduced at site level. A short task and finish group, with both legal and operational representation, will be established to agree the purpose, standard agenda, membership and escalation route for these meetings. • The existing 8.30am and 9.15am operational calls provide a route for addressing issues arising on the day. Communications will be issued to sites to reinforce the expectation that each site provides at least one representative. **Update 20/08/26** The leader of the Task and Finish group contacted all Operations Managers advising that a representative from each site will need to be nominated to attend task and finish group They have also reiterated the importance of representatives from each court attending the local stakeholder calls each morning.		
	Key Concerns				
3	**Staff did not do enough to shield detainees from public view when they alighted from vehicles in insecure**	Accepted	**<u>Cornwall</u>** • All sites have a secure gated area (alongside a cells entrance) for parking Serco vans – all are being utilised. **<u>Devon</u>**	HMCTS Property	

	areas, which compromised their privacy and dignity.		• Exeter and Plymouth Combined Courts - secure parking which is utilised. • Newton Abbot Magistrates' Court - secure van dock that is used by Serco. There is a small area of parking reserved for them at the side of the building, and a secure van dock to the cells which is large enough for one vehicle. • Plymouth Magistrates' Court - no secure parking. Prisoners are unloaded in a public area. Serco vehicles can no longer access the underground garage due to their increased size. Using smaller vehicles would not remove the risk of contact with Magistrates, who use the garage for secure parking. As Plymouth Magistrates' Court has no external grounds, a screened route to the cell area cannot be provided. • Serco vehicles are too large to enter the entrance of the secure garage (metal cage) at Barnstaple Law Courts. Vans parked outside and defendants are handcuffed and then walked through the cage into the custody complex. High profile detainees are taken into the garage area to protect from the public and press. **<u>Dorset</u>** All sites have secure, private parking which is fully utilised. • Bournemouth – secure enclosed van dock for the custodial vans. Currently due to the closure of Poole the empty custody vans are being parked overnight in the secure staff / judicial car park at their request. • Poole (c*urrently closed)* – secure van dock area but it is not enclosed/covered.		

			• Weymouth – secure van dock area but it is not enclosed/covered. The empty custody vans are being parked overnight in the van dock at their request. ACTION: HMCTS to liaise with Police, where required, to support virtual hearings and/or the production of defendants in custody at Barnstaple Law Courts / Plymouth Magistrates' Court, using the Swindon approach. ACTION: Serco to confirm if they can use smaller vehicles to mitigate problem at Barnstaple Law Courts (and potentially Plymouth Magistrates' Court). Serco unable to shield prisoners and required to maintain security when alighting detainees from vehicles. HMCTS to propose physical solutions at exposed courts to improve shielding from public view (Plymouth MC only). **Update 18/8/26** • Secure vehicle routes continue to be used at sites where they are available. Further assurance is being sought from local teams on any checks in place to confirm that these routes are used consistently. • For sites where a fully secure route is not available, particularly Plymouth Magistrates' Court, Facilities Management has been asked to explore whether portable screens or other physical measures could provide additional privacy. FM colleagues are also checking arrangements used in other regions to determine whether these could be replicated locally.	Serco, HMCTS	

			• The outcome of this work will be recorded, including any operational, safety, property or security constraints where a proposed option is not feasible. **Further information required:** Awaiting feedback on the feasibility of portable screens and any learning from other regions. Local teams also need to confirm what assurance checks are currently undertaken. **Update 20/08/26** Where full secure routes are not available, vans are parked as close as possible to detainee entrances to minimise detainee exposure. The entrances to Plymouth and Newton Abbot Magistrates' Courts are on public roads, so screens could be hazardous / used as weapons. The visibility issue at Poole is from above (neighbouring blocks of flats), so one-sided screens would not offer a total solution.		
4	**Not enough was done to meet the individual needs of some detainees.** Facilities to support detainees with disabilities were limited, interpreting services were not always used and female detainees were not always	Accepted	**<u>Cornwall</u>** None of the Cornish sites are currently EA compliant. It has not been possible to provide a detailed assessment of accessibility provision, as the expected facilities and specific disabilities referenced have not been clearly defined. Where prisoners require language support, interpreters are typically arranged by the Police prior to attendance at court. In cases where an interpreter has not been booked and one is subsequently required, the Court will endeavour to secure appropriate interpreting services at short notice, usually via CVP through the Magistrates' Courts.	HMCTS Ops, HMCTS Property	

	supervised by female staff.		**N&E Devon** The report stated that, as the only Equality Act compliant facility, there were few helpful adaptations within the designated cell. However, it is noted that Exeter and Barnstaple Law Courts are believed to meet Equality Act requirements. A review of the relevant design guidance by court staff identified only two specific accessibility features for designated cells: a wider cell door and access to an accessible toilet. No further prescribed adaptations were identified within the guidance. In practice, Serco undertakes assessments of prisoners' disabilities and implements appropriate measures to meet individual needs where required. **S&W Devon** It was noted that some aspects of the assessment could not be fully evaluated, as the questions did not specify the needs or disabilities being referred to. In relation to interpreting services, interpreters are routinely booked where a requirement has been identified by the Police, and Local Authorities notify court administration teams of any ongoing custody cases requiring language support. Due to the geographical location of courts in the far Southwest, interpreters may occasionally request to attend Magistrates' Court hearings via CVP rather than in person, particularly where a defendant has been remanded overnight and the request is made at short notice. In such circumstances, it may not be possible to facilitate pre-court conferences within the cell complex. Regarding the supervision of female detainees, Serco managers for both Magistrates' and Crown Courts have confirmed that,		

			where female custody cases are known in advance, efforts are made to deploy female staff for supervision. This can be more challenging in cases involving overnight detentions; however, every effort is made to source female staff from across the court estate where possible. OCS policy permits supervision by male officers when necessary. Female detainees are accommodated separately from male detainees and are placed in cells equipped with CCTV coverage where available. Further clarification on the specific accessibility requirements under consideration would be necessary to provide more detailed comment. **<u>Dorset</u>** In relation to accessibility, Dorset courts do not currently provide accessible cells, accessible cell areas, or accessible routes between the cell complex and courtrooms. As a result, detainees with identified accessibility requirements are accommodated and processed through Salisbury, where appropriate facilities are available to meet their needs. **ACTION: Seek further information on specific accessibility requirements** Serco to amend their recruitment targets to increase the number of female PCOs. Serco to implement a process to identify those with potential need for interpreting services using a report available through 'Book a Secure Move'. Serco to improve audit checklist to interrogate the usage data for translation services. This will ensure that reason not to use translation services are captured.	HMCTS PECS, Serco	**Oct 2026** **Oct 2026**

			Serco to recirculate account numbers for translation services to ensure circulated data accurately reflects calls are captured. **Update 18/8/26** • Further information is being gathered on whether audit checklists have been updated to provide assurance that detainees' individual needs and accessibility requirements are identified, considered and acted upon. This will include checking how accessibility assessments, interpreting requirements and other identified needs are recorded and monitored. • The current statement regarding Equality Act compliance at Barnstaple Law Courts is also being checked with the relevant local lead, as the position may be affected by limitations within the cell complex. The action plan will be amended once this has been confirmed. **Further information required:** Gathering confirmation regarding audit checklist changes, and regarding the correct Equality Act compliance position for Barnstaple Law Courts.		**Sept 2026** **June 2026 (complete)**
5	**Scrutiny of the use of force was not sufficiently robust and failed to identify important learning to improve staff practice.** Body worn video cameras were underused, limiting leaders' ability to	Accepted	Serco/PECS to introduce initiatives to further scrutinise Use of Force documentations and feedback learning to local management teams. 100% of incidents utilising BWVC footage, the documentation will be reviewed to ensure this is aligned with footage. Serco to positively circulate examples of successful use of Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVC) footage (i.e. prosecutions) to reinforce staff confidence in their use. (add line to SOP etc)	PECS/Serco Serco	**Sept 2026** **Ongoing**

	make sure all force was justified.				
6	**There were too few custody and escort staff trained in the supervision of children.** Most court custody suites also lacked suitable facilities for children or appropriate distraction materials to occupy them.	Accepted (a) Accepted (b)	a) Serco to undertake a review of court-based Dual Badge Officers (DBOs) (dependant on volumes) to increase the likelihood that children are supervised by trained staff. b) A review of distraction materials will be completed and coordinated by the PECS quarterly Welfare Board.	Serco Serco	**Oct 2026** **Dec 2026**
7	**Custody staff did not receive training in resuscitation skills often enough to maintain their competence.**	Accepted	This training is now delivered annually as part of a wider training refresher (LMS based). The training package was not under roll out; it had been added to the existing annual refresher on to the learning management system prior to the inspection. The detail was submitted as part of the inspection evidence.		**Complete**
8	**Digital person escort records (dPERs) did not always accurately identify a detainee's health risk.**	Accepted	(Refers to Police/Prison) PECS/Serco to feedback any DPER Healthcare quality issues to police on daily, monthly and/or quarterly stakeholder meetings. PECS to hold prison DPER completion/quality to account via regular operational visits.	PECS, Police	July 2026 (ongoing) July 2026 (ongoing)

9	**Specialist mental health liaison and diversion support was not readily accessible for detainees in all court locations.**	Accepted	**<u>Cornwall</u>** Liaison & Diversion (L&D) teams attend at both Magistrates' Courts but not regularly at Crown Court. Local provision shortfall to be explored with NHS partners. **<u>N&E Devon</u>** L&D's based at both Exeter & Barnstaple. Office provided by HMCTS. **<u>S&W Devon</u>** Plymouth did have the L&D team on site for a prolonged period. This seems to have ceased due to staffing issues. There are mental health support facilities at the local police station which can be called on. **<u>Dorset</u>** Bournemouth Combined Court has dedicated Mental Health Team on site and have complete procedure regarding communication with Serco. Weymouth Combined Court has Mental Health First Aid trained Serco officer on site, and they also have communication with L&D team should there be any further help required. **<u>NHS L&D</u>** L&D teams across the Southwest remain committed to providing a responsive service within court settings and continue to work	HMCTS, NHS	

			closely with HMCTS colleagues to maximise opportunities for engagement with vulnerable defendants. The services have developed a good understanding of the practical challenges associated with delivering point-of-need provision across a large geographical area and are actively working with HMCTS to identify solutions. One of the key challenges identified is access to timely court listing information, which can make it difficult to deploy resources flexibly across multiple court locations. Encouragingly, national discussions regarding future L&D access to the Common Platform are ongoing. Whilst the detail is still being developed, greater access to listing information has the potential to support improved visibility of demand, better deployment of resources and earlier identification of individuals who may benefit from L&D intervention. There are now clear examples of positive practice across the region. Dedicated L&D staff are embedded within Exeter and Bournemouth Crown Courts, following support and investment from the national Health and Justice Team. These arrangements demonstrate the benefits that can be achieved through close partnership working and provide valuable learning that can help inform future developments elsewhere in the region. L&D colleagues are also working constructively with HMCTS and remain engaged in discussions regarding accommodation and facilities within court buildings. Both organisations recognise the importance of providing confidential and appropriate spaces to		

			support assessments and engagement with service users, and there is a shared commitment to identifying practical improvements where possible. Overall, there is a strong willingness from both HMCTS and L&D services to continue strengthening the partnership, building on existing good practice and exploring opportunities, including potential Common Platform access, that could further enhance support for vulnerable people appearing before the courts. Both L&D and HMCTS are due to schedule further meetings on how we can collectively progress this work across the Southwest. Awareness of how to access L&D Services to be reenforced to Serco Staff.	Serco, PECS	

Recommendations	
Accepted	9
Accepted Subject to Resources/Partially Accepted	0
Rejected	0
Total	**9**