

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

The state of custody

Positively, schemes reported:

- ICVA receives many reports of great work by custody staff each quarter and this quarters return was no different. Reports received included comments regarding the welcoming nature of staff in busy periods and staff responding positively and quickly to actions arising from ICV visits.
- One area noted that the numbers of female custody staff had been greatly improved with a focus now being placed on ensuring that custody staff come from representative and diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- One scheme noted that the force had introduced a specific, discrete, room in custody for those detainees requiring a trauma-informed approach at booking in.
- Some schemes reported good ranges of distraction items, and one scheme area noted that custody had moved from a 'request culture' to an 'offer culture' in terms of custody staff offering detainees their full range of entitlements.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Stocks of custody meals continue to be reported as an issue in a small number of areas. ICVA has brought this up at NPCC level and contact been made with the supplier of many custody meals to improve availability.
- A concern was noted from a scheme regarding a detainees ability to keep an asthma inhaler in cell with them during detention. ICVA is seeking clarification on this from healthcare partners and will share the position on this via an upcoming newsletter.
- Several reports contained issues with availability of healthcare staff in custody leading to long detainee wait times for healthcare appointments.
- Some schemes are reporting considerable wait times for new ICVs to be vetted, which impacts on the frequency and coverage of visits.

The impact of ICVs

ICV schemes have continued to deliver regular, independent monitoring. ICVs have reported making a difference in several ways.

- ICVs in one area have been focusing on ensuring toilet roll is provided to detainees and if not that this is recorded on detainee record, although this may seem like a small change, this is an important area for detainee dignity.
- ICVs influenced change in making sure that blanket shortage/issue with supplier at custody was addressed and rectified with appropriate supplies now being in place.
- ICVs raised good practice of arrows to mecca in some suites, but not all. We recommended they be added to all cells. The force agreed and have been adding the arrows to each cell as standard during their annual closures/refurbishment.
- ICVs reported concerns regarding a fault with the Air Handling Units (AHU), which meant they were unable to regulate the temperature in the cells. The inspector agreed not acceptable and closed Custody with immediate effect.

ICVA response

“This quarter has seen the raising of some important issues in custody and some areas of national interest both in terms of challenges and positive comments. The reports of where ICVs have made positive changes to custody continue to show the validity and necessity of the custody visiting model and the tireless commitment by the volunteers and scheme managers. Thank you to all for your hard work and dedication to detainee rights, entitlements and wellbeing.” Sherry Ralph, Chief Operating Officer, ICVA.

Further information

The data returns for Q1 are incomplete, however, ICV schemes conducted well in excess of 947 visits in quarter four, speaking to over 2,636 detainees and observing over 1,239 detainees.

If you have any comments or questions about this report, please get in touch via the email address below.

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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