

Gloucestershire Constabulary
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Your reference:

Our reference: FOI_26_0460

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Direct dial: 01452 754304

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Date: 24/06/2026

Dear

Gloucestershire Constabulary Freedom of Information request FOI_26_0460

On 12/05/2026 you sent an email constituting a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking the following:

1. Please can you tell me how much Gloucestershire Constabulary recently spent on decorating the custody block with murals (sky/ clouds and forest scenes).
2. Please can you advise the rationale for this.
3. Please can you advise what expert advice was sought to support this rationale.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 s1, I can confirm that Gloucestershire Constabulary holds some relevant information.

In relation to your request, please see the response below.

- 1) The cost of the custody mural was £1000. The cost to Gloucestershire Constabulary was £0, due to the costs incurred being covered by a monetary grant.

For questions 2 and 3, please see the below

Police custody is recognised as an environment that can be inherently stressful and, for some individuals, traumatic. The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice – Detention and Custody Risk Assessment highlights that detention itself may increase vulnerability and requires ongoing consideration of environmental impact as part of safeguarding responsibilities.

This is particularly relevant for individuals with neurodiverse conditions, such as autism, ADHD or sensory processing differences, who may experience heightened sensitivity to noise, lighting and unfamiliar environments. These factors can contribute to increased anxiety, distress and difficulty engaging with custody processes, leading to increased detention times, increased assaults on staff and increased levels of self-harm.

The introduction of calming environments (including design elements such as murals, soft colours or reduced sensory stimuli) is intended to mitigate these impacts by reducing overstimulation and supporting emotional regulation.

UK custodial data demonstrates the scale of risk:

- In England and Wales, there were 837 incidents of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners in the 12 months to December 2025.
- There were 117 assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners in the same period.
- In 2024/25, there were 17 deaths in or following police custody, with a number involving individuals with mental health or substance-related vulnerabilities.

(Source: Ministry of Justice – Safety in Custody Statistics; Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody)

These figures indicate that self-harm, distress-related behaviours and violence remain significant risks in custodial environments, particularly among vulnerable individuals.

A number of UK studies have considered the relationship between custodial environments and detainee behaviour:

- Nixon & Goldie-Chaplin (2025), *Journal of Forensic Practice* found that aspects of the prison environment can directly influence levels of self-harm and the need for intervention.
- Wooff & Skinns (2018), *Punishment & Society* identified that the physical and emotional environment of police custody settings plays a key role in shaping detainee emotions and interactions.
- Skinns et al. (2020), *British Journal of Criminology* demonstrated that material conditions in custody influence detainee perceptions of dignity and wellbeing, which can affect behaviour and engagement.
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024) – *Improving Behaviour in Prisons* reported that environments which promote calm, safety and engagement can contribute to improved behaviour and reduced disruption.

UK policing practice has increasingly recognised the need to adapt custody environments to meet neurodiverse needs. The College of Policing Practice Bank (West Midlands Police neurodiversity initiative) identifies that improved environments can:

- Reduce the likelihood of self-harm
- Reduce incidents of violence towards staff
- Improve engagement and communication within custody processes

In addition, calmer environments support staff by:

- Reducing behavioural escalation and the need for use of force
- Supporting safer interactions
- Improving overall efficiency of custody processes

Over the past 5 years within the Constabulary's custody suite we have lost over 554 days to staff sickness linked to psychological or nervous disorders, which has resulted in significant overtime costs and of course the welfare cost to the individual. Upon speaking to affected staff members, A triggering working environment was identified as a key reason for these high levels of sickness.

The approach to creating a calming custody environment is informed by a combination of:

- National policing guidance and Authorised Professional Practice
- Published academic research within the UK criminal justice system
- Practice examples developed in collaboration with individuals with lived experience and partner organisations
- Research undertaken by Creased Puddle Neurodiversity experts.

In summary, the introduction of calming design features within custody environments is informed by:

- Evidence of high levels of self-harm and violence in custodial settings
- UK research demonstrating a clear relationship between environment, emotional response and behaviour
- National policing guidance emphasising risk assessment, welfare and safeguarding responsibilities
- Emerging UK practice recognising the specific needs of neurodiverse detainees

These measures support:

- Detainee welfare and dignity
- Reduction in self-harm and behavioural incidents
- Improved safety for staff and detainees
- Compliance with obligations under PACE Code C and broader safeguarding standards

This ensures that environmental adaptations are aligned with evidence-based approaches to safeguarding, wellbeing and risk reduction.

For the avoidance of doubt, please note that the Constabulary conducted 'in house' research in relation to this project and external billable expert advice was not sought on this occasion.

If you are not satisfied with this response or any actions taken in dealing with your request, you have the right to ask that we review your case under our internal procedure. Please note that a request for an internal review must be made within 20 working days of the response to your original request.

If you decide to request that such a review is undertaken and following this process you are still unsatisfied, you then have the right to direct your complaint to the Information Commissioner for consideration.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following means:

Website - <https://ico.org.uk/>

Call their helpline - 0303 123 1113

Email - casework@ico.org.uk

Post – Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely,

Disclosure Officer
Gloucestershire Constabulary