

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme



Annual Report 2014-2015

**Police and Crime
Commissioner**

for Hertfordshire

Introduction by David Lloyd

Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

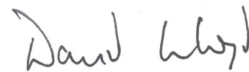
Welcome to the Annual Report of Hertfordshire's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme. This report will outline the scheme, look at the volunteers and focus on the visits made from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.

I have had statutory responsibility for custody visiting since November 2012. The Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) have enabled me to fulfil this responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of detainees is monitored and issues relating to detainees or the custody suites are addressed. Their role is to increase public confidence in the custody service and increase transparency. Our ICVs are all volunteers and I would like to thank them for the excellent work they do in checking the welfare of detainees and in keeping the scheme going.

We have four custody suites in Hertfordshire located in Hatfield, Stevenage, Watford and Hoddesdon police stations. The volunteers visit the suites

unannounced once a week, during day or night to carry out interviews with detainees to check on their health and wellbeing and that they have been offered their rights and entitlements.

I am pleased to report that no serious issues were reported this year.



David Lloyd
**Police and Crime
Commissioner for
Hertfordshire**



Overview of the scheme

Under the Police Reform Act 2002, all police authorities are required to run a custody visiting scheme. The scheme gives the public reassurance that detainees are being treated fairly by carrying out independent checks on the welfare of detainees, at a time when they may be feeling vulnerable or confused, as well as looking out for issues around cleanliness and maintenance of custody suites.

David Lloyd, the Police and Crime Commissioner, is responsible for the operation of the scheme in Hertfordshire. He appoints a Scheme Administrator from within his office that is responsible for recruiting and training volunteers as well as managing the scheme.

ICVs are unpaid volunteers who live or work in Hertfordshire. Currently there are 55 Independent Custody Visitors across the county. They are trained to interview people in custody to ensure that their treatment is fair and that they have access to their rights and entitlements. During each visit

a visiting report form is produced by the visitors and forwarded to the Commissioner's Scheme Administrator and to Custody Managers.

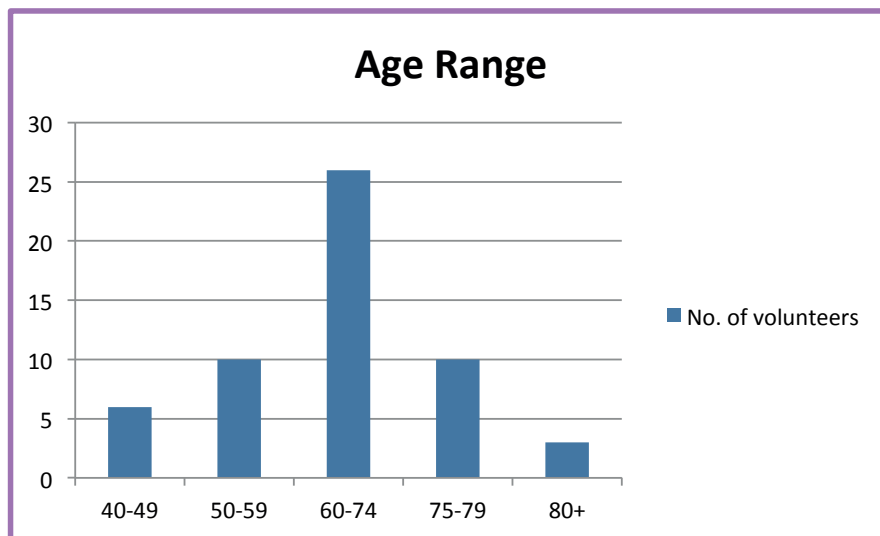
Based on the custody area there are four Panels, each with an experienced member acting as a Panel Chair. They assist the scheme administrator to manage the scheme within their panel and to train and mentor visitors.

Concerns raised by visitors are reported to the Custody Sergeant at the time of the visit. Key concerns are followed by the Scheme Administrator and the Custody Inspector. The visitors will also have a chance to raise general concerns and matters arising from visits during the full Panel meetings which are held twice a year. All ICVs are invited to attend, giving them an opportunity to network with other ICVs and receive updates from the Scheme Administrator and the Custody and Criminal Justice Chief Inspector.

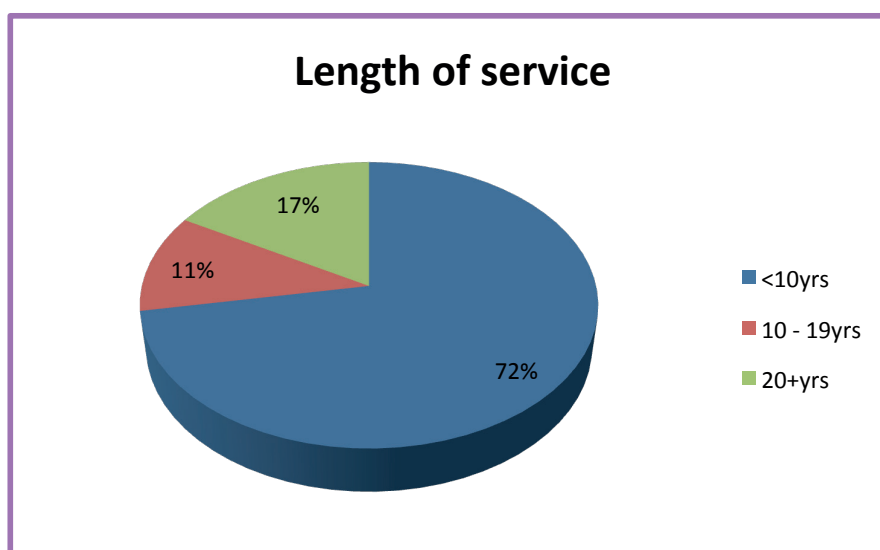
Independent Custody Visitors

There are a total of 55 Independent Custody Visitors who live or work in Hertfordshire, 34 male volunteers and 21 female volunteers.

The chart below shows the age range of the Independent Custody Visitors. Over 70% of the visitors are over 60 years of age.



The pie chart below shows the length of service for our ICVs. While the majority have been volunteering for the scheme for less than ten years, due to the number of longstanding volunteers the average visitor has over 10 years' experience.



Recruitment is currently underway to focus on a younger, wider demographic which will be more representative of Hertfordshire. We have an opportunity to bring in new members from different parts of society, bringing with them a fresh perspective. The refresh of the scheme will be discussed later on.

Visits made by ICVs

From April 2014 to March 2015, Independent Custody Visitors made a total of 162 visits to custody suites. These visits were unannounced and the ICV's had the opportunity to see all the detainees, depending on availability. At the time of the visits a total of 930 persons were detained; of which 519 were visited.

Below is a breakdown of the visits from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015

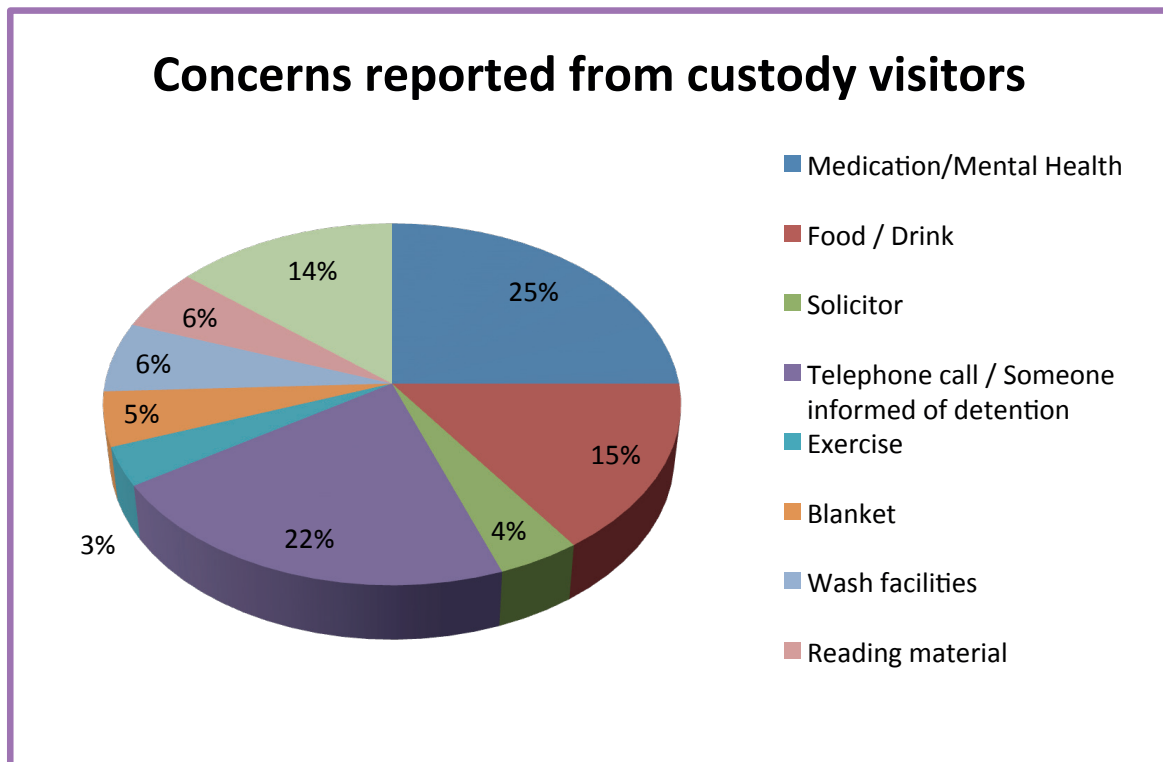
| Custody Suite Visited | No. of visits undertaken | No. of detained persons held | No. of detainees available to visit | No. of detained persons visited | % of detainees visited (of those available) | No. of detained persons not visited |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Hatfield | 32 | 266 | 124 | 119 | 96% | 142 |
| Hoddesdon | 48 | 142 | 104 | 88 | 85% | 38 |
| Stevenage | 48 | 320 | 203 | 179 | 88% | 117 |
| Watford | 34 | 202 | 136 | 133 | 98% | 66 |
| Total | 162 | 930 | 567 | 519 | 92% | 363 |

There is a chance not all detainees will be available to be interviewed by an ICV during a visit. This is due to a number of reasons including when detainees are asleep, intoxicated, violent, in an interview or providing fingerprint/DNA evidence. This year a total of 363 detainees were not available to be visited.

Detainees are also able to refuse to be visited by ICVs, this year 48 detainees refused to be interviewed by an ICV.

Issues reported from custody visits

Throughout the duration of the year visitors raised 189 concerns with custody staff. 25% were related to medical or mental health issues. 22% were requests for phone calls or to inform someone of their detention and 15% were requests for food.



In 47% of the visits there were no detainee concerns. ICVs also recorded 101 positive comments during the year.

During the year ICVs reported any issues with facilities. In total 41 issues were recorded, 39% were with regard to cells being out of action and 10% were about heating and ventilation. As well as these, ICVs noted 13 potential staffing issues throughout the year.

ICV Scheme Costs

Although visitors are unpaid, they are reimbursed for travel and subsistence costs. As well as these costs the Commissioner incurs other costs for running the scheme such as training costs, printing costs, catering for panel meetings, conference booking fee etc.

Comments from the Head of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Custody Units

The last year has seen a tremendous amount of change across Custody in Hertfordshire, change that is aimed at heightening even further the services, facilities and environment we provide for those persons who have been arrested by the Police.

Dealing effectively, fairly and lawfully with people who are arrested and detained by the police, is vital. The role of a Police Custody Unit is key to this by ensuring that people who have been arrested are treated fairly and that their wellbeing, especially those who are vulnerable, is safeguarded throughout their short time with us. Through the effective and humane treatment of detained persons, the police also optimise the chances of securing vital evidence in the Custody environment and thereby the likelihood of a successful outcome to the associated criminal investigations.

I have worked closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner again this year to help promote further the status and impact of the Independent Custody Visitors (ICV) Scheme in Hertfordshire. I regard the work of the ICVs as highly significant important. The efforts of this group, made up exclusively of public volunteers, reassures me that the work of my officers and staff, the processes they use, and the environment we provide, are all open to scrutiny at whatever time (always unannounced) the ICVs wish to visit any of the four Custody units at Watford, Hatfield, Stevenage and Hoddesdon. My staff and I are committed to the safe detention and handling of all persons whilst they are held in custody. The 162 independent visits conducted by the volunteers over the last fiscal year is impressive and the written feedback they provide on each occasion helps me to identify areas of strength and weakness in our Custody arrangements, whether that be as a pattern across the four custody units or instead highlighting a particular concern at one station. I can then work to correct any potential weakness.

The insight provided by the ICVs adds to the scrutiny provided by a comprehensive internal 'quality assurance' process which I have introduced within

the Custody Unit itself which is conducted monthly, coupled with both unannounced audits and six-monthly audits run by a different department to add a level of 'independence'. Further, an unannounced joint visit was staged by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Constabularies in late May of this 2015, the report from which will be published in October. My Custody staff are specially trained and very committed but I feel this level of inspection is right in order to be transparent about what happens in our Custody units and therefore build public confidence that Hertfordshire's Custody Units are safe and fair environments.

Many of the changes I alluded to in my introduction are focused on those persons who may be most vulnerable whether that is because of their age (elderly or young), or a disability (whether physical, mental or both) or whether it is through alcohol or drug-related abuse or misuse. It is vital that these people are properly supported in Custody by receiving quick and appropriate healthcare, or by being given rapid access to Appropriate Adults for example. We are also focussing beyond Custody and trying to ensure that those persons with such vulnerabilities are able to engage with relevant service providers and we are working with mental health colleagues, healthcare colleagues, drug and alcohol support colleagues, and Children's Services to help detainees achieve a better lifestyle outcome in the longer-term. The benefits of such an approach are far-reaching, including a reduction in their criminal behaviour, leading to less victims and less damage to the communities of Hertfordshire.

To bring my brief report to a close, I would like to again thank all the ICVs for their outstanding effort this last year. To achieve such a high rate of visits, seeing over 500 detainees is indeed, as last year, truly exceptional. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you to help ensure Hertfordshire's Custody Units remain a safe and healthy environment.

Shane O'Neill, Detective Chief Inspector

Future of ICV

Since its initiation over 25 years ago Hertfordshire's ICV scheme has remained much the same. In recent years national changes have occurred with new guidelines and shifting the responsibility to the PCC. In order to keep up and improve upon national standards our ICV scheme needs to adapt.

As demonstrated earlier the majority of our visitors are aged 60 or over and are mostly male. This make up can present barriers when trying to promote the scheme as representative and standing up for the whole community. Following partnerships with the University of Hertfordshire we have an opportunity to bring in additional members to diversify the scheme and bring in a fresh perspective.

Alongside this opportunity the custody team are working to implement a number of changes to their suites and practices but need a more regular update of their service than infrequent audit inspections. We would like to use this as an opportunity to change the role of an ICV, adapting a model which means they are similar to auditors, offering unbiased observations to complement the inspections of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).

Conclusion

Independent Custody Visitors are essential in enabling the Police and Crime Commissioner fulfil his statutory responsibility to ensure detained persons are treated fairly while in police custody. The ICV scheme provides transparency and increased the public's confidence in the police service. We hope that the scheme refresh will give us the opportunity increase the diversity of our Independent Custody Visitors and improve the overall service, becoming even more focused and unbiased.

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor please contact:

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

15 Vaughan Road

Harpenden

AL5 4GZ

Telephone: 01707 806100

Email: commissioner@herts.pnn.police.uk

For more information regarding the role of ICVs and that of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, please visit www.hertscommissioner.org.

For more information on the role of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA), please visit www.icva.org.uk