

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 an 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:

- An example of a type 1 diabetic detainee, well documented and managed by staff including allowing DP's mobile phone to be kept outside the door of the cell as she uses this to check her blood sugars.
- One force have now established 10 tablets across all custody suites that contain easy access to Rights & Entitlements, Videos and Games for Children. Adults who are not deemed a risk will also have the option of use but will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- ICVs reported extremely kind and professional support for a detainee with autism disorder diagnosis.
- One area noted that there is an intention to have a breakout room for detainees. Carpet has been fitted. Police will continue to develop partnerships to provide support to the most vulnerable detainees. As part of the pilot, there will be opportunity for Police to develop new partnerships who can become part of the embedded 'offer' for children and women that come into custody suites.
- A new handover policy has been developed and signed off, aiming to provide greater scrutiny of handovers. It allows ICVs to observe each stage of the handover.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Issues with healthcare provision this quarter include a poor attitude from healthcare staff toward a detainee, a detainee not seeing an HCP when they had concerns about their access to medications, HCPs declining to visit a detainee, no HCP involvement in perimenopause and menopause referral pathways and healthcare staffing issues.
- Several visits raised serious safeguarding questions, including children being held overnight, detained in excess of 24 hours, or lacking clarity on AA attendance, food provision, shower access, and distraction materials.
- More than one report this quarter detailed expired halal certificates for custody.

- One scheme reported privacy and dignity risks with strip searches linked to drugs, alongside structural concerns (no dedicated strip-search room, searches conducted in cells, CCTV coverage) which raised privacy and procedural assurance questions.
- One CDO attitude was reported by an ICV for being misogynistic when referring to a female detainee. This was escalated and addressed appropriately with the CDO in question.

The impact of ICVs

- ICVs reported that there were very few books/magazines for young people. This has been fed back to the force and they have addressed this.
- ICVs reported that some of the Quran's were very tatty and were missing spines. These have now been replaced. Another scheme reported a lack of Buddhist religious materials were highlighted during the past quarter and this was rectified with the relevant religious text purchased.
- ICVs highlighted inconsistencies in guidance around detainee clothing. New items were not to be ordered, clothing was only provided to detainees under certain criteria, and one suite was disposing of used clothing rather than laundering it. As a result, some suites did not have fresh clothing available for detainees. The OPCC raised this with the force, which promptly re-issued guidance to staff, outlining the ICVs' findings and clarifying expectations.
- Concerns regarding detainee's welfare fed back and resulted in move to cell with CCTV and visit from Liaison and Diversion.
- ICVs appropriately escalated and logged a number of welfare and compliance issues requiring follow-up, including:
 - Extended detention welfare: detainees reporting cold, hunger, lack of hot drinks during prolonged stays (including those awaiting court)
 - Mental health / violence risk management: detainees not offered visits due to violent behaviour, use of AA for mental health noted, with follow-up requested on AA involvement and safeguards
 - Rights and legal access: solicitor contact, waiting times, and whether reminders / welfare checks were completed when detainees refused food/drink
 - Language / immigration cases: limited-English detainees, immigration waits, and whether interpretation was offered/considered, use of translated rights/entitlements documentation was positively noted.

ICVA response

“While this quarter includes positive examples of thoughtful, individualised practice and care in custody which is to be celebrated, ICVs also continue to raise serious concerns around healthcare, safeguarding and dignity.

Reports of poor attitudes, although not widespread, are significant, as they directly affect detainees’ experiences and confidence in the system.

Independent custody visiting remains vital in highlighting both good practice and the cultural improvements needed to ensure consistent, respectful treatment for all”.

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

ICV schemes conducted at least 1,829 visits in Q3, interviewing at least 6,719 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