

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)
Quarterly stakeholder update
Q2, 2021/2022



The Independent Custody Visiting Association represents all independent custody visiting schemes across the UK. Local volunteers (known as independent custody visitors) make unannounced visits to police custody to check on the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of detainees.

The state of custody

Covid-19 as a theme was not as prevalent in Q2 reports, with many reports focusing on other areas of custody. Feedback overall was mixed for quarter two. Positively schemes have reported:

- Distraction items – schemes have reported awards of funding to attain distraction items in their area, and others have reported good use of the items already in suites such as jigsaws and foam footballs.
- ICV schemes have reported being welcomed back into custody by the custody staff, with good communication, and helpful responses from the force in order for ICVs to return to the suites.
- Some examples of excellent detainee care were received from schemes, most notably to vulnerable detainees with the report noting that the staff were ‘attentive and responsive to the detainees needs.’

Schemes have included the following causes for concern in quarter two:

- There were a number of reports this quarter pertaining to arrangements for women in custody. These concerns included detainees not being aware that they could speak to a female member of staff, lack of female staff, insufficient menstrual care products and a specific report pertaining to detainee dignity whilst menstruating. ICVA has followed up on the specific report which has been appropriately escalated.
- Two schemes reported ongoing issues with detainees accessing exercise and showers. This is a consistent area of concern from scheme feedback and has been echoed in various reports from inspectorates and international human rights visitors to police custody in the UK.
- Staffing issues continue to be reported as problematic in some suites with impacts on detainee care being reported as a result. One scheme reported that there had been a suite closure due to poor staffing levels.

The impact of ICVs

ICV schemes have continued to deliver regular, independent monitoring across the pandemic. Their continued presence in custody, whether that is in person or remotely, should be recognised and commended.

ICVs have reported making a difference in several ways:

- ICVs have reported a range of estate issues, resulting in improvements in CCTV, showers and improving the disposal of hazardous waste.
- A range of improvements regarding detainee meals were recorded including improved stock, removal of out-of-date meals and appropriate storage of detainee food items. ICVs also identified that a Halal certificate was out of date and this is being rectified.
- ICVs had identified that reading materials were not available in other languages and that there were no suitable reading materials for children which has now been rectified.

ICVA response

‘Many independent custody visiting schemes have faced significant challenges throughout the pandemic. Quarter two has seen the vast majority of schemes returning to face-to-face visiting supported by additional monitoring methods and recruitment and increasing the levels of volunteers is a feature for many of our members. ICVA wishes to thank all of those ICVs who have left schemes over the course of the pandemic for their work, and welcome those who are joining schemes across the country to monitor the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of detainees in police custody.

As there have been several reports of concern regarding female detainees and their care, ICVA will prioritise the conversion of straight to ICV training on the needs of female detainees, in particular menstrual care.’

Further information

The data for quarter two is incomplete as some schemes have been using a variety of monitoring methods but reveals that in the last quarter ICVs completed at least 1,032 visits, interviewing at least 2,350 detainees. In addition to this there were well in excess of 45 custody record reviews undertaken.

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- ICVA leads, supports and represents local independent custody visiting schemes.
- Further information can be found on our website: www.icva.org.uk