



KIM MCGUINNESS  
NORTHUMBRIA  
**POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER**

**violence  
reduction  
unit**

# Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

## Annual Report

1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020



Police & Crime Commissioner for Northumbria

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## 1. Introduction

The Police & Crime Commissioner for Northumbria has a duty to implement and co-ordinate an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. The primary purpose of the scheme is to provide independent scrutiny of Northumbria Police to ensure that detainees in custody are being treated fairly and in accordance with Code C of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). The full version of the Act can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-codes-of-practice>.

The PCC has a dedicated ICV Scheme Manager who is responsible for organising and overseeing the delivery of custody visiting in Northumbria. Arrangements are kept under review and are revised as necessary and in accordance with any changes made to the Code of Practice and National Standards. Volunteers are supported in their role through contact with the office and regular meetings and training.

The scheme is reviewed on a four-yearly basis, and is written in conjunction with the Independent Visiting Association National Standards on Independent Custody Visiting and the Home Office's Code of Practice on Independent Custody Visiting.

## 2. The Northumbria Independent Visiting Scheme and Meet Our Visitors

The Northumbria scheme currently has 15 Independent Custody Visitors covering the seven designated police custody suites in the three Area Commands: Forth Banks (Newcastle), Middle Engine Lane (North Tyneside), Southwick (Sunderland), South Shields (South Tyneside), Etal Lane (Newcastle), Bedlington (Northumberland) and Berwick (Northumberland). The number of cells in each Custody Centre is provided in the table below;

<b>Custody Centre</b>	<b>No. of cells</b>
<b>Forth Banks</b>	50
<b>Middle Engine Lane</b>	40
<b>Southwick</b>	28
<b>South Shields</b>	12
<b>Etal Lane</b>	22
<b>Bedlington</b>	20
<b>Berwick</b>	6

Custody demand is mainly focused on the larger three suites which are Forth Banks, Middle Engine Lane and Southwick. The remaining suites are classed as resilience suites and are opened at peak times of demand or when other custody suites are unavailable eg, building repairs.



There are currently four panels, each with a Co-ordinator, appointed by the panel members. The Co-ordinators are responsible for the day to day arrangements of their panel including setting the rota of visits and organising panel meetings. The Co-ordinators also meet quarterly with the Scheme Manager and Northumbria Police staff. The panel carry out weekly visits in the three main custody suites which can range from 1 to 3 hours depending on the number of detainees in custody. The Panel meetings are held after the Panel Co-ordinators meetings, ensuring panel members are kept up to date on developments on custody visits and addressing any concerns as well as sharing good practice amongst the visitors.

## 2.1 Meet Our Visitors

### Tracy Scrivener



I first got interested in custody visiting when a work colleague was telling me what she did in her spare time and she explained what the visiting involved etc. I had previously been a Youth Leader with the Girls Brigade and i was looking for some form of volunteering work to undertake in my spare time. Due to working full time I could not commit to any volunteer work that had to be carried out on a specific time and on a specific date and custody visiting can be arranged around my schedule.

I feel that our visits help the detainees see that people are concerned with how people who have been arrested are being treated & there are regulations as to how they are dealt with, treated and that people do care. Sometimes talking with us just breaks up the monotony for the detainee which is sometimes all they need to feel okay and less anxious in some cases. A friendly face and someone to talk to is sometimes all that is needed to calm a person down and as we do not wear a uniform we are less intimidating for people who are in custody for the first time and do not know what will happen to them.

From the officers point of view, I believe we are there to reassure them that they are doing their job as they should and there are no areas of concern. If we do need to bring up an issue then we do it in a friendly way, explain the issue and suggest how it can be resolved. We are not there to catch anybody out or make the officers lives harder, we are there to assist them and show that detainees are being treated correctly.

## 2.2 The Custody Visiting Process

To read more about the Custody Visiting process this can be found [here](#)

ICVs continue to check the following areas:

- Cells and toilets have been maintained
- CCTV is present and working
- Reasonable temperatures are maintained within the cells and suites
- Any medical attention or medication required has been provided
- Any visible injuries have been explained
- Female detainees hygiene concerns are addressed
- Washing facilities and access to fresh clothing have 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

Issues of immediate concern are raised with the Custody Sergeant. Unresolved issues or those requiring a response from the PCC are brought to the attention of the Scheme Manager. All reports completed by ICVs are assessed by the Scheme Manager with a response to each issue being provided by Northumbria Police, these update reports are then added to the PCC website on a monthly basis. Feedback is given to ICVs on comments raised following discussion with the Custody Inspector, or in more serious instances following discussion with the Chief Inspector, the force's lead for custody.

On a quarterly basis a meeting is held between the Scheme Manager, Panel co-ordinators and the Head of Custody for Northumbria Police. This is an opportunity for issues to be directly raised by Co-ordinators with the senior officer in charge of custody and also receive relevant updates in relation to national developments effecting their role. An annual

training seminar is also arranged for all visitors on an annual basis where any National changes effecting the visiting process can be communicated to volunteers.

The annual training seminar in 2020 was cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic however training materials have been added to the dedicated ICV page on the OPCC website which has allowed ICVs to continue learning and keeping up to date with custody related matters.

### 3. Visiting Statistics

125 visits to custody took place and 451 interviews were held in the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. The table below shows the number of visits, the total number of detainees in custody, and the amount of detainees visited during this time in each of the custody suites.

	Forth Banks	Middle Engine Lane	Southwick	Millbank – Resilience Suite	Etal Lane – Resilience Suite	Berwick – Resilience Suite	Bedlington – Resilience Suite	Total
<b>Number of visits</b>	35	45	32	4	1	6	2	125
<b>Total in custody</b>	523	504	304	22	0	0	0	1,331
<b>Detainees visited</b>	168	170	104	9	0	0	0	451

#### Detainee figures 2019/2020

Custody Centre	Number of Detainees
Forth Banks	<b>13375</b>
Middle Engine Lane	<b>8006</b>
Southwick	<b>7333</b>
Millbank (Resilience)	<b>441</b>
Etal Lane (Resilience)	<b>35</b>
Berwick (Resilience)	<b>8</b>
Bedlington (Resilience)	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29198</b>

A small number of detainees were unable to be interviewed for a variety of issues such as the detainee attending court, being asleep, in interview at hospital or receiving medical treatment. In some cases a recommendation from the custody staff that an individual was not safe to interview led to visual observation only being made.

133 detainees refused an interview. This is a decrease on the 147 refused visits in 2018/19.

#### **4. Issues Arising from Visits**

Most of the issues raised by ICVs are dealt with promptly at the time of the visit. By their nature, they tend to be low level issues relating to a detainee's comfort and general level of satisfaction. Any issues of a more significant nature and which relate to a detainee's rights or entitlements would result in an ICV consulting the custody record (where permission is granted).

Any issues which cannot be rectified at the time of the visit are highlighted on the visit report form and escalated by the Scheme Manager to the Head of Custody. This is done immediately upon receipt of the form and the matter is also raised at the Panel Co-ordinators meeting.

Feedback on all comments is made by the Scheme Manager to the ICV on an individual basis, and where the issue relates to other custody centres, as an email to all.

The Commissioner attends a quarterly Scrutiny meeting with the Chief Constable and Senior Officer Team where she is presented with information covering the full breadth of custody within the force. This also gives her the opportunity to raise any issues identified by both ICVs and ensure that recommendations have been addressed.

A report of issues raised by ICVs is produced on a monthly basis with the concerns raised and response by Northumbria Police included. These can be found by accessing the link [here](#)

#### **5. Overview of 2019/20**

ICVs in Northumbria began their year assisting the Independent Custody Visitor Association in a pilot scheme to monitor the care and support given to female detainees in custody in relation to menstrual care and dignity. The monitoring and information supplied by the Northumbria ICV scheme allowed ICVA to lobby government to ensure that females detained were properly cared for and treated with dignity. Parliament formally agreed changes to PACE which was made law and ICVs should be congratulated for their part in these much welcomed changes.

In addition, Northumbria ICVs have also assisted ICVA in providing information regarding the types of clothing provided to detainees in custody.

ICVs undertaking visits throughout the year highlighted on occasion low staffing levels mainly at peak times or due to staff absences. Panel co-ordinators were regularly briefed on the recruitment of new custody staff and also assisted in the training of these staff during their appointment. This ensured that staff were familiarised with the attendance of ICVs in custody and their important role in ensuring the care and dignity of detainees.

An unannounced inspection of Northumbria Police Custody took place in late 2019 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. The report highlighted many positive areas however there were several recommendations and areas for improvement made by Inspectors. Northumbria Police developed an action plan to rectify any issues identified and

the Commissioner felt that ICVs were best placed to ensure that these areas were being addressed during their visits to suites and detainees.

At the start of 2020 the country was faced with the Covid 19 pandemic which resulted in visiting being suspended to protect ICVs. To ensure that monitoring and oversight of custody and detainees was undertaken, custody record checks were carried out by volunteers utilising a questionnaire provided by the Independent Custody Visitor Association. These checks will continue until it is safe to return to physical visits.

Due to the pandemic the annual training seminar was cancelled, this was to provide ICVs with training on areas such as detainee dignity, risk assessments and vulnerability. To assist ICVs in this difficult time, training materials have been added to the dedicated Independent Custody Visitor page on the Police and Crime Commissioner website.

## **6. Further Information and Contact Details**

### **Dean Lowery**

ICV Scheme Manager

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The OPCC website: <https://www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk>

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