

# West Mercia Constabulary

Reliance – the first private sector organisation to provide custody management services.



## The Customer

Reliance had daily contact with West Mercia Constabulary as part of the Prisoner Escorting and Custody Services (PECS) contract where the local police custody centre in Hereford was used to house detainees awaiting court hearings. Reliance's professional approach and understanding of the custody management processes and procedures gave the Constabulary the confidence to pilot custody management with Reliance.

The pilot began in the custody centre in Hereford and operated for six months. It was then extended to include the custody centres at Worcester City and Droitwich.

The results proved positive, with the Reliance team integrating fully with custody and operational police officers. This success resulted in West Mercia Police Authority extending the service to all six custody centres.

## The Result

In 2002 Reliance was awarded the total contract after a competitive procurement process. The focus for West Mercia Constabulary was, and is, on increasing the number of officers available for operational duties. The Contract released officers back to operational duties. Custody officers report an improved quality of care and a reduced level of hostility as detainees recognise that Reliance custody assistants played no part in their arrest.

The continuity and professionalism of Reliance's people is important, for improved relationships both with police officers and persistent offenders. Reliance drives efficiency gains because the dedicated custody assistants become more familiar with the task than police officers. The six custody centres report an improvement in the quality of detainee processing.

## Key Services Provided Include:

- Detainee processing
- Detainee care
- Custody interventions

*Our confidence in Reliance to provide excellent custody services is reflected in our commitment to developing an excellent working relationship. This working relationship enables West Mercia Constabulary to focus on our core policing responsibilities now and in the future.*

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## Partnership

The Reliance Contract Manager plays an important role at the monthly meetings held with the custody user group. The meetings discuss the impact of new legislation and evaluate best practice initiatives. Reliance is encouraged to share feedback on current working practices across all six centres.

## People

Although each custody assistant works from a designated custody centre, Reliance trains its people to operate from any one of the six centres. This enables them to work with the varying custody practices and procedures required by each BCU.

- *Warranted officers relieved of custody duties return to front line duties*
- *Creating a professional workforce*
- *Improved level of care reducing hostility*
- *Delivering efficiency gains across custody*
- *50% of the Reliance team is female*

## Professional custodians

The Reliance management team provides coaching and guidance at site level. All managers have successfully completed a robust training programme. They deliver an excellent level of professional guidance and pastoral care to their teams. Custody sergeants have benefited from more direct contact with the Reliance management, reducing time to resolve issues that arise in the custody centre.

This approach to custody management has enabled Reliance to achieve a high professional standard for custodial support services. The dedicated Reliance team has established a close professional bond with the police, which is essential for effective working in a volatile environment.

## Measuring efficiency

The Reliance team has developed an operational methodology based on the experience and the knowledge of former police officers in the team. This methodology takes full account of risk in a custody environment.

## Designated powers

High standards of care and professionalism have resulted in Reliance securing a new contract for custody management in 2006 for West Mercia Constabulary. In the new contract, members of the Reliance team are known as detention officers. The Chief Constable has designated powers to the Reliance people under the Police Reform Act 2002. This is testament to the trust that has developed between West Mercia Constabulary and Reliance.