

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

Positively, schemes reported:

- ICVA received reports of positive use of technology in police custody this quarter, including the use of tablets for child detainees and the use of tablets for translation services leading to staff having more effective communications with detainees who do not speak English.
- A reduction in delays for ICV access to custody, although there were still one or two areas where this required improvement, there were significantly less reports of delays than in the previous quarter, and several positive reports of progress in this area.
- Although there were still one or two reports with issues, overall, this quarter showed improvements in storage of religious items in several areas, with appropriate storage being reported and internal quality assurance processes being put in place in one force.
- Several reports of detainees stating that they had experienced good treatment by custody staff in terms of treating detainees with respect, individualised care and the use of correct pronouns.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Staffing and healthcare availability continue to be reported as issues, this is an ongoing theme reported by schemes each quarter and remains the most reported area of concern by ICVs/schemes.
- These staffing issues in terms of both custody and in court transport services were reported as meaning that some detainees were spending longer in custody than they needed to.
- Concerns were reported arising from the BBC Panorama programme, with plans being put in place for additional scrutiny as a result.
- Several reports were received regarding detainee food options, one report noting that additional items above the basic custody meals had been removed due to cost, and two reports received of issues with halal meal supplies/licences.

The impact of ICVs

- ICVs noted that a detainee was not unable to read when they had stated they could in their custody record. The record was amended, and the detainee received appropriate support and thanked the ICVS for their help.
- An ICV had reported a woman had received inadequate sanitary products, reported this, and as a result the staff were reminded that there is a whole range of products on different shelves and to distribute according to the woman's specific requirements.
- Two reports of follow up activities taking place by ICVs where they had been advised not to see a detainee which is good practice to ensure that the detainee was receiving appropriate care and that uses of force were proportionate and justified.
- Several schemes reported ICVs having an impact on custody 'request culture' including ensuring detainees had access to showers, exercise, blankets and toilet roll, with one scheme reporting a change in process for detainees having toilet roll in cells.
- Several reports were received on ICV impact on estates matters, including action being taken on an infestation in a particular area of custody.

ICVA response

"This quarter we were really pleased to see a noticeable reduction in the number of schemes reporting delays in accessing custody. Although not completely unreported this quarter, we are heartened that there are significantly less reports of this occurring, and where it is, plans being in place to rectify it.

This quarter saw the BBC Panorama programme air regarding Charing Cross custody suite. The Home Office issues a Code of Practice that sets out the role and remit of ICVs. ICVA, its members and stakeholders believe that the Code needs strengthening and reinforcing. Whilst we do not believe that monitoring is responsible for custody culture, it is integral that monitors have all of the tools they need to be able to spot issues where they are present. Earlier in the year, we have called for revisions to this Code guarantee ICVs' immediate access to custody suites, ensure that they can speak to detainees in private out of the sight and hearing of police officers, and allow them to have access to custody records. We are working with the Home Office on making these changes".

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

ICV schemes conducted at least 1900 visits in Q2, interviewing at least 7200 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