



Independent Custody Visiting Scheme for Cheshire

Annual Report 2022/23

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This Annual Report captures details of the work of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme within Cheshire from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and includes information in relation to volunteers, custody facilities and outcomes from the visits undertaken throughout the year.

Background

In 1981, Lord Scarman commissioned an inquiry into the Brixton and Toxteth riots and recommended that, in order to promote public confidence in policing, a system should be developed whereby policing activity should be made more publicly accessible, easily scrutinised and subject to greater questioning and comment. As a result, the concept of Custody Visiting (or Lay Visiting as it was then known) was recommended. Home Office Ministers approved the provision of custody visiting on a voluntary basis on the part of Police Authorities, which subsequently became a statutory requirement when the Police Reform Act 2002 came into effect. In 2012, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act transferred the responsibility to Police and Crime Commissioners.



Independent Custody Visiting is therefore a statutory requirement of Police and Crime Commissioners of which the purpose is to provide independent oversight of the detention of people in police custody. The aim of this is to provide the public with confidence that the police treat people lawfully and with respect whilst in custody.

Police and Crime Commissioners are responsible for maintaining and administering an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in their area, although the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) monitors the operation of the Scheme on behalf of the Commissioner. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local community who volunteer to check on the welfare of people detained in police custody.

ICVs visit custody suites unannounced and will report directly to the OPCC detailing any issues that arise from a visit or requiring further action. Recommendations made by ICVs lead to improvements for the welfare and dignity of detainees. Any issues requiring immediate action are escalated to the Custody Sergeant at the time of the visit. Consequently, ICVs play a valuable role in maintaining public confidence in policing.

Introduction to Police Custody in Cheshire

Cheshire Constabulary has three operational custody suites:

- Eastern Area Panel - Custody Suite in Middlewich
- Northern Area Panel - Custody Suite in Runcorn
- Western Area Panel - Custody Suite in Blacon.

All three custody suites operate 24/7. On average there are 1,700 detainees per month across all three suites however, due to its central locality Middlewich custody suite is the busiest. Modernisation and improvements to the estate mean all three custody suites are

due for refurbishment in the next 12 months, including updating CCTV provision and the charge desk area.

Overall numbers – 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023	
Custody Suite	Annual throughput
Middlewich	8,299
Runcorn	8,040
Blacon	5,104
Total	21,443

Cheshire ICV Scheme

As of 31 March 2023, there were 20 active ICVs participating in the scheme across the county. Members of the ICV scheme are split into three panel groups, each one serving one of the custody suites. ICVs visit custody suites unannounced and at any time or day of the week and are completely independent from the Constabulary.

Throughout 2022/23, the number of ICVs within Cheshire scheme has increased due to a successful recruitment campaign. Existing ICVs proactively supported the recruitment of new panel members and formed part of the ICV recruitment steering group.

All new ICVs who joined the scheme took part in the interactive induction training which has offered them practical opportunities to learn more to develop their role. This was in addition to the induction programme where all new volunteers are guided by their experienced colleagues who act as mentors. In the probation period and beyond, they were provided with all necessary support, advice and training which includes involvement with the ICV scheme Coordinator.

Cheshire's experienced volunteers have also been involved in activities addressing their learning & development needs and they had opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills that would support them in fulfilment of their role. All ICVs had an opportunity to participate in annual training which took place in May 2022 and explored:

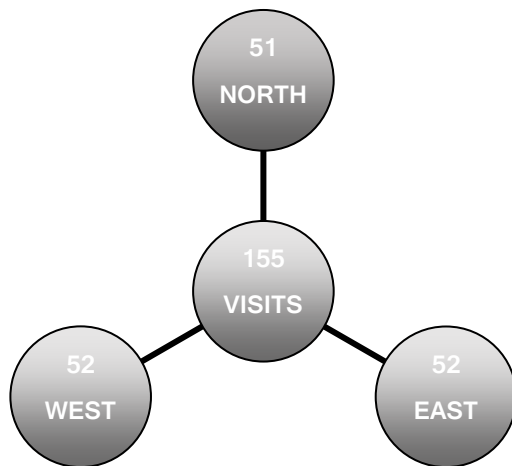
- Project Nova (supporting veterans who have been arrested or are at risk of arrest).
- Role of Appropriate Adults
- Young People in Custody
- Mental Health & Wellbeing in Custody.

Furthermore, ICVs attended panel meetings on a quarterly basis. At each panel meeting the Chief Inspector responsible for Custody was present to provide updates and to address any issues brought to their attention by ICVs.



ICV Visiting Data

The below data captures details of the work of the ICV scheme within Cheshire from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and includes information in relation to volunteers, custody facilities and outcomes from the visits undertaken throughout the year.



Comparison of the number of custody visits conducted last year with number of custody visits in the previous years (2021/22 = 155 visits; 2019/20 = 145 visits¹) indicates that similar number of visits is conducted each year which shows consistency and reassurance that visits take place regularly and that each custody suite in Cheshire is visited once per week (as per rota and Scheme Guidance).

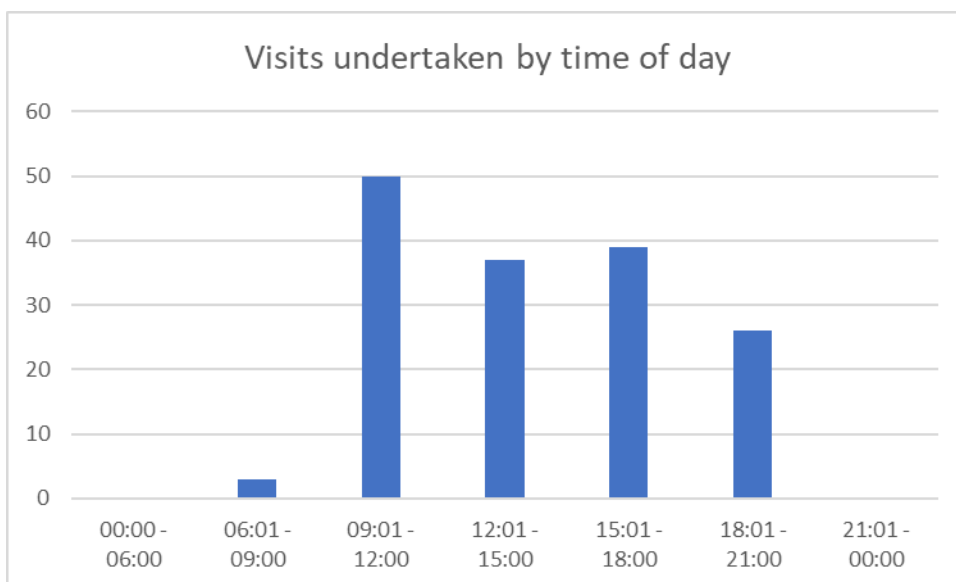
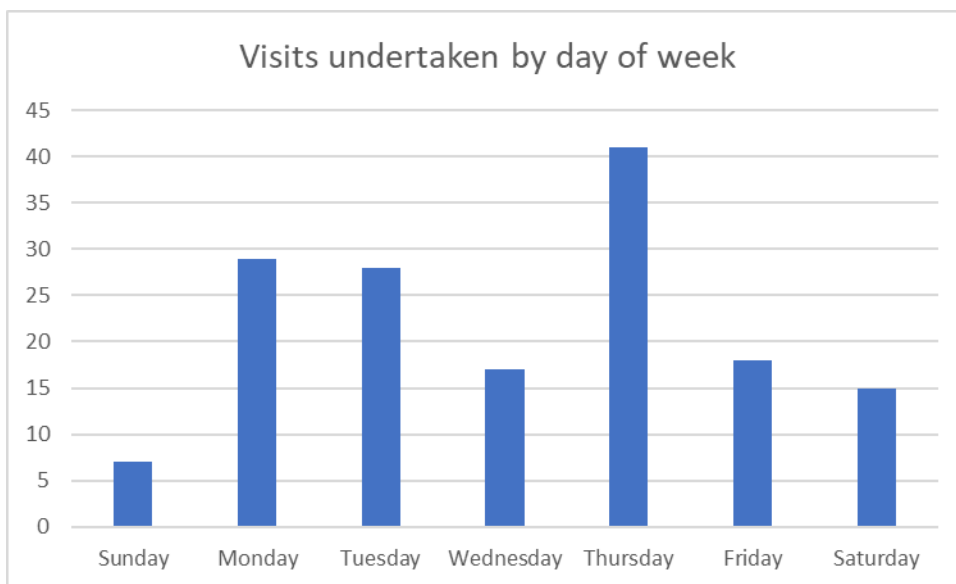
Breakdown of visits					
Custody Suite	Detained Persons (DPs) in custody at time of ICV visit	Number of DPs selected to be seen	Number of DPs observed [asleep]	Total number of DPs visited	% of DPs accepting ICV visit
Runcorn	552	404	72	361	87%
Blacon	399	347	12	283	81%
Middlewich	650	435	31	401	92%
Total	1,601	335	115	1,045	87%

Detainees may not receive a visit due to being interviewed, asleep, intoxicated or on advice given by custody staff due to safety reasons. In addition, detainees may also decline a visit and 51 detainees exercised this right throughout 2022/23 which is in line with the previous years (2021/22 = 49).

The OPCC analyses data from visits to ensure that the ICV Scheme remains effective and that visits are completed throughout the week as well as at various times of the day.

¹ No data available for the period 2020/21 during which visits were impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and any statistical information would not be comparable with past and future years.

The graphs below indicate at what day of the week and time of the day visits were completed throughout 2022/2023.



ICV Scheme Findings

ICVs act as a critical friend and they are crucial when it comes to implementation of changes for detainees, custody staff and wider communities. ICVs during their visits, through proactive engagement with detainees, custody staff and custody facility will aim to establish whether detainees' welfare needs are met and whether those detained in custody are treated appropriately. They also ensure that PACE and the Codes of Practice are being complied with. Each ICV custody visit will result in production of a report form and findings from the visit will be fed back to the OPCC. Cheshire Constabulary will be informed of any findings that would be concerning but also, which is just as important, of any positive feedback and observations.

In most cases issues brought to the attention of ICVs are resolved during the custody visit, directly with the custody staff, or immediately afterwards. Such issues will range from requests for additional drink or/and food, additional blankets to detainee needing medication, wishing to contact family members and/or solicitor. It is vital to note that ICVs in their reports and verbal feedback provide PCC with reassurance that Cheshire Constabulary provides detainees with high standards of care and they are treated with respect and dignity. Moreover, ICVs have a professional, cooperative relationship with their police colleagues, and the scheme works well because custody staff value the role and the insight and transparency it provides.

Throughout 2022/23 on 17 occasions ICVs reported problematic issues with regards to custody facilities and equipment, such as: exercise yard being out of use, shortage of blankets, CCTV not working properly, public entrance keypad not working, malfunction of hatch in the cell door. These observations that are not resolved immediately, are monitored by the OPCC and ICVs. The majority of estate issues listed above have been resolved and currently OPCC is monitoring progress on the outstanding actions regarding facilities.

Achievements and Notable Practice

- Experienced ICVs supported recruitment of new volunteers throughout all stages of the process and were proactive during the induction of new colleagues.
- Working group on the implementation of e-reporting forms has been created. ICVs together with the Scheme Coordinator visited GMP to shadow a visit and observe use of e-forms in practice. This is anticipated to Go Live in autumn 2023.
- ICVs are members of the Constabulary's Strategic Custody Group. This gives further reassurance to ICVs that their concerns are being heard and actioned.
- An ICV regularly delivers an input to the new custody staff during their induction training. This is invaluable for maintaining good working relationships between ICVs and Custody Team.

Looking Forward to 2023/24

Plans for the forthcoming year will include:

- Further work on the implementation of e-report forms.
- An active role in the organisation and participation in the Regional Conference which brings together all ICV schemes from North-West and North Wales.
- Improving on publicity and visibility of the ICV scheme by raising awareness of the ICV role.

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)

Cheshire PCC is a member of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA). ICVA is a Home Office funded organisation that operates to promote and support the effective provision of custody visiting nationally. As a national resource for custody visiting, ICVA works closely with government and criminal justice organisations to:



- raise public awareness on the rights, entitlements, health and wellbeing of people held in police custody;
- advise on best practice for independent custody visiting schemes nationally; and
- provide training, publicity and support to PCCs, their offices and ICVs.

For additional information in relation to custody visiting nationally, please visit the Independent Custody Visiting Association website www.icva.org.uk

If You Would Like to Know More...

For further information in relation to the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme or if you are interested in becoming ICV please contact:

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Cheshire Constabulary Management Response:

The Independent Custody Visitor Scheme (ICV) continues to provide a key role in ensuring the highest standards of safety within the Constabulary's Custody Suites. The team of 20 Volunteers who currently make up the ICV scheme in Cheshire have continued to support by undertaking unannounced visits at each of the Custody Suites to observe and report on the care and treatment of Detained Persons. The numbers of arrests in Cheshire have continued to increase during 2023 with the highest numbers recorded passing through our Custody suites since 2017, with figures approaching 22,250 for 2023. It is more important than ever we keep focus on the highest standards of service delivery and last year the ICVs assisted with checking on the welfare of 1,045 people detained in custody.

The regular three-monthly meetings with the head of Custody continue to provide an effective and constructive forum for dialogue to give confidence around the areas highlighted by the ICVs as well as providing opportunity to update the ICVs on changes within the Custody business. The ICVs are also represented at the Monthly Custody Performance and Custody Cohesion Meetings providing an independent perspective on the Constabulary's Service delivery. In 2023 the Constabulary made custody a standalone department, separating it from Criminal Justice to give greater scrutiny and focus over this critical area of business and a Gold Group chaired by ACC Kelly is in place to ensure the delivery of custody goes from strength to strength.

Additional focus and scrutiny is rightly in place around the detention of young people and those who are vulnerable with multi-agency support as well as the additional scrutiny provided by the ICV scheme. The Constabulary has a positive and constructive relationship with the ICVs whose time and commitment is invaluable in providing much needed public scrutiny to our work. Their continued support is quite rightly recognised and welcomed by the Constabulary.