

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING

*If this were you, wouldn't
you want someone to check
on your welfare?*



Annual Report 2016-2017



DORSET
POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER

Foreword

Since the introduction of an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Dorset, our volunteers have visited many thousands of detainees to check on their welfare and the conditions they are being held in whilst being detained in police custody.

This report details the invaluable work that the Independent Custody Visitors have carried out across Dorset between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. It includes an overview of the year's visits, as well as more information about the scheme in general.

The visits conducted have confirmed that custody in Dorset is a safe and caring environment for detainees, and I would like to thank the custody officers and detention staff for their continued professionalism and dedication. Their role is not without challenges, but their treatment of detainees remains exemplary.

I am fortunate to be the Chair of the Independent Custody Visiting Association, which supports Commissioners, Scheme Managers and volunteers in the delivery of effective and efficient schemes.

Special thanks must go to all Independent Custody Visitors, past and present, who have carried out the visiting role with consistent enthusiasm and professionalism. It is their conscientiousness and commitment to the Scheme in Dorset that keeps it functioning at such a high level.



Martyn Underhill
Police and Crime Commissioner

What is Independent Custody Visiting?

Independent Custody Visiting is a national initiative, supported by the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA), whereby specifically trained members of the public make random and unannounced visits to custody suites to check on the welfare of detainees and the conditions they are being held in. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) will ensure the detainees have received their legal rights and entitlements, and with permission from the detainee, will review the notes kept on their treatment during detention. ICVs are independent of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the police, and will have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system. Police and Crime Commissioners have responsibility for running and maintaining Independent Custody Visiting Schemes in their force area.

Each week a randomly selected pair of ICVs will visit each of the 24-hour suites. On completion of each visit they compile a report outlining any comments or concerns they may have. This report is sent to both the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and Dorset Police. Serious complaints are investigated by the Professional Standards Department of Dorset Police; other matters which can be resolved at the time of the visit are recorded on the report. The findings of these reports are discussed at quarterly meetings attended by all ICVs, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the OPCC's Scheme Manager, the Assistant Chief Constable, Dorset Police's Head of Criminal Justice and the Custody Liaison Officer.

Further information on ICVA can be found on their website www.icva.org.uk.

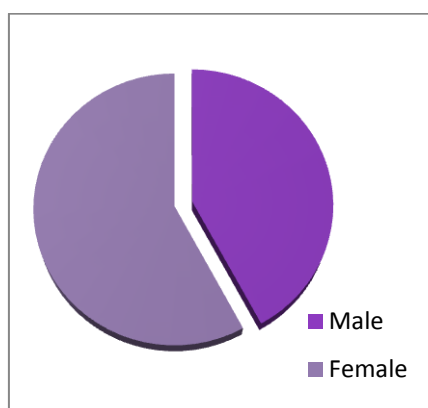
Why is Independent Custody Visiting important?

Independent Custody Visiting provides protection to detainees and the police, and reassurance to the wider community. Volunteers from Independent Custody Visiting Schemes across the UK independently check on the welfare of detainees who may be feeling vulnerable or confused, providing independent scrutiny of their treatment and the conditions in which they are being held.

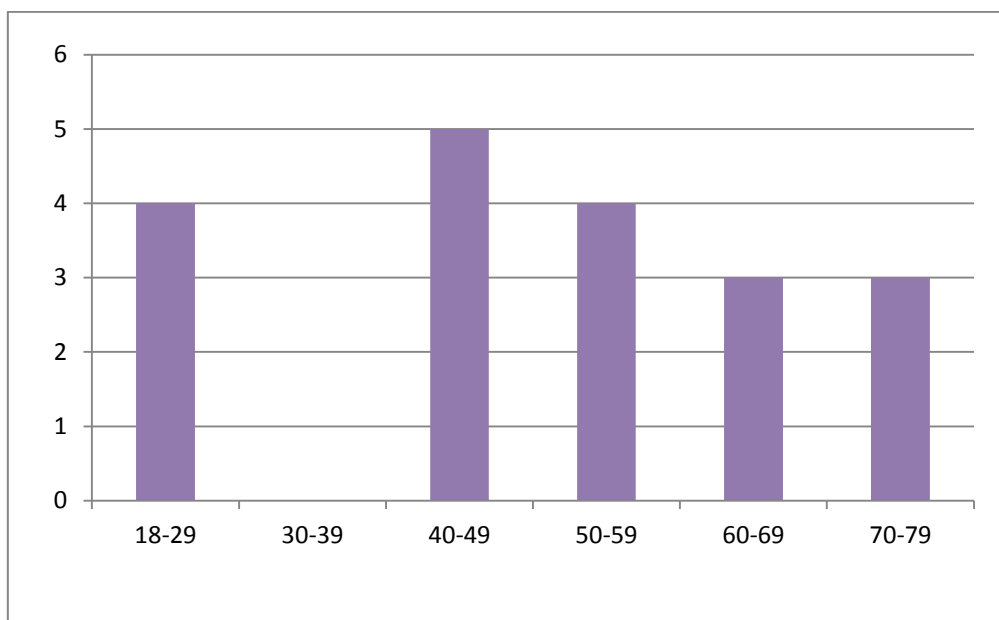
Independent Custody Visiting allows the police to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and provides public reassurance that policing in their area is fair and in accordance with statutory legislation and guidance.

Recruitment and Demographics

A recruitment campaign was held in 2016 which generated a great deal of public interest, resulting in 10 ICVs joining the Scheme. Start dates for new ICVs were staggered to provide each trainee with sufficient visits to aid their learning and ensure that accredited ICVs were able to continue being allocated visits.



At the close of 2016 there was a total of 19 ICVs in Dorset, 11 females and 8 males.



The average age of our ICVs is 50. Details on the age breakdown are indicated in the bar chart above. The average length of service, rounded to the nearest year, is 4 years and the longest serving ICV has been with the Scheme for 8 years.

Key Developments

Changes have been made to the structure of the Scheme management, with day-to-day administration being carried out by the Scheme Administrator.

To avoid losing significant numbers of visitors from the Scheme at the end of the nine year maximum tenure, it was decided to recruit on an annual basis, moving away from the previous recruitment plan of every three years.

During 2016, a decision was made to no longer use rural custody suites as designated sites, leaving visitors with Bournemouth, Weymouth and Poole as designated custody centres.

Visit Statistics

During the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, a total of 102 visits were made to Dorset Custody Suites. Dorset Police operates two 24-hour suites, one in Bournemouth and the other in Weymouth. On occasion, due to operational need or other issues, such as building or maintenance work, one of the two suites will be closed and detainees transferred to Poole Custody. Although always ready to be used, Poole Custody is generally non-operational. The Scheme Manager is always informed of any movement away from the usual custody suites.

	Weymouth	Bournemouth	Poole	Rural	Total
No of Visits	48	44	6	4	102

Visitors always visit in pairs. Visits are unannounced and visitors must be admitted to the custody facility immediately on their arrival. During the 102 visits made, a total of 518 detainees were offered a visit, and 488 detainees accepted and were spoken to.

Detainees:	Held	Offered	Visited/Seen
No:	772	518	488

Detainees have the right to privacy and are not obliged to speak with visitors if they do not wish to. The detainee may also be asleep, being interviewed or processed.

The days of the week and times of the visits undertaken are shown below.

Day of Week	No of Visits
Monday	16
Tuesday	15
Wednesday	13
Thursday	12
Friday	18
Saturday	19
Sunday	9

Times of Visits	No of Visits*
From 1am – 7am	2
From 7am – 10am	14
From 10am – 1pm	30
From 1pm – 4pm	9
From 4pm – 7pm	19
From 7pm – 10pm	21
From 10pm – 1am	3

* This only indicates visits made to 24-hour suites. Rural suites were only visited when the stations were open.

When visiting is conducted during the 10pm to 7am period, visitors may not be able to speak with many detainees as they will be asleep, but it does provide the opportunity to conduct a thorough review of the conditions of the suite.

During visits, detainees are given the opportunity to discuss with the visitors their treatment whilst in custody. Visitors will check that detainees have been informed of their legal rights and that they understand them.



Visitors will also check that

- Cells and toilets have been maintained
- Reasonable temperatures are maintained within the cells and suite
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided
- Any visible injuries have been explained
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing has been provided
- The custody facility, food preparation areas and bedding are in a clean, tidy and hygienic condition
- The detainee is satisfied with their treatment in custody
- A reasonable period of time to rest has been given if detained overnight
- With the consent of the detainee, visitors check the custody log to confirm the detainee's account of their detention.

Any delays in gaining entry to the custody suites can compromise the credibility of the Scheme. Detailed below is the number of occasions delays have been experienced.

Waiting Time	No of Visits	%
Entry within 5 minutes	96	94%
Entry within 5-10 minutes	5	5%
Entry within 10-15 minutes	0	0%
Entry after 15 minutes	1	1%

Acceptable explanations were provided at the time of the visits affected.

Visitors will raise any matters that require immediate attention with the Custody Sergeant at the time of the visit. A report is completed as a record of each visit and comments recorded, along with any actions undertaken as a result of queries raised. Copies of the report are provided to the Custody Manager for Dorset Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Any queries arising from the reports are discussed and feedback provided at the Panel meeting, or before if the situation requires.

Key Issues

Key issues highlighted in 2016-2017 and the actions taken on these issues were as follows.

Towel Shortage - It had been noted by visitors on several occasions that the supply of towels had been irregular. This was consistently reported and raised at Panel meetings, and as a result additional towels were ordered and distributed to the suites.

Language Questionnaire - To assist visitors in engaging with detainees, the OPCC introduced questionnaires translated in a variety of languages. The questionnaires explain who the visitors are and ask the basic questions around their rights and entitlements. The Custody Sergeant risk assesses each occasion the visitors ask for the detainee to be allowed to complete the form, and if visitors have any concerns as a result of the answers given by the detainee, they would be free to use the interpreter service.

Hospital Beds - On several occasions concerns were raised about the amount of time detainees had waited for bed within a Mental Health Unit. Unfortunately, this issue could not be resolved by Dorset Police, but they continued to record those occasions.

The Future

In July 2017, recruitment commenced to appoint six visitors to join the team, with training visits starting later in the year.

With the recent increase in terrorism attacks, the Commissioner has requested Dorset OPCC trains and prepares up to six visitors to complete visits to detainees held under the Terrorism Act (TACT). TACT visitors must have 18 months' visiting experience, undergo higher level security checks, and receive specific training.

Further Information

Applications from members of the public to become Independent Custody Visitors are always welcome and the Commissioner's office is keen to recruit volunteers from a wide spectrum of society to reflect the diverse communities in Dorset.

Volunteers must be 18 years of age and be independent of the police and be willing to carry out the role objectively and impartially.

Enquiries from members of the public interested in the Scheme should be directed to pcc@dorset.pnn.police.uk