

A group of people, some in military-style clothing, are shown in a supportive embrace outdoors. The scene is set against a background of trees and greenery. A large blue diagonal graphic element is present on the right side of the image.

NIAAS

BECAUSE SUPPORT MATTERS.

Mind
wise

A NEW VISION
FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Annual Report 2023-2024

To the Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Appropriate Adult Scheme (NIAAS)

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Delivered by MindWise:

A membership charity which supports those affected by severe mental illness and other mental health difficulties, who are contracted by the Department of Justice to deliver the Northern Ireland Appropriate Adult Scheme (NIAAS).

Our Mission:

To transform lives and develop new visions for mental health.

Reporting:

The statistical information that makes up this report is drawn from a database populated by appropriate adults delivering front line support in police stations across Northern Ireland.

OUR VALUES:

Underpin everything we do in supporting people affected by severe mental health illness and mental health difficulties, they are:

PASSION

RESPECT

EMPATHY

TOGETHERNESS

This report is in respect of the period 1st December 2023 – 30th November 2024.



NIAAS Manager's Introduction

During this contract year we provided support to detainees on 3,609 occasions. The overall figure was 152, (4%) lower than last year. The changes in service demand from month to month and year to year, indicate the fluid nature of the service, which we anticipate and respond to, to meet the changing and challenging requirements within police custody suites.

It is thanks to the dedication and commitment of our staff team that we meet the changing demands. Our experienced staff can competently engage with the call centre, custody suite staff and colleagues, to ensure attendance requests are addressed promptly and cost effectively whilst meeting our key performance indicators.

Confidentiality prevents this report from including specific case complexities, neither can it reveal how particular vulnerable people were navigated through a series of processes that may be intimidating and alien to them. Each year staff engage in the most serious of police investigations, which can be both lengthy and disturbing in nature. These cases required our staff to spend many hours in interview rooms assisting and supporting detainees, in the most trying of circumstances.

We also acknowledge the professionalism of the police custody staff. We have found them to be courteous and compassionate towards the vulnerable people we are called upon to support.

Stanley Booth MBE
MindWise Criminal Justice Manager

3

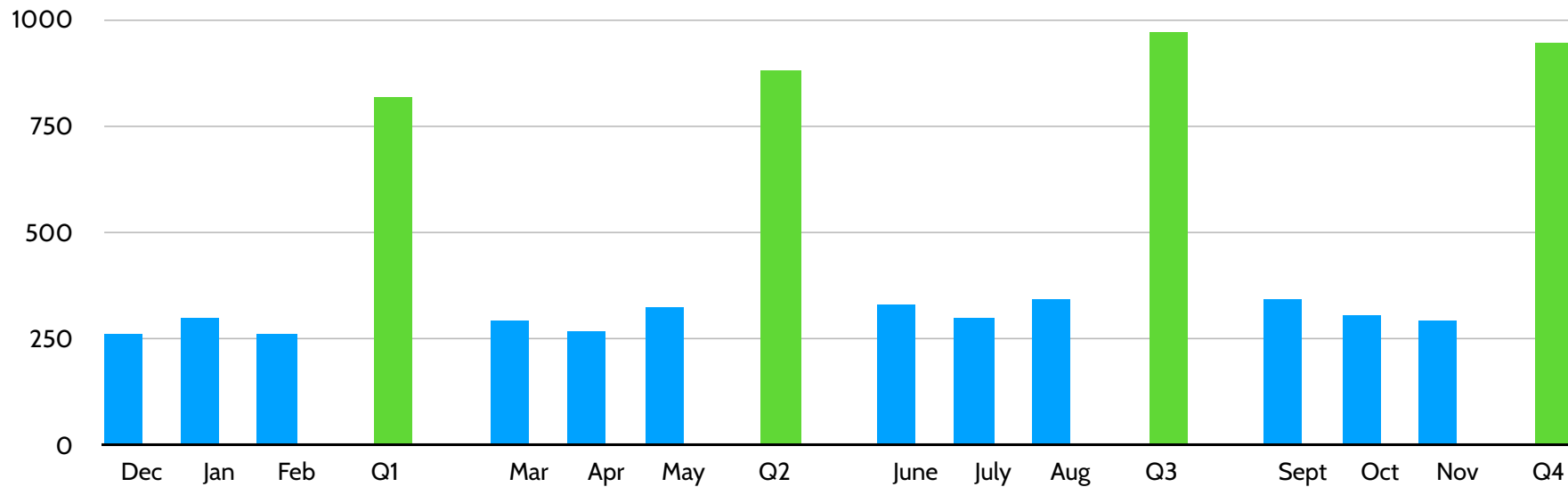
EMPATHY

Our 2023-2024 Report

The NIAAS was delivered by our staff team throughout Northern Ireland 365 days of the year between 08:00 and 23:00 hours, with an out of hours call out facility also provided between 23:00 and 08:00 hours, when urgent circumstances necessitated attendance.

During this reporting year the NIAAS staff team provided support on 3,609 occasions at police custody suites. [Table 1](#)

Table 1 : Support Provided by NIAAS		
Dec	261	
Jan	298	
Feb	259	818
Mar	294	
Apr	266	
May	322	882
June	329	
July	295	
August	345	969
September	344	
October	302	
November	294	940
		3609
Average	300.75	



Risk Management

The strategies to minimise risk are contained within the NIAAS Risk Management Plan, which is regularly reviewed and updated by the NIAAS Manager who is responsible for all aspects of risk analysis, and is supported by the MindWise Senior Management Team.

The Scheme is compliant with the DOJ security framework, reporting regularly against Key Performance Indicators, relating to Governance, Health and Safety and ICT. These form part of specific performance indicators across a range of issues, such as service delivery, health and safety, ICT, risk management and finance. The CEO of MindWise, upon being satisfied the service is meeting the governance directives, provides assurance statements of compliance with HMG

standards and DOJ security framework contractual standards as needed.

We provide quarterly reports to our governance board representatives as part of our reporting process. All risks (including information and IT security risks) are assigned to an owner. Our governance body is informed that a copy of the MindWise Risk Register is available for viewing on request. When travelling to and from police stations staff are required to use 'People Safe' which is a lone working support and monitoring system, which plays a role in staff safety during their journeys.

Our Role as Appropriate Adult

The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 Codes of Practice require that a parent or legal guardian be the first to be contacted when an Appropriate Adult is required. On occasions a Trust may be a legal guardian for a looked after child in care (LAC), meaning the Trust is the corporate parent under the Children (NI) Order 1995.

When the police have difficulty contacting a parent or family member, to perform the role of Appropriate Adult they turn to our scheme. Our staff ensure that police adhere to the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989 (PACE) and the PACE codes of practice.

This is a complex role which demands an understanding of the rights of the detained person, as well as a clear understanding of the appropriate adult role and its boundaries. Interpersonal and good communication skills are also necessary, as well as being conversant with police procedures. An appreciation of the various mental health conditions found in police custody, and how that can impact a person's vulnerability, are also essential skills required in the role.

The Appropriate Adult has specific rights to ensure they can fulfil their role, examples include:

- To inspect the custody record of the detained person upon arrival at the police station, and at any time during their detention.
- To intervene in an interview if it is necessary in the interest of the detained person or to facilitate effective communication with the police.
- To request a break in any interview for the detained person to seek legal advice or consult with the detained person (particularly if the interview is a lengthy one, or if the detained person becomes distressed or ill).

When a detained person arrives at a custody suite the Custody Sergeant is responsible for ascertaining if the person is vulnerable and if they require the support of an Appropriate Adult. To assist in this determination the Custody Sergeant will ask a series of questions as contained in the police computer system which are designed to identify a person's vulnerability. Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) working within custody suites also provide assessments around mental health, learning disabilities/difficulties

The Appropriate Adult has specific rights to ensure they can fulfil their role

and other vulnerabilities to assist the police in this important matter.

On arrival at a custody suite the AA will endeavour to establish the detained person's vulnerability so that they can best support the person. This can be gleaned from information contained within the person's custody record, information provided by police, as well as from the HCP's assessment which includes having access to health care medical records.

The next stage is to ensure the detainee understands their entitlement to legal aid and how to access the services of a solicitor. Some will have a solicitor they have used before, while some will not have had that experience, but can nominate a solicitor from a list held by police. The Appropriate Adult is most concerned by those who indicate they do not want legal representation, especially if arrested for a serious offence, are young, or

have a high level of vulnerability, coupled with little experience of the custody process. In these cases, the AA will impress on the detained person the importance of speaking to a solicitor before being questioned by police. PACE also permits an Appropriate Adult to request a solicitor contrary to the detained person's wishes, if they consider it to be in the person's best interest, which it usually is.

Whilst the Appropriate Adult may advise the detainee to seek legal advice they cannot give legal advice in any circumstances, such as advising a person to answer or not to answer police questions, or how to answer questions. Where a detainee needs such advice the presence of a legal representative is desirable if not essential.



Our Service Users

SAFEGUARDING:

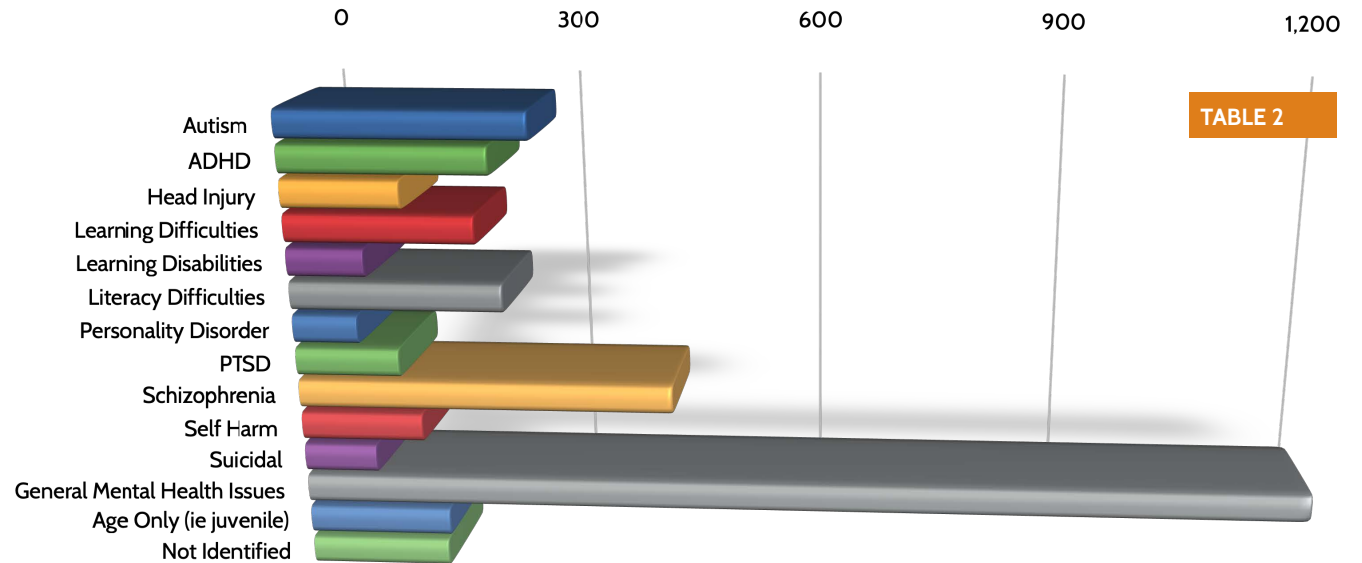
MindWise have a clear safeguarding policy and accompanying procedures, as well as a Child and Adult Safeguarding Champion within the organisation. We train our staff team to identify safeguarding issues regarding children and vulnerable adults and to report any concerns. In this reporting period staff identified two safeguarding issues that were reported to police for investigation.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Following discussions with police custody management and the delivery of appropriate adult training to Trust staff, the Trust now engages with all looked after children. NIAAS involvement with a looked after child only occurs when it is unknown to police that a child is subject to a care order.

VULNERABILITIES

In 3,275 (90.7%) of attendances, a particular vulnerability was identified by NIAAS staff or healthcare professionals. In 169 attendances (4.6%), young people under 18 years were deemed vulnerable by virtue of age only, with no other co-existing vulnerability identified. The range of mental health conditions that exist is vast and



staff are not clinicians, therefore we refer to general mental health issues for those people displaying signs of poor mental health. This year there was 165 (4.5%) occasions when staff were unable to categorise the nature of the vulnerability.

The vulnerabilities frequently found within police custody under the term general mental health issues, include depression, anxiety and bi-polar disorder. We also encounter people affected by autism, brain injury, personality disorders and self-harming. Within the support provided, learning difficulties include those affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). [Table 2](#)

Autism	287
ADHD	240
Head Injury	137
Learning Difficulty	220
Learning Disability	90
Literacy Difficulty	248
Personality Disorder	76
PTSD	122
Schizophrenia	441
Self Harm	144
Suicidal	86
General Mental Health Issues	1184
Age Only (i.e. juvenile)	169
Not identified	165

Age Band

JUVENILES:

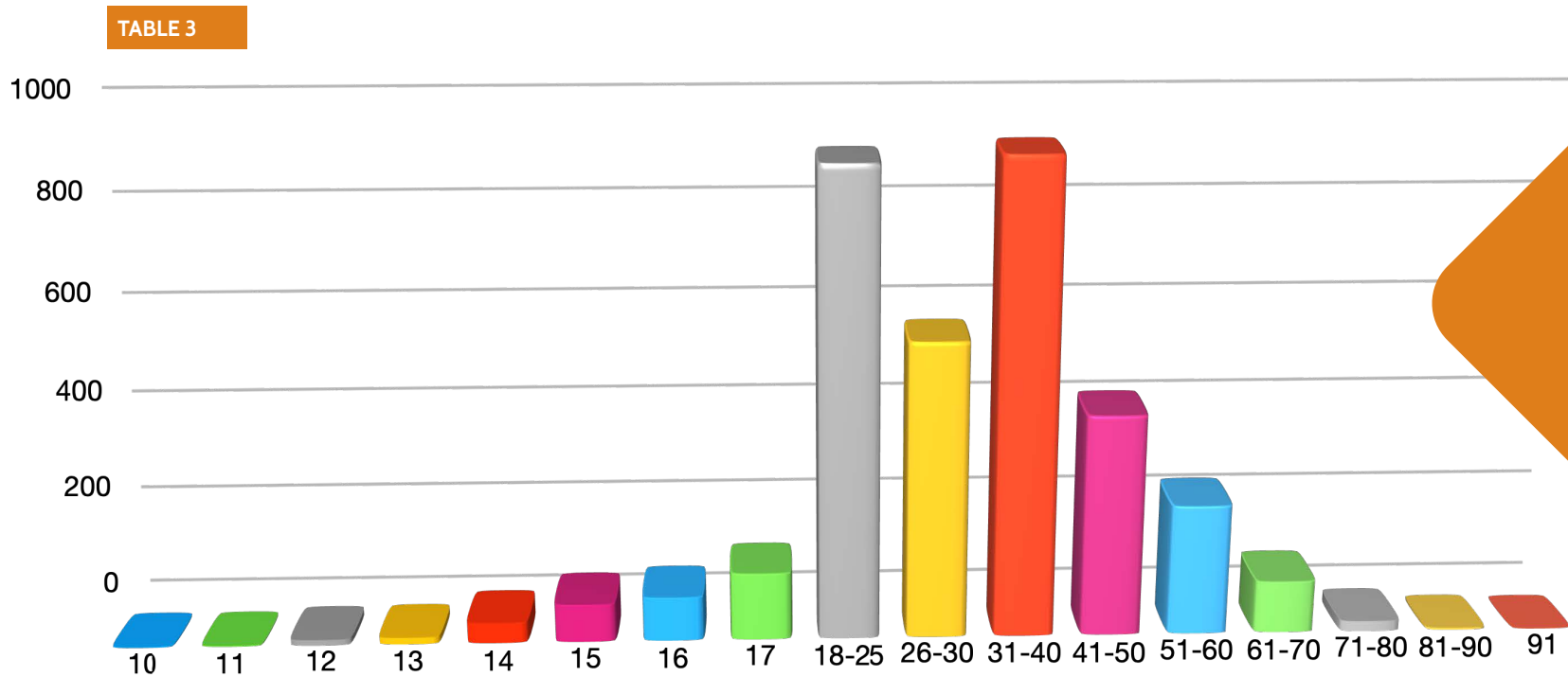
This year we supported 2 10 year olds, (2 less than last year) and 2 11 year olds, (3 less than last year). We also supported 11 12 year olds, (14 less than last year) and 13 13 year olds, (18 less than last year).

This year, 2024, the juvenile figure was 363 (10.1%). We have seen a fall in the juvenile percentage over the last four years from 15% in 2021, 14% in 2022, 13.5% in 2023 and now 10.1% in 2024.

ADULTS:

Each year the 18–25-year-old age range accounts for the majority of our attendances. This year it was 914 (25.3%), almost identical to last year's percentage figure. At the top end of the age range, 61–90 years, we supported 128 (3.5%), an increase of 27 cases (0.8%) from last year. [Table 3](#)

Table 3 : Age Band	
10	2
11	2
12	11
13	13
14	40
15	75
16	87
17	133
18-25	914
26-30	582
31-40	928
41-50	437
51-60	257
61-70	103
71-80	20
81-90	4
91+	1



ADULT / JUVENILE RATIO

This year we supported 3,246 adults (89.9%) and 363 juveniles (10.1%). This ratio is marginally smaller for juveniles as we have seen a downward trend of juvenile support over the last four years. We now see 5% fewer juveniles requiring an appropriate adult from our team compared to 2021.

The request to support a juvenile or adult arises when a parent or family member cannot attend to fulfil the appropriate adult role. There can be a variety of reasons for this, other family responsibilities, no transport, conflicting personal/domestic relationships etc. Additionally, a family member is deemed inappropriate if they are a victim of the detained person, a witness to the

alleged offence or the detained person has made an admission or disclosure to them about the alleged offence. [Table 4](#)

Table 4 : Adult/Juvenile Ratio		
	Adult/Juvenile	Total
Adult	89.9%	3,246
Juvenile	10.1%	363
		3,609

Gender

Our data collection represents not only male and female but also those people identifying as transgender, intersex or non-binary. These terms mirror the national appropriate adult network of gender categories.

The gender figures (male/female) this year are consistent with last year. The scheme supported 2,957 (81.9%) males, 3,077 (81.8%) last year, and 639 (17.7%) females, 679 (18%) last year.

13 people identified as transgender; this has increased from 5 last year. No-one identified as intersex this year compared to four last year, and none identified as non-binary compared to one last year.

When these figures are viewed alongside the age chart, it is evident that young men in their late teens and early twenties are the dominant group in need of our service. [Table 5](#)

Table 5 : Gender	
Male	2957
Female	639
Transgender	13
Intersex	0
Non-Binary	0

Age, Alcohol & Drugs

Whilst staff are consulting with a detainee, they may discuss a person's personal difficulties and capture data beyond mental health issues, such as the misuse of alcohol and drugs prior to arrest. Police cannot conduct an interview whilst a person is under the influence of any intoxicating substance, however a range of offences often flow from the misuse of alcohol or drugs. Often detainees are frank with our staff and acknowledge the part alcohol / drug misuse has played in the events which lead to their arrest.

ALCOHOL

This year staff identified alcohol as a precursor to detention on 1,517 (42%) occasions, 18 more than last year's figure (39.8%). [Table 6](#)

DRUGS

Drug use was identified in 949 (26.2%) cases, an increase of 2.7% on last year, with particular concern in 56 cases involving young people aged 10-17 years, 24 of which were 17 years of age.

In the older cohort of detainees aged 61-90 years, we supported 128 (35%) persons, 23 more than last year. Of these 44 (1.2%) had consumed

alcohol and 7 (0.1%) had consumed drugs, albeit from experience we are aware that drug intake by people in this age range often relates to misuse of their prescription drugs. [Table 6](#)

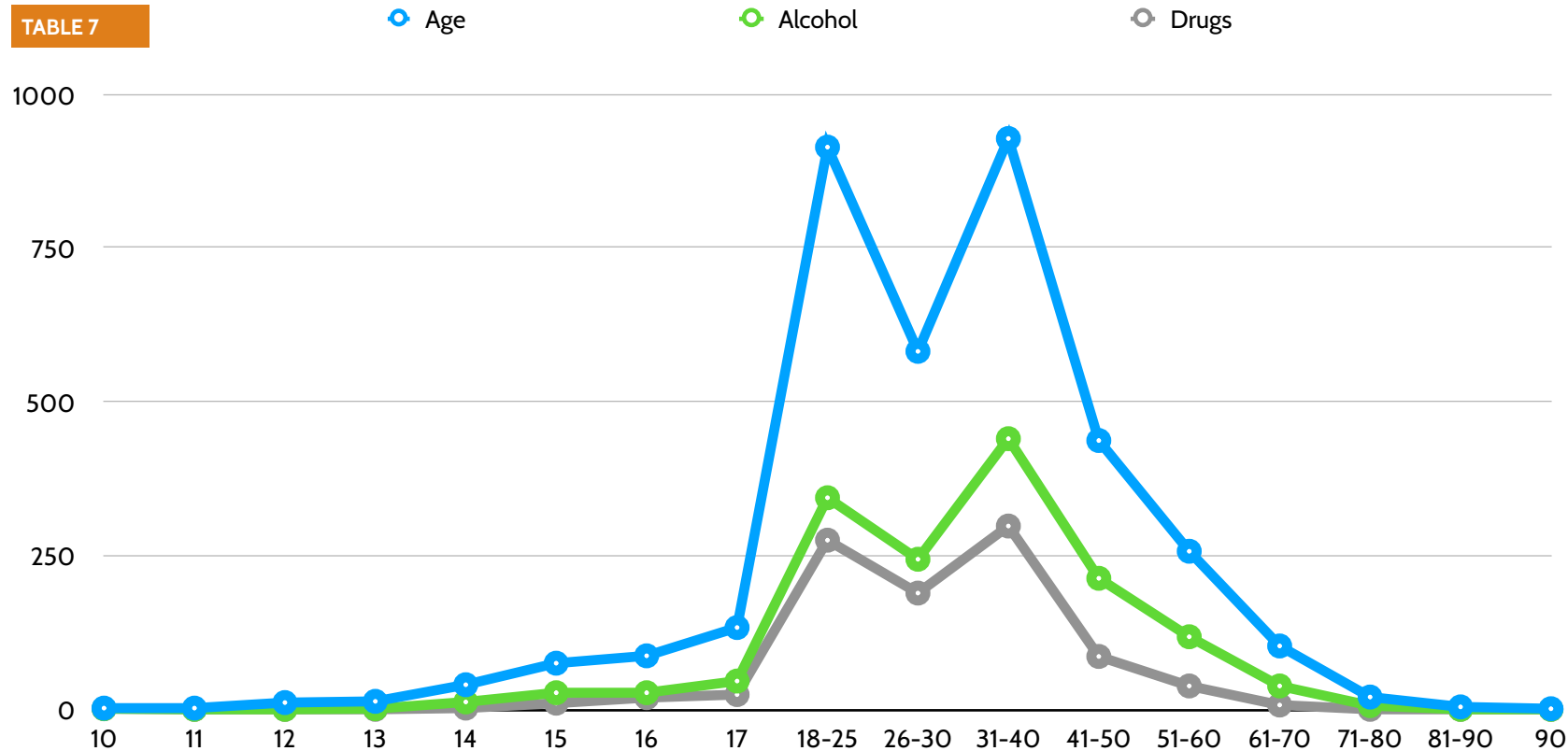
Table 6 Age, Alcohol & Drugs			
	AGE	ALCOHOL	DRUGS
10	2	1	1
11	2	0	0
12	11	0	0
13	13	1	0
14	40	12	2
15	75	27	10
16	87	27	19
17	133	46	24
18-25	914	344	275
26-30	582	244	189
31-40	928	440	298
41-50	437	213	86
51-60	257	118	38
61-70	103	38	7
71-80	20	6	0
81-90	4	0	0
90+	1	0	0
	3609	1517	949



The relationship between age, alcohol and drug use can be seen in [Table 7](#).

Over the past five years alcohol has been a consistent factor in over 40% of detainees supported by the scheme. Drug related detentions are also showing an increase post covid, rising from 22% to 26%, a worrying trend. [Table 8](#)

Table 8 Five-year trend					
ALCOHOL			DRUGS		
2023-24	1517	42.00%	2023-24	949	26.20%
2022-23	1499	39.80%	2022-23	884	23.50%
2021-22	1640	41.50%	2021-22	872	22.00%
2020-21	1538	42.00%	2020-21	342	9.40%
2019-20	1493	42.00%	2019-20	909	25.00%



Station Attendance

The focus of our attendance is nine key custody suites. This contract year we attended 11 locations, two of which (Lisburn and Ballymena) were attendance by exception and not routinely attended. This can occur through a temporary closure or capacity issue at a primary custody suite.

The nine key custody suites attended this year were Belfast (Musgrave), Londonderry (Waterside) Antrim, Lurgan, Strabane, Dungannon, Banbridge, Coleraine, Strand Road. [Table 9](#)

BELFAST: MUSGRAVE STATION

Musgrave is the main custody suite for the city and surrounding areas and is by far the busiest station for the scheme accounting for 2,009 (55.6%) of all our attendances. To avoid unnecessary travel for staff and to ensure immediate availability we provided a static staff presence in Musgrave Suite each day from 9am. This ensured we could respond to service demands as they arose facilitating cases to progress promptly which benefits both the detainee and police and also impacts favourably on our arrival time statistical data.

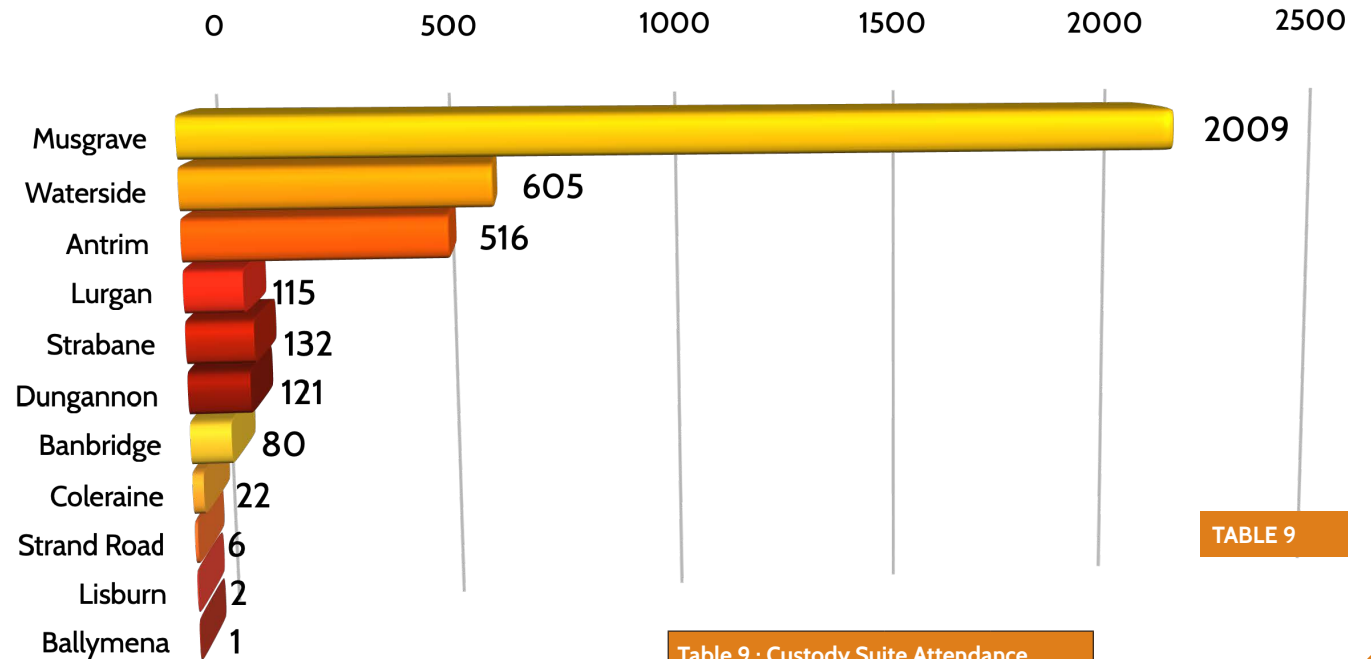


TABLE 9

Service demand can outstrip the staff available as unpredictable circumstances arise. On these occasions additional staff are drafted in to provide support. We have experienced on occasions up to three staff members being present in Musgrave at the same time working on different cases. Staff in the Northwest cover Waterside as the principal station in that area and remain available to respond to the other seven custody locations as the need arises. Staffing levels are under constant review in line with budgetary constraints.

Table 9 : Custody Suite Attendance		
Musgrave	2009	55.6%
Waterside	605	16.7%
Antrim	516	14.2%
Lurgan	115	3.6%
Strabane	132	3.3%
Dungannon	121	3.1%
Banbridge	80	2.2%
Coleraine	22	<1%
Strand Road	6	<1%
Lisburn	2	<1%
Ballymena	1	<1%

Note: The PSNI has an ongoing refurbishment / maintenance programme for custody suites which means a suite may be closed for considerable periods. Arrests in these periods go to other suites which can inflate arrest figures for that station. Our attendance figures at any given station should not be seen as a reflection of crime rates in that area.

ARRIVAL TIMES

This year we responded to 3,609 calls; these attendances are divided between planned calls and unplanned calls.

Planned

There are two types of planned call:

- 1) those that are booked in advance via our online system where police know a person granted bail is returning and police wish to carry out a further interview or charge the person if the investigation is complete and there is sufficient evidence. The NIAAS online booking system was used by the police 93 times (2.5%) in the past year.
- 2) in live cases where police request appropriate adult attendance and advise a set time. Considerations for staff on these occasions include – is the person fit for interview, has the person been assessed by the HCP, does the detainee require a rest period or meal, is the police team ready to interview, has the person requested legal advice, if so, is the solicitor available to attend or give advice remotely at the set time? Careful liaison by NIAAS staff with police will ensure staff attendance at the right time and avoids

Table 10 Planned / Unplanned Arrival

PLANNED ARRIVAL	UNPLANNED ARRIVAL	TOTAL
1606	2003	3609
44.5%	55.5%	0

unnecessary delays for all concerned. Of course, not everything goes to plan, and staff must be fluid and able to adapt to changes, which often come with little notice, such as when the detainee suddenly becomes unwell and needs to go to hospital or police get called to an emergency. Our goal is to ensure that we have staff in the right place at the right time to support our vulnerable clients, and to allow the police to progress their enquiries with least delay. Agreed attendance times occurred on 1,606 (44.5%) occasions this year. **Table 10**

Unplanned

There are occasions when police require attendance forthwith and our target is to attend within a two-hour window. Immediate attendance requests can arise for a variety of reasons, an urgent interview is required where there is a risk to life or property, the PACE clock (maximum time a person can be detained without charge) is running

down, forensic samples are required urgently from the detainee, or the detainee is due to appear in court. This year 2,003 (55.5%) requests for immediate attendance were received, an increase of 6% on last year.

Total 98.9%

When both advanced online requests and agreed attendance times are measured the NIAAS team arrived at the agreed time in 98.9% of all calls. This can be attributed to the benefit of having staff on site in Musgrave 9am–5pm each day. Additionally, staff are experienced in time management and have an in-depth knowledge of custody processes which allows careful planning, with staff being utilised in the most effective way within custody suites. Within Musgrave staff frequently work back and forward with 4–5 detainees on any shift.

There are occasions when we are unable to arrive at a custody suite within the requested time. This typically occurs when there is an unexpected peak in requests and staff are already committed to cases at other custody suites. On these occasions we make early contact with the requesting custody suite to assess the need and update them on our expected availability to attend. Management within the team ensures

that the first available staff member attends the outstanding call with regular update contact with police also maintained.

ATTENDANCE: DAYS OF THE WEEK

Our attendance patterns within any week often fluctuate. This year Sunday was our busiest day with 555 calls (10.6 per day), but just one call ahead of Friday, with 554 calls. Thursday this year

saw the least calls with 455 (8.75 per day). High and low call days can be influenced by many things including events taking place in the area, public holidays, public disorder, large planned arrest operations by police etc.

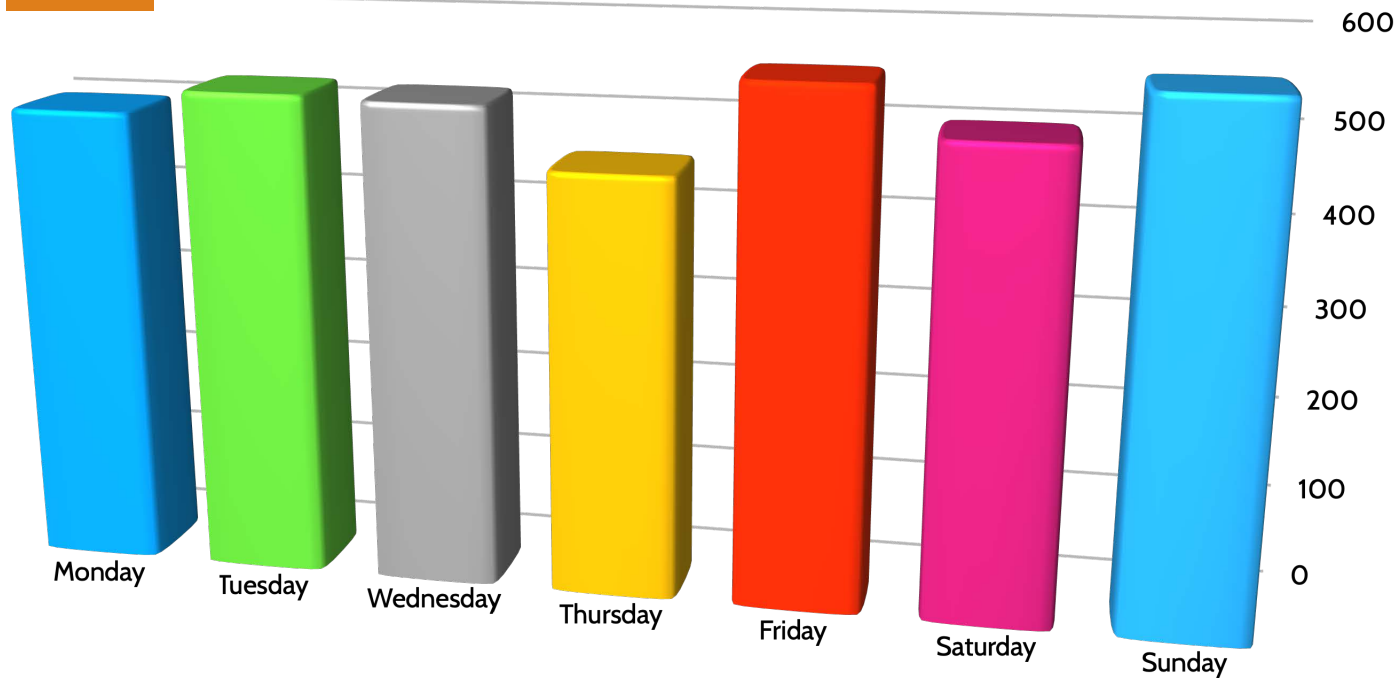
All the attendances vary between 8.75 and 10.6 per day, therefore we are required to staff our rota in anticipation of 10 detainees being supported

every day across Northern Ireland. Albeit we know half of these will be at Musgrave in Belfast.

Table 11

Table 11 : Attendance Days	
Monday	499
Tuesday	524
Wednesday	520
Thursday	455
Friday	554
Saturday	502
Sunday	555

TABLE 11



Pattern of Appropriate Adult Attendance

The NIAAS service delivery is on a 24 hour per day, 365 days per year basis.

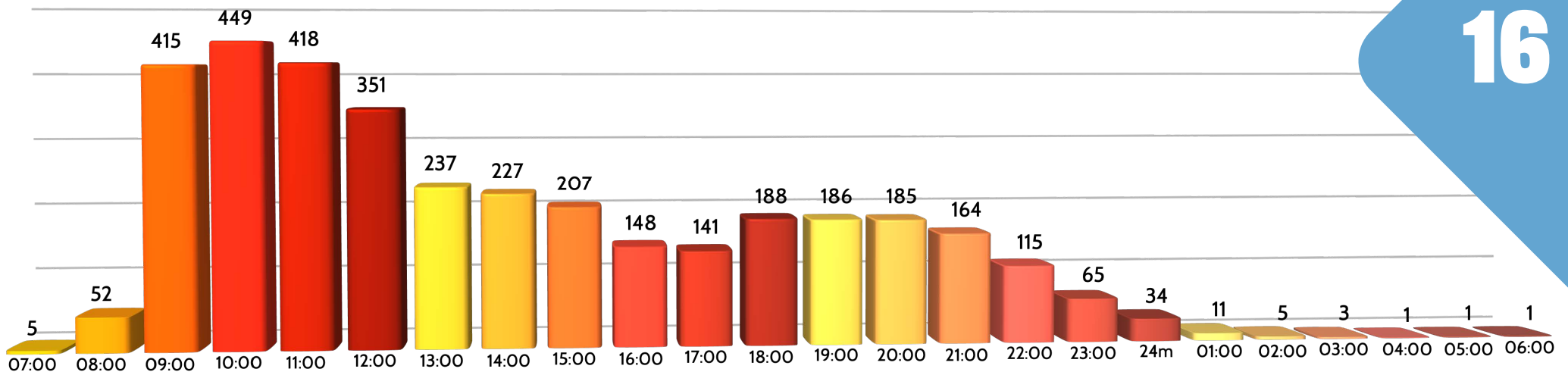
We attend at police stations as and when we are required to do so. The routine service delivery is between 08.00 hours and 23.00 hours, with staff on call for out of hours attendance, if necessary, after 23.00.

The main attendance period for the NIAAS remain the mornings between 09.00- 13.00 hours, with 1633 (41.7%) attendances, this is 64 calls (4%) more than last year, with the peak being

between 10am and 11am. This is responded to by having staff on site at Musgrave custody suite each day from 9am, and ready to deal with a case immediately after detainees have had breakfast, seen a healthcare professional, and received legal advice etc. There is a second peak in the evening between 18.00 -22.00 with 723 (20%) being 119 (4%) more than last year.

The arrival chart shown below lists the arrival time attendance between the hour shown and the next time listed: e.g. 18.00 is any arrival between 18.00 and 18.59. [Table 12](#)

TABLE 12 - ATTENDANCE TIMES



PERIODS SPENT WITHIN PSNI STATIONS

There is a range of procedures that may occur during the detention period all of which can impact on the length of time an appropriate adult may be inside a police station. A detainee may be subjected to a medical examination, identification procedures, fingerprinting, DNA sampling, strip searching and not least the interview. Whilst the police processes and procedures within police custody are similar and the allegations may be common to the officers, the case details and detainee circumstances are not all the same and may on occasions be unique. It is important for our staff to be available to respond to what could be a lengthy complex case that may run beyond their anticipated attendance period, or even late into the night. Therefore, our appropriate adults need to be flexible and adaptable to meet the demands of the service as well as being able to appropriately support and assist the detainee.

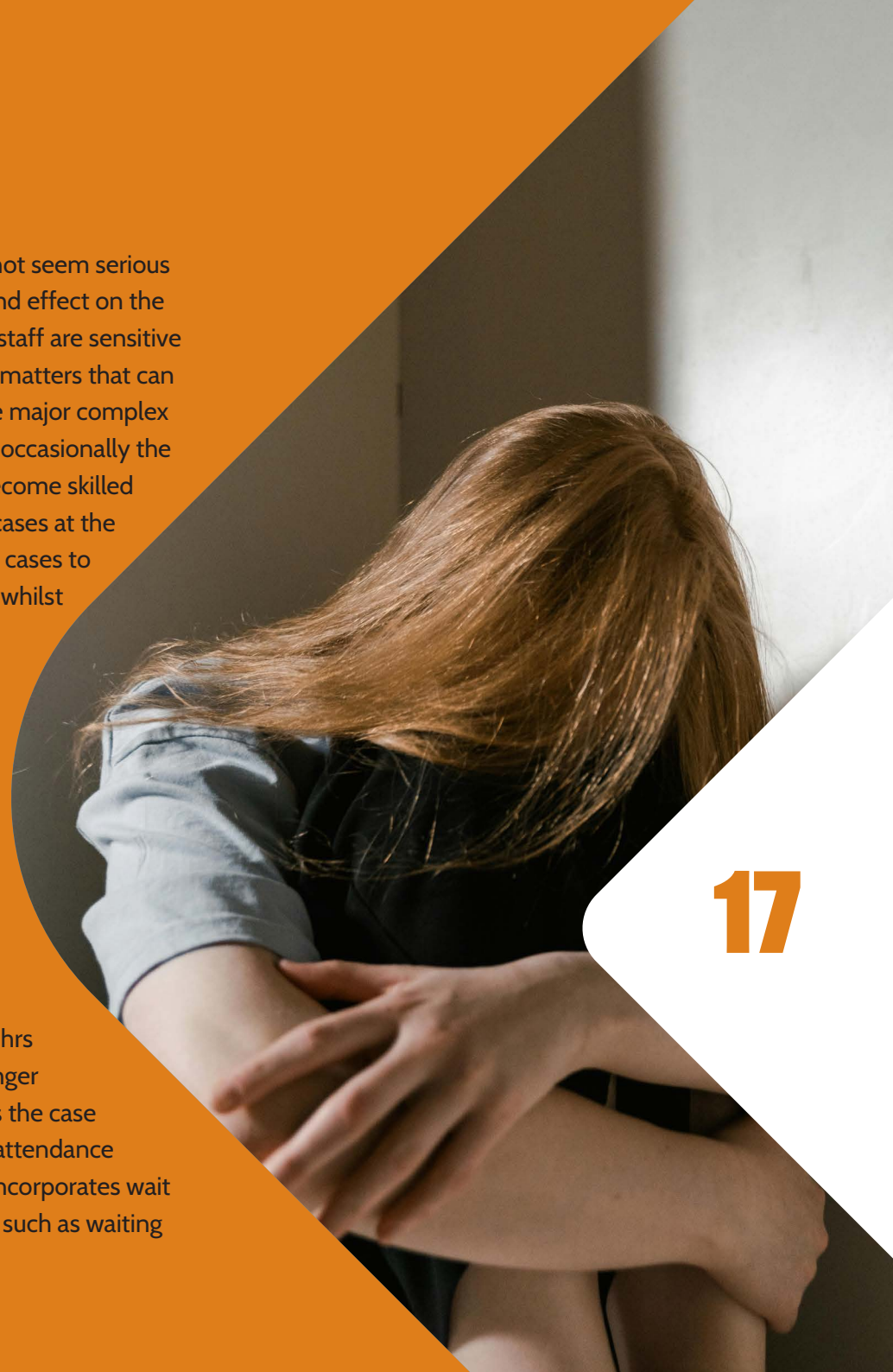
LENGTH OF CASES

Within PACE, a person may be detained by police for a maximum of 96 hours, occasionally in the most serious of cases we are called upon to support a person throughout the full detention period. (Other than when they are sleeping).

There are those cases that may not seem serious in nature but may have a profound effect on the accused and the victim, and our staff are sensitive to this. There are those frequent matters that can take little time, but others can be major complex investigations taking all day, and occasionally the following days. Our staff have become skilled at carrying multiple less serious cases at the same time, moving in and out of cases to speed custody processes along, whilst ensuring appropriate support is maintained.

The average period staff spend engaged with a detainee can vary from a few minutes to all day or several days depending upon the complexity of the police investigation.

The average detainee - client engagement was 127 minutes (2 hrs 07 minutes) this is 11 minutes longer than last year. The 127 minutes is the case engagement time, not the total attendance time in custody which typically incorporates wait times before and post interview, such as waiting



for police staff or a solicitor's arrival and waiting for a bail decision post interview, all of which brings the average time in custody per case to 185 minutes (3 hours and 05 minutes).

THE NATURE OF POLICE INVESTIGATIONS

The NIAAS staff encounter every criminal offence on the statute books, such as dishonesty offences (theft, burglary, robbery) or behavioural offences (criminal damage) and aggressive behaviours (common assault) but occasionally staff engage in the most serious and most disturbing of investigations encountering alarming levels of gratuitous violence.

This year staff encountered non-fatal strangulation cases on 58 occasions, (37 more than last year), 44 murder enquiries, (2 more than

last year) and 82 rape enquiries, (7 less than last year). Some of these cases involved children under 13 years. These, along with 17 firearms offences, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, wounding with intent and grievous bodily harm offences all involves concerning levels of aggression and violence.

The NIAAS role at times exposes our staff to very disturbing facts in the most violent cases which can remain with them long after they have left the interview room. It is incumbent on the NIAAS Management Team to always be aware and alert to this, to ensure a de-brief after such cases, and that staff avail of the support service available to them, and indeed that the support service provided meets the needs of staff, should they be affected by what they have been exposed to.

OUR STAFF

All our staff are level 3 trained in the Open College Network Appropriate Adult course, this along with PACE and police custody procedures addresses the technical aspects of the service delivery. However it is the MindWise recruitment and selection processes that ensures we have a staff that are skilled in delivering this service in a calm, reassuring and compassionate way, that often de-escalates tensions in what can be a powder keg of emotions for a detainee facing the police detention and interview process.

WE ARE PROUD THAT OUR STAFF TEAM LIVE THE MINDWISE VALUES OF PASSION, RESPECT, EMPATHY AND TOGETHERNESS IN THE DELIVERY OF THIS SERVICE.

Appreciation

This year we conducted a survey asking PSNI officers using Musgrave custody suite for their feedback on our service provision. We asked questions addressed at Communication, Confidence, Knowledge, Values, and Impact. We were pleased that 70 officers whilst busy in front line policing took the time to respond.

SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY:

Its clear staff communicate well with detainees, and staff have the confidence to do so. Staff have a moderate to high level of knowledge of police procedures and are seen to be fair, respectful, and compassionate. More than half thought our engagement with the detainee had a positive impact upon them.

Officers had the opportunity to add free hand comments some of which are shown here:

All interactions that I have had with AA's have been excellent. They provide an excellent prompt, efficient service that is conducted with respect, humility, and empathy. They are extremely professional and are an asset to the Custody suites.

AA'S are very professional and very punctual which is vital in the custody setting.

Excellent service, under-valued and not appreciated enough. We need more AAs in all the suites service wide.

The AA'S have on occasion been able to improve a DPs behaviour by just talking them through the process.

Over the many years working with NIAAS, all NIAAS staff have been very Courteous, professional, Knowledgeable, Caring and Friendly. I have the utmost respect for each and every member that attends custody.

I am a custody sergeant therefore have frequent interactions with NIAAS in custody. I have always found them to be knowledgeable, helpful, and patient. I cannot praise enough the work that they do. At times there can be a high demand on their services which results in an (unavoidable) delay therefore the only suggestion is that at times there are not enough AAs to deal with the volume of work.

All the A/A's that I have worked with have been extremely professional, caring and have excellent knowledge around police procedure with D/P's.

My experience of Appropriate Adults within Custody has always been positive. There is a good relationship with custody staff. I have never had a complaint about the service and always find them more than helpful, friendly, and kind.

Every member of staff I have dealt with has been professional, caring, and supportive of the DP. I would also add they are extremely patient when dealing with the delays caused by solicitors, medical staff, and the general custody procedure.

AA scheme has been a boon for the efficient operation of custody, it reduces time in custody for DPs, as for many suitable supports from family members is not available, not suitable and many of them actually interfere in investigation, carry items into custody to hand over to prisoners causing danger.

As a Custody Sergeant I couldn't speak highly enough of the AAs from the scheme who attend Musgrave. They are great at what they do, and we have a great working relationship.

I have found the appropriate adults from the scheme to be consistently professional, detached from the emotions of the DP, mentally sound, very well aware of their role, and very willing to support the DP to the best of their ability. They have on occasion been instrumental in resolving awkward situations that would otherwise have been almost impossible to resolve without third party assistance.

We know that some detainees struggle to interact, and that mental health issue can make communication difficult, and many are understandably so concerned about the case against them or a pending court appearance that the level of support provided may not register with them at the time.

We have experience of detainees responding differently, such as less aggressively on their second engagement with us, having experienced previous support, this change in attitude is itself an indication of the detainee acknowledging and appreciating the support provided.

Legal Advice

Legal advice can be provided in person, via telephone, or online via Skype. This year all three processes were evident. Legal advice was provided in person on 1,030 occasions (33%) with phone advice on 1,633 (53%) occasions. In our experience the phone advice cannot replicate the support personal attendance brings. Both phone advice and Skype attendances bring their own challenges.

The pre interview legal advice by 'phone' dominated the advice process this report year on 1,633 (53%) occasions, a 10% increase on last year.

The advice given is unique to that client, the legal representative needs to consider the ability of their client to withstand the rigours of questioning in their absence. We have encountered vulnerable interviewees being advised to pursue 'no comment' replies to all questions, however the difficulty arises when an interviewee is unable to withstand the rigours of questioning and fails to follow the advice given.

There are a range of reasons why legal advice can be lost in the process. A delay between the advice being given and the interview taking place, perhaps hours later, is an obvious one. In this time lapse the detainee has been interacting with custody staff and police through DNA / fingerprinting processes, provision of meals, provision of medication, facilitation of contact with family etc. Some hours later at the point of interview it is easy for the interaction to continue with any legal advice received by the detainee further back in his/her memory.

It is not the role of appropriate adult to function as a substitute legal advisor in such circumstances and it can be confusing for an interviewee and frustrating for an appropriate adult when the interviewee turns to an appropriate adult expecting the appropriate adult to do more than their role permits. This places our staff in a difficult position, that of giving supportive and helpful advice and assistance to the detainee and mediating between the detainee and the

interviewing officer whilst avoiding advice that could be considered legal advice.

A solicitor who has given phone advice may then attend the interview remotely via Skype where police can facilitate this via a police iPad. This occurred on 679 occasions (18.8%) a reduction of 1.1% from last year. This process depends on the tablet being positioned to the satisfaction of the representative so that he/she can see and hear all that is taking place subject to the layout of the room and tablets positioning, and it can be susceptible to signal loss.

It is not the role of appropriate adult to function as a substitute legal advisor

Out of Hours Trend

ARRIVALS:

The 'out of hours' call out service was used on 122 (3.3%) occasions, this was 57 fewer occasions than last year. This averages 2.3 attendances per week, down from 3.4 per week. Staff on standby for overnight call out from 23.00-08.00 have a 32% chance of being called out.

DEPARTURES:

Staff attending calls before 23.00 find the case may not conclude until well after 23.00 hrs. It is common for staff to arrive at a station at 21.00 and leave at 01.00 or 02.00. This year we saw 389 (11%) departures after 23.00 a welcomed reduction from last year's 872 (21.1%) These 389 occasions per year average at 7.4 occasions per week, meaning staff working in the evening can expect to be held on after 23.00 every night. We monitor this trend because late nights can impact on staff who may have other commitments the following day.

Working time directives also come into play with specific rest periods required between work ending and work starting the next day. **Table 13**

Table 13 Arrival and Departure		
TIME	ARRIVAL	DEPART
23.00-23.59	65	143
00.00-00.59	34	100
01.00-00.59	11	80
02.00-02.59	5	44
03.00-03.59	3	16
04.00-04.59	1	2
05.00-05.59	1	2
06.00-06.59	1	1
07.00-07.59	1	1
Total	122	389
Percentage	3.30%	10.70%

late nights can impact on staff who may have other commitments the following day



Overall Patterns and Trends Year on Year

There are patterns that are consistent year on year from 2019-2024, regarding the people we support, with some contemporary trends:

GENDER:

We have always seen a similar breakdown between male and female detainees, in percentage terms, 82% to 85% male and 15%-17% female. In the last three years 23 people identified as transgender and four as intersex, with one identifying as non-binary – this is a new development in our gender recording.

ALCOHOL:

Alcohol was a factor in 39.8% – 42% of cases in the past five years, this year it was 42%. Whilst there is some fluctuation, in the main it sits at around 40% year on year.

DRUGS:

Drugs featured in 25% of cases in 2019-20 but dropped significantly during Covid to 9.4%. Post covid we have seen a gradual increase and a return to pre covid levels. This year the figure is 26.2%, the highest to date and a concerning trend.

AUTISM:

Autism impacted cases has increased over five years from 5.9% to 7.9%. The increase may be associated with developments within the health care model, with on-site nurses identifying the condition, coupled with related PSNI staff training and better awareness.

HEAD/BRAIN INJURY:

This remains consistent between 3.5%-4.1% each year, this year detainees affected was 3.7%.

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND/OR SELF HARMING THOUGHTS:

Collectively detainees expressing or exhibiting these thoughts or intentions has decreased in the last five years, from 12.3%, 11.3%, 5.6%, 5.3% to 2.3% respectively, and we have watched this trend with interest. The decrease may be attributable to the improvement of health care provision within custody suites and introduction of health care professionals (HCPs) on-site. The ongoing support they offer may well be an influencing factor in the detainee's thinking during their time in custody.

LITERACY ISSUES:

Over the five-year period these figures have fluctuated between 7.8 and 8.9%, this year is slightly lower at 6.8%.

SCHIZOPHRENIA:

This condition shows an increase in the past five years from 7.9% to 12.2%. The increase may be associated with the developments in the health care model alongside PSNI training in mental health awareness.

POOR MENTAL HEALTH:

This generic term has decreased in the past five years reducing from 40.1% to 32.8% this year. Again, the presence of health care professionals on-site who can identify specific mental health conditions, resulting in more accurate recording, may well be impacting this statistic, with police now less likely to rely on generic 'clubbing' of conditions.

Managers closing comments

Our attendance at police custody suites depends entirely upon police requirements which are often unpredictable. As a responsive service this brings various delivery pressures and challenges. I am proud of our record of delivery this past year. The team attended 3,609 calls across 11 police stations and delivered on a 24/7 basis. The overall attendance figure was 3,609, which is 152 lower than last year.

Following a recruitment strategy in 2024 we were successful in recruiting new staff, we have increased our staffing level to pre covid levels and we are now better positioned for future service delivery.

We are not however complacent, and we continue to look at ways to further improve the service. Moving forward we will recruit additional contracted staff and reduce reliance on casual staff. This will further enhance the stability of the team and delivery of the service.

I also look forward to improving our IT capability and to developing systems whereby we can better inform our funders of the complexities of our service and its consistent delivery.

I can assure the Department of Justice that our scheme is robust, effective, efficient and well placed to deliver a professional support service to vulnerable persons within police custody suites, and we enter our new contract period with confidence and a determination to deliver.

Stanley Booth MBE
Appropriate adult Scheme Manager LLb BSc