

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Annual Report 2019/20



Introduction by Tim Passmore, Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk

This report provides an overview of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Suffolk and details what the custody visitors have been doing between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from our local community who visit the two Police Investigation Centres (PICs) in the county to check on the welfare of detained persons and the conditions in which they are held. They help me to fulfil my responsibility to ensure that policing in Suffolk is carried out fairly, in accordance with relevant legislation and Home Office guidance, and with respect for the human rights of all those coming into contact with the police.

I am very grateful to the ICVs in Suffolk for their dedication and commitment in undertaking this important role. I would also thank the Constabulary for their co-operation and facilitating the successful operation of the Scheme. ICVs continue to give me reassurance that, in Suffolk, the treatment of detained persons is fair and in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (referred to as PACE) and the Safer Detention Guidelines.



Comment from Steve Jupp, Chief Constable

One of the most significant actions my officers can take is to deprive someone of their liberty. Their treatment within one of our PICs is, quite rightly, subject of scrutiny by the ICVs. Suffolk Constabulary prides itself on how we interact with our communities. Transparency surrounding such a sensitive part of our business is welcomed, it helps ensure that we are fully aware of our levels of service and contributes to identifying ways in which we can continue to improve.



1 Organisation of the Scheme in Suffolk

As at 31 March 2020, there were 16 ICVs participating in the Scheme across the county, 9 on the Bury St Edmunds Panel and 7 on the Martlesham Panel.

The following table provides a summary of the custody visitors by gender, age and ethnicity.

Suffolk ICVs		Bury St Edmunds	Martlesham	Total
Gender	Male	1	3	4
	Female	8	4	12
Age	18-29	0	1	1
	30-39	1	0	1
	40-49	2	0	2
	50-59	1	0	1
	60-69	2	2	4
	70+	3	4	7
Ethnicity	White British	15	Asian - Indian	1

During the period 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020 three volunteers were recruited and four volunteers left the Scheme.

2 Details of Visits

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, a total of 95 visits were made by ICVs to the Police Investigation Centres (PICs). 698 persons were detained in custody at the time visits were conducted and 233 of the detainees were visited (the overall throughput for the PICs located in Suffolk for the year was 9,590). Whilst offered a visit, there is no obligation for a detained person to speak with ICVs. More detail in respect of visits to the Bury St Edmunds and Martlesham Centres is provided below:

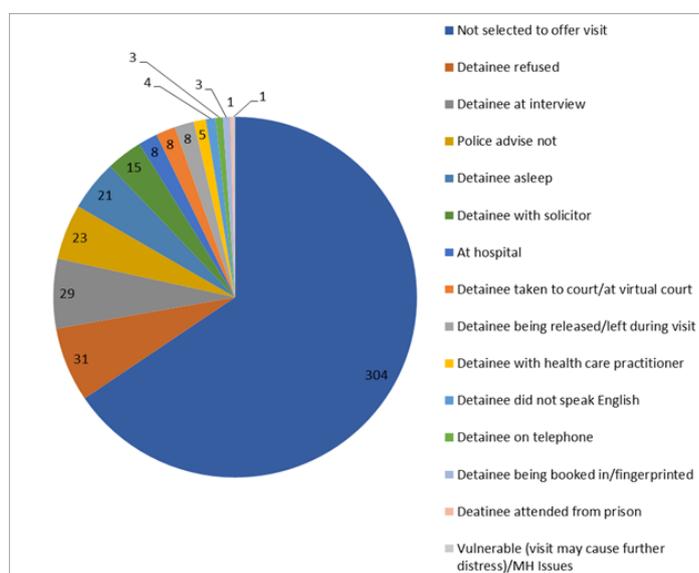
PIC visited	No. of Visits	No. of detainees held	No. of detainees available	No. of detainees visited	% of detainees visited (of those available)	No. of detainees not visited*
Bury St Edmunds	47	338	140	111	79%	226
Martlesham	48	360	149	122	81%	238
Total	95	698	289	233	80%	464

**Note: There are a number of reasons why detained persons are not visited. For example, the police may advise against it for health and safety reasons. The category 'not visited' is broken down in the following pie chart showing the reasons detained persons were not visited during the period. 65% of the detainees not seen were 'not selected by ICVs' themselves as they have focused their time in custody on more in-depth interviews with fewer detainees and scrutiny of their custody records, rather than brief interviews with all detainees held at the time of the visit.*

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the decision was taken to suspend visiting on 17 March 2020 for the health and safety of the volunteers, detainees and custody staff. Both panels therefore completed their final visits for this period on 12 March 2020.

Since visiting was suspended on 17 March 2020 alternative monitoring measures have been put in place. The Joint Chief Inspector for Custody has been providing reports to the OPCC on a two-weekly basis throughout April, May and June on the operation of police custody. From 28 April 2020 the ICV Panel Co-ordinators have been telephoning the PIC Inspectors on a weekly basis and reporting back on what is happening at the centre and the present position with the detainees held. The OPCC is continually reviewing this practice to consider when it might be appropriate and safe enough for the volunteers to return to physical visits.

Breakdown of reasons detainees not visited – Total 464 not seen:



Breakdown of visit days and times:

Monday	19		
Tuesday	20	0700 - 1000	17
Wednesday	12	1000 - 1300	19
Thursday	18	1300 - 1600	16
Friday	10	1600 - 1900	24
Saturday	9	1900 - 2200	19
Sunday	10	2200 - 0700	3

ICVs are encouraged to vary the times and days of their visits as much as possible.

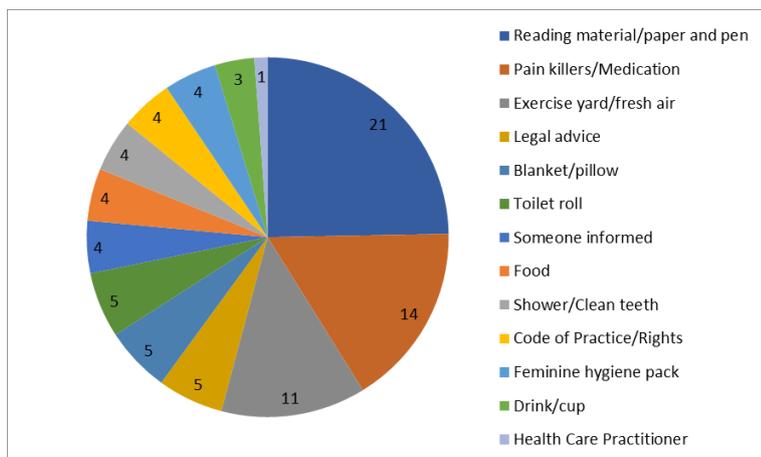
3 Findings of Independent Custody Visitors During 2019/20

For each of the 95 visits carried out throughout the year a report was provided to the OPCC by the ICVs detailing what they had observed and discussed with detainees and custody staff at the time of the visit. ICVs report on the detainees' rights and entitlements, as well as the conditions of the facilities.

ICVs comment on a broad range of matters which are followed up by the OPCC ICV Scheme Co-ordinator with the relevant Police Investigation Centre (PIC) Inspector. The Inspectors have been very helpful and willing to provide information or clarification when requested. ICVs have quarterly panel meetings whereby they meet with the local Police Inspector to discuss their reports for that period and the Constabulary responses to any queries they raised, alongside any necessary action taken by the Constabulary to address those points. This process enables the volunteers to share their experiences with fellow volunteers and feel assured that their reports are considered and progressed. On a monthly basis the ICV visiting statistics and a summary of their findings are also shared with the Joint Chief Inspector for Custody so that any more significant or strategic issues can be highlighted and addressed.

Throughout the year ICVs have regularly commented on the professionalism of staff in dealing with detainees and ICVs. There have also been a number of very positive comments, particularly about the care of vulnerable detainees, young people and detainees in custody for the first time. Where ICVs have noted any concerns, we are satisfied that the Constabulary has addressed these appropriately. By way of some examples; where it was noted that a foreign embassy had not been notified that a detainee was held despite a bilateral agreement for a mandatory notification of Consular officials being in place, this was followed up. When concerns were raised by a detainee about the care of a family member these were passed on to custody staff, followed up and the detainee updated.

As a result of their conversations with detainees the following matters were raised with custody staff and subsequently dealt with:



4 Developments During 2019/20

The most significant developments in custody in 2019/20 were:

Changes to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Codes C and H

The changes PACE Codes C and H (21 August 2019) stipulated that: female detainees should be asked about their requirements for menstrual products whilst in custody and products provided accordingly; all detainees should be offered the opportunity to speak in private with a member of custody staff regarding their personal needs relating to health; hygiene and welfare, access to toilet and washing facilities must take account of the detainee's dignity; strip searches and intimate searches of detainees must be conducted with proper regard to their dignity and the needs of transgender individuals must not be overlooked in respect of these matters.

Constabulary guidance was in place, changes to the Athena IT system made and Rights and Entitlements documents updated in readiness for these changes. ICVs have been monitoring how these changes have been implemented and reporting back on their findings which have been positive. We have worked closely with the Constabulary to ensure that the ICVs are able to access that information that they need to make these checks.

Dignity, Decency and Diversion

In Summer 2019 the Head of Custody introduced a 'Dignity, Decency and Diversion' Project which was piloted in Great Yarmouth, before being extended to Martlesham at the end of 2019 and rolled out to all PICs across Norfolk and Suffolk in early 2020. This focused on enhancing detainee dignity and in particular seeking ways to reduce the number of occasions detainees were required to wear 'rip-proof' clothing. This was subject to the risk assessment process and more frequent observations applied as necessary to mitigate the risk. Custody staff were encouraged to consider more carefully allowing detainees to retain some of their personal effects as part of the risk assessment, moving away from automatically removing items such as ear rings and jewellery. Both Constabularies noted positive outcomes from this work in terms of detainee and staff interactions. ICVs continue to report on their observations relating to these changes.

Independent Strip Search Scrutiny

In June 2018 ICVs from Suffolk and Norfolk were invited to join an Independent Strip Search Scrutiny Panel to review the Constabularies' recording of Strip and Search powers and consider any disproportionality issues. Quarterly meetings were held between October 2018 and January 2020. There have been significant improvements in the quality of the information over the period. Meetings will now take place on a six-monthly basis and the Joint Chief Inspector for Custody is working on a proposal relating to children and young people in custody.

5 Looking Ahead

We are working with the Constabulary and ICVs to continue our monitoring arrangements through the Covid-19 pandemic and to consider how and when the volunteers might return to visiting the centres in the safest possible way for all parties. We will also work with the Constabulary to consider if we can assist with its recovery and renewal plans, reflecting on the Covid-19 period, positive outcomes and lessons learnt.

Due to the nature of the role, recruitment is ongoing as required and we recognise the need to recruit some additional volunteers in the 2020/21 period. We will try to improve the diversity of the panels to better reflect the community of Suffolk through that recruitment process. Continuous training is also essential so we will continue to utilise the Independent Custody Visiting Association training materials as well as provide local training inputs.

We will continue to work closely with the Norfolk OPCC as we have a joint custody function and also work closely with our regional counterparts to share best practice and plans.

6 Conclusion

Custody Visiting continues to be essential in providing independent scrutiny of the treatment of detained persons and the conditions in which they are held. As well as the mutual level of assurance it offers, the Scheme helps to build partnerships between the police and the communities they serve, and raise public confidence generally.

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor or would like more information please contact: The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk, Police Headquarters, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich IP5 3QS
Telephone: (01473) 782774 or e-mail: spcc@suffolk.pnn.police.uk

For more information on the role of ICVs and that of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk visit: www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk.

For more information regarding the role of the Independent Custody Visiting Association visit www.icva.org.uk and for more information on the National Preventative Mechanism visit www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk.

If you require the information in the Annual Report in any other format, please contact us.