

# Being a custody detention officer

Published on 30 November 2022 Written by Sophie Rost, Custody Detention Officer, Devon and Cornwall Police

## Spotlight on a role: Custody detention officer

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I've worked as a custody detention officer (CDO) at Exeter police station for five years. Despite wearing a similar uniform to our warranted police colleagues, CDOs are police staff. We have designated powers that are only authorised in the custody environment, like the power to conduct physical searches on detained persons (DPs). CDOs assist custody sergeants to process DPs through custody, while monitoring their wellbeing. We maintain the safety of the unit by performing daily checks, including inspecting cells, and we perform other administrative tasks to ensure the unit is fully operational.

On a typical day, we conduct three core roles – office, visits and biometrics. The office role requires a considerable level of multitasking to facilitate the interview process. This involves contacting investigating officers, solicitors and where necessary, appropriate adults. We also ensure DPs' health by arranging for medication to be collected and by liaising with medics and/or mental health professionals, who ensure that DPs are fit to be in custody. If serious concerns are raised, diversion is arranged to a more appropriate setting. The visits aspect of our role involves conducting scheduled checks to ensure DPs' ongoing welfare, as well as providing blankets, food and drinks.

Finally, we obtain biometric samples from DPs in custody. This involves profiling their description and taking a photograph, fingerprints, DNA sample and footwear impression. Biometrics are used to conduct a speculative search, to establish possible links to other offences, so a high standard is required.

A significant proportion of DPs who arrive in custody present in a volatile or emotional manner, which can be exacerbated by intoxication or mental health issues. Like police officers, we are trained to use approved restraint techniques, but these methods are only employed as a last resort. Rather, our aim is to de-escalate the situation.

A crucial function of our role is to use patience and good communication skills to build a rapport and manage their expectations. In Exeter custody, we have distraction items, including foam footballs, jigsaw puzzles and colouring books. These support DPs with neurodiversity or mental vulnerabilities, by providing a constructive diversion tool that helps us to have positive interactions.

To become a CDO, you need to complete an initial five-week training course, followed by a mentorship period in custody. There are regular refresher days that focus on first aid and personal safety training. In relation to career progression, the role provides a valuable insight into policing. By having a proactive approach to learning and development, CDOs can acquire a wealth of knowledge and experience. It can be a great opportunity to develop the necessary skills and attributes to become a police officer or to explore other staff roles.

- This article was peer reviewed by Clare Fencott, Custody Detention Officer, South Wales Police.

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