

**The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)**  
**Quarterly stakeholder update**  
**Q1 2024/2025**



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.

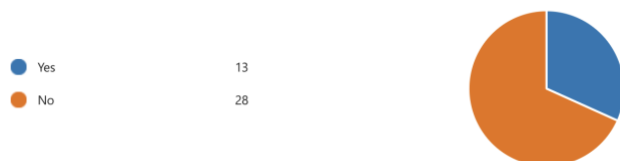
Each quarter, we ask schemes to report data on the number of visits, but also that they include detail of positive news from custody, causes of concern and areas where ICVs have had impact. This allows ICVA to pull together this stakeholder update, including areas which particularly stand out for comment/interest, or areas which are reported by multiple members.

This quarter we also included a specific set of questions on healthcare in custody, whether ICVs were reporting issues with healthcare, and where they were, what kind of issues were being reported.

## Healthcare

14. Are you currently experiencing issues with healthcare provision in custody?

[More Details](#)



Almost one third of those responding to the survey were experiencing issues with healthcare provision in custody. These responses fit broadly into 3 areas:

1. Embedding or consistency across blocks
2. Staffing Issues
3. Travel Distance

Reports from schemes on the issues include:

- Issues with new contracts bedding into suites.
- Lack of healthcare professional (HCP) coverage in suites.
- Lack of HCPs.
- Distance HCPs need to cover in order to be present in multiple suites causing delays.
- HCPs assessing detainees for mental health concerns to refer to mental health services.
- HCPs only seeing detainees on request rather than any proactive engagement due workloads.

These issues impact on detainees in that they may need to be transferred to a hospital to receive treatment, that they may experience delays in treatment whilst an HCP is awaited and that they sometimes receive remote healthcare advice. ICVA has raised the high prevalence of these issues with both the Home Office and a representative from the NHS and will continue to support schemes to raise and rectify issues where they occur.

### **The state of custody overall**

Positively, schemes reported:

- Arrangements for detainees who may be experiencing symptoms of perimenopause/menopause being put in place.
- Custody staff raising important medical issues with healthcare professionals (HCPs) such as developing bruising, being tenacious in terms of attaining inpatient status for a detainee with sores to his leg and identifying a detainee's deterioration in physical wellbeing due to diabetes.
- More items being offered and provided to eliminate boredom or help with mental health, books, balls, magazines. One report in particular notes the assistance that these items gave to a neurodiverse detainee experiencing anxiety.
- Improved and effective storage and availability of religious texts for detainees being reported, additional prayer matts being ordered as well as assistance given to a detainee to allow for prayer.
- Schemes report particular pathways being established for women and those who have served in the armed forces being in place in suites.
- Multiple reports received about the helpfulness of custody staff, professionalism and the level of care given to detainees.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- There were several issues pertaining to healthcare, as outlined in the above section of this overview.
- Staffing issues of custody staff also continue to be a concern leading to delays in visits and access to detainees and ICVA will raise this again with the Home Office and National Police Chiefs Council. ICVs should not experience delays in accessing custody for their visits.
- Despite distraction items being used well when noted, there has been a recent recall of several items due to a procurement issue, whereby potential links to child labour were uncovered in the supply chain, counter to Force procurement policy. This has led to a shortage of distraction items across custody and ICVs are monitoring how this is affecting detainees – 1 example noted a detainee with learning difficulties who would have benefitted from a distraction item, had to go without.
- One scheme reported 2 complaints about sore wrists/ elbow from handcuffing over the course of a week.
- A concern has been reported that in one area detainees who speak no/ little English are frequently not visited by ICVs despite language book. Force have mentioned implementation of Language Line, though C/Insp unable to provide update at this stage. ICVA supports the use of interpretation services

for visits as national good practice and is concerned that a whole tranche of detainees in this case are not receiving monitoring visits.

- Issues with Inspector reviews were reported again this quarter, with delays in detainees being informed about reviews undertaken whilst the detainee was asleep in particular, with one delay being recorded at 8 hours.

### **The impact of ICVs**

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

- A good example of collaborative working was a detainee advised ICVs when they were conducting a visit that they were suffering from pains in their chest and they had a history of heart attacks. ICVs informed the Escorting Officer who contacted the HCP and the detainee was taken to hospital.
- ICVs spoke to a detainee who informed them that he had a blocked shunt. One of the ICVs understood the severity of this issue and noticed that the detainee was sweating. ICVs informed custody staff, who immediately took action and called the custody nurse and 999. The detainee was ultimately taken to hospital in an ambulance.

### **ICVA response**

*“The number of schemes reporting issues with healthcare professional availability is of concern. Detainees having timely access to the medical care they need is of the utmost importance, and gaps in coverage and staffing can pose significant issues and risks to detainee wellbeing. We will continue to monitor this issue and raise it with stakeholders.*

*Positively, we are delighted to see that work Sussex OPCC and ICVA have undertaken on support for perimenopausal/menopausal detainees is being embedded in suites, with support from the National Police Chiefs Council and College of Policing. We will continue to work with schemes and forces to ensure that good practice continues to be embedded nationally, and look forward to providing an update report on World Menopause Day 2024’*

*Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.*

### **Further information**

ICV schemes conducted at least 1780 visits in Q1, interviewing at least 6,900 detainees.

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

info@icva.org.uk

ICVA leads, supports and represents local independent custody visiting schemes.

Further information can be found on our website: [www.icva.org.uk](http://www.icva.org.uk)