

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:

- Several schemes reported good arrangements for care of detainees during the heatwave including relocations and ongoing monitoring of temperatures in cells.
- ICVs were impressed when the Custody Inspector arranged for two 15-year-old DPs, who were concerned they would be unable to sit their Mathematics GCSE exam, to complete the exam within the custody suite under the supervision of an invigilator. This demonstrated Police's commitment to child-centered policing by ensuring the children's voices were heard and their educational opportunities were protected, while allowing custody processes to continue safely and effectively.
- ICVs have been making observation of custody handovers and have broadly reported good communication between outgoing and incoming teams, comprehensive discussion of detainee risks, clear identification of constant watches, detailed healthcare updates, effective discussion of interpreters, court appearances and vulnerable detainees.
- Food and drink, ICVs reported excellent arrangements and individualised treatment regarding kosher meal supplies and sweetener and sugar free options for diabetic detainees.
- Continued indicators for positive culture and custody department being open to external scrutiny including staff/officers being welcoming, 'going over and above' to answer queries during ICV visits and sharing new ideas to improve care for people detained with ICVs.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Some entitlements e.g. access to showers and exercise have not been routinely offered to detainees. This tends to be observed when custody suites are busy and in these instances custody staff accommodate where they can and prioritise those most in need.
- Staffing continues to be reported as an issue within some suites with either new or insufficient staffing levels leading to abandoned visits, difficulties during the visit or detainees accessing entitlements.
- ICVs have reported issues with the length of time getting DPs to court via SERCO creating stress for detainees who have to stay in police custody longer than necessary.
- Missing information or recording errors in custody records have been reported in several areas as part of visits and in custody record reviews.
- Issues with food in custody have been reported in terms of both the calorific value of meals, and the range of meals being reduced due to costing pressures.

- Issues in some areas with the storage of religious items have been reported.

The impact of ICVs

- ICVs reported occasions where discussions with detainees had revealed mental health issues and vulnerability which were raised with custody staff to ensure effective care was given.
- ICVs spoke to a black detainee who advised that he is unable to shower while in custody, as the available products do not include moisturiser and the water causes dryness to his skin. This was escalated to the force, who subsequently engaged with the detainee to seek his recommendation. Following this, 12 small bottles of moisturiser were purchased and are now available in custody suites across the county.
- ICVs recognised that there weren't any EPI pens in a custody suite that doesn't have onsite Health Care practitioners. So have reported this to OPCC and there are now going to be EPI pens in all suites as well training for staff in how to use them.
- ICVs notices that wellbeing rooms had fell into disrepair or were being used to house stock. All wellbeing rooms have since been refurbished and decorated with mood lighting, plants, and comfortable furniture to create a more calming environment.
- ICVs raised concerns that there is no dedicated strip search room at a suite, so strip searches take place in cells, where CCTV is recorded. Video screens were covered during strip searches, however, the footage was still being recorded, stored and could be viewed/downloaded. ICVs raised that this is a privacy/ dignity issue and contrary to policy.

ICVA response

"This quarter's update highlights both encouraging examples of good practice and the continuing challenges facing police custody across the UK. It is particularly encouraging to see the tangible impact that independent custody visitors continue to have, identifying practical improvements that enhance the safety, dignity and wellbeing of people in detention. At the same time, recurring issues around staffing, detainee entitlements and custody conditions remind us that independent scrutiny remains as important as ever. I would like to thank every volunteer and scheme for their continued commitment to ensuring that people are treated fairly, respectfully and with humanity while in police custody."

Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.

Further information

ICV schemes conducted at least 1,787 visits in Q1, interviewing at least 7,273 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