

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:

- ICVs are frequently told by detainees that the detention staff have been “kind”, “helpful”, “all right”. They cannot think of a recent visit where a detainee has offered an adverse comment about detention staff.
- A detainee who was fasting for Ramadan expressed gratitude for the understanding of staff re use of prayer mat, washing before prayers, general respect for his religious needs.
- Staff *always* address every detainee by name, always “John” or “Mr Smith” not simply “Smith” promoting the dignity of detainee, and ensuring people in custody are not regarded as an amorphous mass, but as individuals. Detainees have commented that they find this reassuring.
- ICV reported “At a recent visit we were impressed with the way the Sgt approached a sleeping detainee, who had been under-the influence and was on close watch. He gently put a hand on his shoulder, called him by first name and with a kind tone of voice said ‘are you all right mate, just checking if you need anything’? It wasn’t appropriate to wake him further to hold an interview, it was good to see such gentle interaction”.
- We have recently introduced a new system for determining which custody suite a detainee is sent to. The idea is to reduce wait times when booking in and spread the load between the two custody suites. This has already had a positive impact on wait times, has freed up custody staff as they no longer have to deal with officers phoning about bringing a detained person in and if detainees are not kept waiting as long to be processed it can help with their demeanour/anxiety.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Concerns raised on the lack of custody staff in several areas, in particular detention officers, thought to be in part due to delays in vetting meaning suites are reported as being short staff, with staff unable to take appropriate breaks and being stressed.
- Issues with availability and staffing levels of healthcare staff in several areas continues to cause concern in suites, impacting on detainees abilities to access the healthcare they need in a timely manner.
- Issues with unreliable interpreter services were raised, with delays in accessing services being a concern.
- Some issues with ICVs not being notified of TACT detentions, or delays in accessing PACE suites.

- Repeat concern - Some detainees are not advised on waking that an Inspector's review has taken place whilst they have been asleep.
- Women and girls not being offered the appropriate hygiene packs on entering custody.

The impact of ICVs

ICVs have reported making a difference in several ways, some of which are:

- Custody are following Ramadan protocol – discussions held with Custody for reassurance to ensure that detainees are being asked if they are fasting, if they would like to be woken to break their fast etc. This information has been added into our report forms after a couple of years ago ICVs highlighted some concerns around detainees not being asked if they would like to be woken to break their fast.
- Raised about the use of reading glasses in custody and that there is not a selection available for detainees – information sent to Chief Inspector and Inspector who are reviewing.
- Building up stock of magazines, reading material
- During extremely hot weather ICVs reported to the Custody Inspector whilst on site their concerns re cell temperatures. Before the end of shift [custody suite] was closed while air conditioning units were serviced & repaired.
- Reduction in level of nightlights for new custody centres and refurbished custody centres (from January 2023 – from 15 lux to 10 lux) with NPCC guidance for existing custody estates currently on 15 lux.
- Toilet roll provision and dispensers to enable refreshed supplies to detainees.

ICVA response

“This quarter has seen some repeat and some new issues raised in custody which ICVA will continue to monitor with schemes. There are some really positive examples of good practice from forces recorded in this quarter, demonstrating individualised care for detainees, kindness and process changes reducing waiting times for detainees.

With volunteers week fast approaching, it is great to see examples of the ongoing impact of ICVs, who provide an unparalleled breadth of monitoring of police custody, and who are incredibly valued by their OPCC/Mayors/Policing Bodies, ICVA, the forces themselves and our national stakeholders.”

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

The data returns for Q4 are incomplete, however, ICV schemes conducted at least 1084 visits in quarter two, interviewing at least 4068 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