

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:

- Suite extremely busy and full but staff extremely helpful including one trainee who accompanied us.
- A number of positive comments regarding Detention Officers and Police Officers in custody
- Reports of staff managing demands in custody effectively despite ongoing difficulty with cell capacity.
- ICVs praised custody staff for professionalism and efficiency when dealing with breastfeeding female detainee in custody.
- Most detainees satisfied with conditions and treatment during detention. Good to see exercise allowed despite less than 24hrs in custody.
- Inspector produced a document to support Custody staff with photos of all ICVs including all new recruits. Along with summary of their role, both staff and ICVs have found this useful.
- Inspector has been instrumental in arranging for large print bibles and reading glasses to be purchased for Custody.
- Introduction of Philips Bluetooth Speaker (which includes a charger and instructions) which is to be used as an addition to the comfort box items in Custody.
- Improvements being made for children in custody, including cell decoration, ensuring location of cells is as appropriate as possible and prioritising booking in.
- One detainee who was extremely vulnerable had advised she had no food or electricity at home after some investigation police arranged for food parcel and credit for electricity on her release.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Some estates concerns were reported as concerns and resolved, such as water being led on floors and in one case, being odious. Other estates issues reported pertain to cells and exercise areas being out of use, drain smells, showers out of order and so on, issues escalated.
- Staffing concerns are raised again in this quarter, with an impact on ICV visits on at least 3 occasions recorded.
- Report from an ICV that their visit was being listened to on a live stream. This echoes a report from a separate area in a similar vein. ICVA is seeking advice and clarification on this area to feed back to schemes.
- Continued issues with inspector reviews and informing DPs when sleeping reviews have been done.

- Lack of recorded evidence of adult females being offered access to a female member of staff in custody.
- Reports have been received from areas continuing to struggle with cover from health care professionals, noting cover is infrequent and intermittent.
- ICVs are recording concerns that detainees they are seeing are vulnerable, and yet are not being recorded as such by custody.

The impact of ICVs

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

- Phone call requested but not provided. Detention officer states detainee initially refused but has since changed his mind. He will now be offered this again.
- Occasions where showers were not offered prior to an ICV visit.
- ICVs advocated for a detainee to ensure that they got an update on their case.
- Information on Lux Lighting shared with Force and adaptations made and scheduled in as part of planned maintenance.
- Following a recent ICV visit, ICVs made the excellent suggestion that some large print Bibles and some reading glasses were needed in Custody. This has since been arranged.
- On finding a detainee was not able to read document discovered as they had dyslexia, custody now have rights and entitlements printed on coloured card.
- ICVS Custody Visit Risk Register is now in place to allow us to report issues more appropriately and set a risk level for actioning.

ICVA response

“This quarter has seen some repeat issues such as healthcare and custody staffing and some new issues raised in custody which ICVA will continue to monitor with schemes and seek clarification upon. There are some really positive examples of good practice from forces recorded in this quarter, demonstrating individualised care for detainees such as arrangements being made for a breastfeeding mother, getting large print religious texts and more.

It is particularly pleasing to see new initiatives arising from ICV reports and the ongoing impact of ICV/OPCC/ICVA and policing stakeholders thematic workstreams, such as that of lux lighting.”

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

The data returns for Q1 are incomplete, however, ICV schemes conducted at least 1,236 visits in quarter two, interviewing at least 4,657 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