

Op NOVA Service Visit 2024: Life-changing support for veterans in the justice system 24.07.24, Kent Police Training College, Coverdale Avenue, ME18 9DR

Keynote Speaker Summary: Kent Police

Delivered by:

Acting Inspector Guy Bourner

Detective Chief Superintendent Samantha Price, Head of Kent Police Criminal Justice and Custody

Kent Police: Encouraging Best practice in Custody Suites and detainee wellbeing

Custody Suites are often the first point of contact for veterans entering the justice system. Through partnering with Op NOVA, Kent Police has fostered a veteran-informed staff culture that is supported by the force's priority on meeting the diverse health and well-being needs of its detainees. This culture helps veterans to disclose their Service history and refer into Op NOVA, resulting in fewer repeat arrests and generating positive outcomes for the wider Kent Community.

Acting Inspector Guy Bourner, the OP NOVA SPOC, spoke on behalf of the Kent Police custody team, which has collectively referred over 97 veterans into Op NOVA since April 2023.

In Act Insp Bourner's experience, the key markers for best practices in custody suites include the referral process and wider police education regarding the challenges veterans face in the justice system.

Referrals: Encouraging best practice

Act Insp Bourner explained that Kent's custody teams have experienced Op NOVA through both automatic and manual referral processes. Automatic referrals are clearly superior in terms of efficiency but are not a substitute for a veteran-informed custody team.

- Custody suite teams must understand the value of an Op NOVA referral and be aware of the single referral pathway.
- Veteran-informed custody teams enable veteran disclosures at any point in custody, not just at check-in. The initial check-in can be stressful, and veterans may be more inclined to disclose to pastoral, healthcare or wider staff while in police custody. Kent police is particularly appreciative of its Forensic Healthcare Practitioners and Designated Detention Officers in encouraging and implementing Op NOVA referrals.

Wider police education: Fostering and sustaining a veteran-informed culture

Act Insp Bourner acknowledged the support from Kent Police's award-winning Armed Forces Network, headed by Deputy Chief Officer Ian Drysdale. This veteran-informed culture ensures that partnerships with services such as Op NOVA can generate positive outcomes for the veteran, the police, and the wider community.

The resources supplied by Op NOVA support this vital continual education and Act Insp Bourner highlighted the value of the Op NOVA training video, which is shown to all new recruits and forms part of the specific custody team induction and training programme.

The Training Video is available to all police forces and is also being increasingly shared with veterans in custody suites to encourage referrals and open dialogue between police and veterans.

Contact Op NOVA to request a copy of the Police training video.

Click here to watch an edited public version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhhFk7tzEJ8>

Detective Chief Superintendent Samantha Price:

The baton was then passed to D/Ch/Supt Samantha Price, who enhanced Kent Police's operational summary by underlining the force's focus on the health and wellbeing of all detainees in custody.

The session explored how this commitment is demonstrated by Kent Police's investment in its internal Forensic Healthcare Practitioners, a pioneering resource currently only active in Kent and the Metropolitan Police Force. Independent reviews have supported the value and impact of this resource.

This investment places Kent Police-employed nurses in custody suites, helping to address the underlying issues that many detainees present with and providing an additional and approachable contact for detainees to disclose their veteran status.

"Our investment in our own Forensic Healthcare Practitioners represents an integrated working partnership that enables us to deliver the best outcomes for detainees. Detainee care is paramount to us."

D/Ch/Supt Price also praised the custody suite's close collaboration with the NHS Liaison and Diversion (L&D) teams. The NHS L&D teams work together to refer detainees to appropriate support pathways that help them move beyond the justice system. OP NOVA is a prime example, and her words resonated with the L&D attendees.

D/Ch/Supt Price closed her session by acknowledging Kent Police’s wider commitment to detainee wellbeing, with neurodiverse resources in all Kent custody suites and an increasing focus on peer support and experience-led improvements.

“We want to hear. We want to listen to the experiences of detainees who have moved through our custody suites.”

Kent police hold a Gold Award from the Armed Forces Covenant, reflecting the force-wide support of the Armed Forces community, from their civilian support officers to the highest-ranking officers. For information on how Op NOVA can support police forces to educate staff and support and refer veterans, contact Op NOVA using our single point of referral system.

Referral to the Op NOVA Support Team:

Freephone: 0800 9177 299

Monday to Friday: 8am – 8pm | Saturday: 8am – 2pm

Online referral form:

www.forcesemployment.org.uk/opnovareferral

Email: opnova@forcesemployment.org.uk

Secure Email: opnova@forcesemployment.cjsm.net

