

What is an Independent Custody Visitor?

Who are independent custody visitors?

Independent custody visitors are members of the local community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the welfare of people in police custody. They come from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community. They must be over 18 and have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system, for example, serving police officers or special constables. Other people such as solicitors or probation officers may be excluded, to prevent possible conflict of interests for the individual. This maintains the independence of the scheme as a whole.

How are independent custody visitors selected and trained?

Volunteers wishing to become independent custody visitors will need to complete an application form. Then they will be asked to attend an interview. Independent custody visitors need to have a sound knowledge and thorough understanding of detainees rights and police responsibilities. Successful applicants attend a training session organised by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, in partnership with the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA). All volunteers are issued with an official identity card, which they must use when conducting visits to police custody suites. Newly appointed independent custody visitors are required to complete a probationary period.

When and where are visits made?

Independent custody visitors visit police stations in pairs. The actual timing of visits is entirely a matter for independent custody visitors, but should be random and unannounced. Independent custody visitors will normally only visit those police stations within their local area.

What happens when independent custody visitors make a visit?

Independent custody visitors must maintain their independence and impartiality. They do not take sides but look, listen and report on what they find in the custody unit. On arrival at the police station, independent custody visitors will be promptly escorted to the custody area. When undertaking visits strict rules of confidentiality will apply. Independent custody visitors may occasionally be denied immediate access to the custody suite for safety reasons and asked to wait. Interviews with detainees are, for independent custody visitors' protection, normally carried out within sight, but out of hearing of the escorting officer.

Reporting procedures

A report is completed after each visit. It provides an insight into the running of the custody area at the time of the visit. Copies of the reports are provided for the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the independent custody visitors and the Home Office. They provide a vital source of information on the environmental and welfare conditions in which detainees are held. The information is analysed and the areas for action are highlighted.

Other duties

Independent custody visitors must treat as confidential the details of what they see and hear on their visit.

Time commitment

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner requires Independent Custody Visitors to undertake a minimum of six visits per annum. Visitors are also required to attend panel meetings and update training as required by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Humberside Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Humberside Scheme covers operational custody suites within the Humberside Force Area. They are currently Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Bridlington and Kingston upon Hull.

OFFICER CONTACT DETAILS

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