

What is an Independent Custody Visitor?

Who are independent custody visitors?

Independent custody visitors are volunteers from the local community who visit police stations, unannounced, to check on the welfare of people detained in police custody. We welcome volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community, aged 18 years and above. Due to the independent nature of the role, our members must have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system. For example, serving police officers, PCSOs and special constables are excluded from the role, in order to maintain an independent oversight. Other professions, such as solicitors, magistrates, appropriate adults and probation officers may be excluded, to prevent possible conflict of interests for the individual and to maintain the independence of the scheme as a whole.

How are independent custody visitors selected and trained?

Volunteers wishing to become independent custody visitors, are required to complete and submit an online application form. They will then be invited to attend an interview. Independent custody visitors need to have some knowledge and understanding of detainee rights and police responsibilities. Successful applicants attend an initial training course and ongoing training throughout their time in the role. Training is carried out by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in partnership with the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA). All volunteers must complete police vetting and 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 timing of inspections is decided by the volunteers 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?

Custody visitors must maintain their independence and impartiality. They do not take sides but look, listen and record their observations. On arrival at the police station, independent custody visitors should be promptly escorted to the custody area. They may occasionally be denied immediate access to visit the cells for safety or operational reasons and they must respect that custody suites can be very busy and challenging places for officers to work. Interviews with detainees are carried out in police cells within sight, but out of hearing of the escorting custody officer. When undertaking visits, strict rules of professionalism and confidentiality apply.

Reporting procedures

A detailed report is completed during each visit which should give an insight into the care provided for detainees at the time of the visit and some assurance for the Police and Crime Commissioner. Data and feedback from the visits are shared with the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) who collect and analyse national data for the Home Office. The visits provide a vital source of information on the environmental and welfare conditions in which detainees are held.

The Custody Visiting Association have acted upon feedback from visitors and have successfully campaigned the UK Government for changes to legislation around the care of detainees.

Expectations of conduct

Independent custody visitors must treat as confidential, the details of which are viewed or heard during their visit or when viewing custody records. They must be respectful of the detainees and custody staff alike.

Time commitment

Please note that the custody visitor role is a highly valued, rewarding and long term position which supports the UK National Preventative Mechanism under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). Please be aware that the role should not be regarded as a short-term work experience post to support degree/college courses or to enhance a CV.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner requires Independent Custody Visitors to commit to carry out a minimum of six visits per annum. Our scheme members are required to complete police vetting and to attend panel meetings and training sessions as required.

The Humberside Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Humberside Scheme covers operational custody suites within the Humberside Force Area which consists of Hull and Grimsby main suites. Further suites (Scunthorpe/Priory Road) remain closed but may be opened for contingency purposes such as overflow or where the main suites are closed for maintenance and therefore may require visits on such occasions.

CONTACT DETAILS

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