

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.

The state of custody overall

Positively, schemes reported:

- Examples of particularly good individual care such as a detention officer giving a detainee with a baby regular updates as to the caring arrangements and wellbeing of their child, an example of family contact and ensuring that a detainees car would be safe during their time in custody and a very caring attitude shown by staff when caring for a detainee who was experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Winter safeguarding packs being provided to people with no home address when leaving custody - foil blankets, additional clothing, food items, personal care items.
- Good progress of the Menopause Referral Pathway with care packs now available in suites.
- One scheme reported a large reduction in the use of anti-rip clothing.
- Several reports of increased distraction items, libraries including books in different languages and one suite offering fresh fruit.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- There was an issue with a Home Office Immigration detainee who did not speak English. The ICVs used a translation sheet to communicate. The detainee had not eaten and was approaching 24 hours in custody. There was mention of Use of Force, but it was unclear if it occurred during the arrest or in custody. A potential communication barrier existed as the language pack was not at the desk when booked in.
- Concerns regarding staffing including lack of resources to accommodate detainee needs and facilitate visits. Concern recorded for staff & detainees care & welfare with this pattern and in particular where staff on shift are on light duties and unable to deal with detainees.
- The Dame Vera Baird Inquiry Report suggested basic provision of sanitary provisions for women in custody were not consistent. ICVs noted that the provision in one of the custodies does not have any hand cleanser or discrete bags to dispose of used items. ICVs also suggested that certain items and packets are left open which may be unhygienic for female detainees.

- Issues with staffing of custody suites continue to be reported.
- Cell temperatures and issues with provisions of blankets to detainees were reported.

The impact of ICVs

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

- A detainee reported to ICVs that they were feeling claustrophobic in cell, ICVs raised the issue, and the detainee was able to access the exercise yard.
- Several personal issues were raised by detainees including facilitating an important call regarding a tenancy and caring responsibilities for children, ICVs raised, and issues were dealt with by custody staff.
- One scheme reported a visit with a detainee who was deaf. ICVs had established communication through the means of writing and exchanging messages. Queries are now being raised regarding the facilitation of custody staff receiving basic British Sign Language (BSL) lessons and establish if an audio loop is accessible within the custody suite.
- One scheme is currently supporting the constabulary in the creation of a neurodivergent friendly booklet which detainees can look at on the way into custody so they know what to expect on arrival.
- ICVs reported a lack of gluten free meal options, specifically with breakfast items. After raising this issue, custody implemented gluten free cereal.
- A female officer was not assigned when the detainee signed in; however, after the ICV raised the issue, one was assigned.

ICVA response

“It is concerning to read that a detainee who was being held under immigration powers was not able to effectively communicate and had not eaten for a significant period in custody. ICVA is working on identifying issues for immigration detainees and will raise these with stakeholders as part of an ongoing workstream. Further, it is disappointing that staffing continues to impact on detainee care and ICV visits.

Positively, we noted some excellent examples of individualised care for detainees, the provision of winter welfare packs for those detainees without release addresses and are delighted to see the impact of national workstreams such as the provision of menopause packs and a large reduction in the use of anti-rip clothing being reported.

The impact of the ICV role on both individual detainee care and in terms of being consulted on custody materials is again clear to see this quarter. As part of their monitoring, important issues are raised to custody staff for action, and there is no doubt that these will have an impact on the detainee’s wellbeing, but also the custody staffs ongoing interactions with those detainees. I give thanks to all of the ICVs undertaking this incredibly valuable role”.

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

ICV schemes conducted at least 1,681 visits in Q2, interviewing at least 5,801 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