

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:

- Mobile phone chargers have been procured for all custody suites in one force meaning all detainees will be able to communicate with family/friends when they leave custody.
- Following focused work undertaken in relation to detainee dignity a scheme reports that they continue to see improvements in detainees being offered toilet roll without having to ask for it. Focus is continuing in this area to improve further.
- Children in custody – ICVA has received multiple reports of good practice in terms of children and their time in custody this quarter. These include procuring iPads with explanatory videos, identifying a child as a victim, cross sector meetings to learn from child detentions, specific child friendly interview rooms being in place and comments on a good range of child friendly foodstuffs and distraction items.
- Detainee interactions – again this quarter ICVA has received many reports of staff interactions with detainees being patient, individualised and respectful, with a particular report of good practice regarding the care and treatment of a detainee with learning difficulties.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Staffing issues of custody staff against a backdrop of reportedly busy custody suites has been reported as an issue in quite a few suites. This has led to some delays to ICV visiting taking place in several areas.
- Staff shortages have been reported as having an impact on detainee entitlements such as access to drinks, exercise, distraction items and showers which is of concern.
- Healthcare staffing continues to be a concern reported in many areas. ICVA is undertaking some work with schemes to establish a data set as to the breadth and depth of these issues.
- One area reports inappropriate language being used from custody staff when talking about detainees, this has been raised with the force for action.
- Two areas report that delays with transport have impacted on the length of time detainees are spending in police custody.

The impact of ICVs

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

- Blanket availability was reported as a concern in more than one area and ICVs have been able to raise this effectively and ensure that there is enough provision, particularly in cold weather.
- ICVs have raised a number of issues which custody staff have been able to assist detainees with, these have included (but are not limited to) making arrangements for dependents, assistance with dyslexia, concerns regarding privacy (in particular of the toilet area), highlighting recent trauma to ensure effective care, access to smoking substitutes, medication, fresh clothing, exercise and showers.
- ICVs have impacted on the effective and respectful storage of religious items in custody and ensuring that detainees are proactively offered items that allow them to practice their faith whilst in custody.
- Several instances of improvements to food stocks, removal of out of date or mouldy food and food to suit all dietary and religious requirements have been noted this quarter.
- ICVs have had impact on a range of estates issues, including cleanliness of suites, ensuring effective pest control and attaining thicker mattresses for detainees.

ICVA response

“Staffing concerns of both custody staff and healthcare continue to be a cause of concern in ICV reports. These have been reported as leading to delays of custody visits and detainee entitlements not being proactively offered/offered at all, which is of concern. Coupled with reports of busy suites, and concerns around healthcare staffing, it is clear that custody is an area that is under pressure in some suites to deliver a safe, effective and dignified environment for some detainees. ICVA has raised this with partners and seeks to undertake further work with schemes to establish the depth and breadth of these issues, particularly those of healthcare.

It is clear from the impact section of the report that ICVs are able to raise a wide range of detainee reported issues with custody staff for onward action which is great to see. There may be any number of reasons that a detainee does not disclose something to custody staff that they then disclose to a volunteer, and to see such a wide range of issues being raised and rectified continues to demonstrate the impact and value of the volunteer monitors on detainee welfare.’

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

ICV schemes conducted at least 1,824 visits in Q3, interviewing at least 7,065 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