Independent Police Custody Scrutiny Panel - Summary (September 2026)

The Independent Police Custody Scrutiny Panel met to review police custody practices, with a particular focus on the use of strip searches in custody.

The Panel brings together independent members and partner organisations to provide external scrutiny and promote transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Governance and Panel Business

The Panel received an update on revised vetting arrangements for members, noting the need for appropriate checks whilst being able to recruit a broad representation from communities across South Yorkshire onto the Panel.

Progress against previous actions was reviewed, including work relating to equality and data protection assessments, improvements to CCTV audio quality, and the provision of complaints data for future scrutiny.

South Yorkshire Police Updates

The Panel received feedback on issues raised during previous case reviews. This included the delivery of training focused on equality, diversity, inclusion, cultural awareness and professional standards. Individual feedback and reflective practice have been used to reinforce learning where concerns were identified.

An update was provided on custody operations, including staffing updates, the introduction of a new police customer relationship management system, and ongoing efforts to improve service delivery within custody environments.

Custody Complaints and CCTV

The Panel was informed that there are currently a small number of live custody complaints under investigation and that complaints are reviewed using CCTV evidence where available. Positive feedback regarding custody is also received.

The Panel discussed ongoing concerns regarding poor or missing audio on CCTV systems in some custody suites. The issue has been raised internally and further work is being undertaken to assess and address the problem.

Review of Strip Search Processes

The Panel received an overview of current strip search procedures. Particular attention was given to safeguards for children and vulnerable detainees, including supervisory oversight and quality assurance arrangements. The Panel noted a reduction in the number of child strip searches during the current year.

Members also discussed the availability of Appropriate Adults for children and vulnerable adults. While delays can occur when waiting for Appropriate Adults to attend custody, it was reported that these delays have reduced in recent months. Further information on waiting times will be provided to the Panel.

Custody Performance and Disproportionality

The Panel reviewed custody performance data, including information relating to strip search activity and disproportionality.

Data presented indicated that in South Yorkshire Black people are arrested and brought into custody at a higher rate than White people relative to their representation within the local population. This finding is consistent with national trends. Across England and Wales, Black people are arrested at more than twice the rate of White people relative to population size, and national criminal justice statistics continue to show ethnic disproportionality at several stages of the system. The data also showed that Black detainees spend longer in custody on average than White detainees. The Panel agreed that further analysis is required to better understand the reasons behind these findings and findings and/or progress on analysis would be reported back to the Panel at the next meeting

The Panel also discussed a data quality issue affecting the recording of some outcomes from some strip searches (corded clothing) and was advised that work is underway to improve the accuracy and consistency in those cases. Corded clothing refers to any garment containing drawstrings, cords, ties, or laces (such as hooded tops, tracksuit bottoms with waist cords, jackets, or shoelaces) that can pose a ligature risk for self-harm or be used to cause injury

Case Reviews

The Panel reviewed several anonymised custody cases involving strip searches, examining custody records and CCTV footage of the booking in process.

During the reviews, members identified examples of good practice, including:

- Referrals to appropriate support services.
- The presence of an Appropriate Adult throughout a child's custody process.
- Efforts to accommodate detainee needs and preferences where appropriate.

The Panel also highlighted several areas for further consideration, including:

- The terminology used within custody records in relation to an assessment of a detainee’s mental health needs.
- Ensuring decision-making rationales are fully documented.

- The use of de-escalation techniques where appropriate.
- Understanding how staff familiarity with individuals who frequently enter custody may impact a detainee’s experience.
- The relationship between vulnerability assessments and strip search decisions.

One case could not be fully reviewed because CCTV audio was unavailable, reinforcing the Panel's concerns regarding recording quality.

Next Steps

A number of actions were agreed, including:

- Further analysis of disproportionality data.
- Improvements to data quality relating to corded clothing strip searches.
- Review of terminology used in some custody records.
- Provision of information on Appropriate Adult waiting times.
- Continued monitoring of CCTV audio issues.
- Follow-up responses to issues identified through case reviews.

The Panel will continue to monitor these issues and review progress at future meetings