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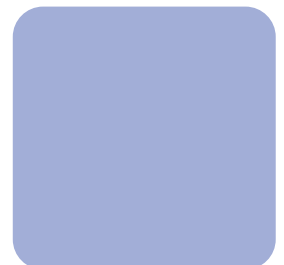
**MERSEYSIDE
POLICE
AUTHORITY**

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

Annual Report 2009/10



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Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

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As Chairman of Merseyside Police Authority, I would like to welcome you to our Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Annual Report 2009/10. This report gives you an overview of the scheme and how it has progressed over the past year.

The Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme exists to make sure people held in police custody are being treated fairly. We have over 50 Independent Custody Visitors; men and women from various backgrounds who visit Merseyside's 8 custody suites at varying times of the day and night and report back to Authority members on the conditions in which detainees are held. Any issues highlighted by the ICVs can then be looked at in more detail by members. ICVs do this on a purely voluntary basis.



The role of an ICV is an extremely important one and we as an authority are extremely grateful to the dedicated team of volunteers who take time out of their busy lives to ensure standards within custody suites are being upheld.

Cllr Bill Weightman, Chairman of Merseyside Police Authority

Custody Visiting is 25 years old this year. That's 25 years of ICVs offering an independent, fair-minded service, reporting on what we find during visits to custody suites and giving local communities confidence in how police treat those held in custody.



We've come a long way in the last quarter of a century, and we now have a team of over 50 fully trained visitors who have an understanding of important issues, such as equality and diversity. These visitors now have the opportunity to introduce themselves to detainees, rather than being introduced by custody staff, which is incredibly important in striking up a rapport with a detainee. We also have messages in a range of languages at our finger tips, so we're able to communicate with those who don't speak English as their first language. We rely on the co-operation and assistance of custody staff to carry out our role and this is something we are extremely grateful for.

As for the future, the Police Authority is in the process of making changes for the better, including to the way ICVs report issues. ICVs on Merseyside are being given a say in how these changes are being implemented to give us the best possible scheme for the years ahead.

Reverend Peter Beaman MBE, Independent Custody Visitor Advisor

Developments during 2009/10

2010 sees the 25th anniversary of Independent Custody Visiting, formerly known as Lay Visiting. The scheme was established following the recommendations of Lord Scarman in 1981. The Merseyside Custody Visiting Scheme began in April 1984 with 20 members of the then Police Committee being trained as visitors. Later that year, members of the public were invited to apply to become members of a volunteer team appointed by the Police Authority. The Authority now has 55 Independent Custody Visitors who visit the 8 custody suites across Merseyside on a regular basis.



During the past year, a comprehensive review of the ICV scheme has been conducted to ensure the scheme is as effective as possible. Existing visitors were asked for their feedback on where they felt improvements could be made and training needs were identified. This resulted in specific training sessions covering topics such as diversity issues and the correct way to fill in a report form.

Visiting statistics for 2009/10

Between 1st July 2009 and 30th June 2010, a total of 452 visits were made to the custody suites across Merseyside. The table below shows how the visits were broken down.

Custody Suite	Total number of visits
St Anne Street	102
Wavertree	41
Belle Vale	42
Copy Lane	37
Southport	51
St Helens	47
Kirkby	52
Wirral	80



How the scheme works

Volunteers are recruited from the Merseyside community to visit custody suites at various times of the day and night to check on the welfare of the people being held in police custody. Visits are always done in pairs and are random and unannounced. Visitors observe, comment on and report back on the conditions in which people are held, providing protection to detainees and the police and offering reassurance to the public.

Merseyside has 8 custody suites;

- St Anne Street
- Wavertree
- Belle Vale
- Copy Lane
- Southport
- St Helens
- Kirkby
- Wirral

Each custody suite has its own team of visitors with an Area Co-ordinator who organises the monthly visiting rota.

On arrival at the station, Custody Visitors produce their identity cards and are taken to the custody suite, where they are escorted

around the suite by a member of custody staff. ICVs introduce themselves to detainees and talk to them about their treatment. Detainees can refuse to speak to Custody Visitors.

A visit report form is completed by the ICVs at the end of each visit and the feedback is reported to the Authority's Community Partnership Committee.

Visitors meet regularly throughout the year to discuss any areas of concern, share advice and receive training.

Issues reported from custody visits

Independent Custody Visitors report a range of different issues to the Authority's Community Partnership Committee. Some issues can be dealt with at the time of the visit such as requests for blankets, refreshments and medical attention, but there are also issues that need further inspection, such as the treatment of a vulnerable person or a perceived breach in protocol. Authority members can request formal responses from Chief Officers if an area of concern is raised within a report. The reports produced by the ICVs are essential in helping members to scrutinise the way the custody suites operate.

Can anyone be a Custody Visitor?

Yes. Custody Visitors come from all sections of the community to ensure they bring different perspectives and life experiences to the scheme. There are no qualifications needed but applicants must;

- Be over 18 years.
- Live or work in Merseyside.
- Have good communication skills.
- Have the time and flexibility to carry out the role of Custody Visitor.
- Be independent, impartial and work in a non-discriminatory way.
- Be able to maintain confidentiality.
- ICVs cannot be serving Magistrates, police officers, special police officers, police staff, police authority members or staff.

Applicants will need a criminal records check but having a criminal record or unspent convictions may not stop you from being a Custody Visitor.



How do current ICVs view the scheme?

I was appointed as a (then) Lay Visitor of the Merseyside Police Authority in 1997. Custody Visiting promised to give me experiences outside my usual day-to-day life, and perhaps to be able to help and support some people who find themselves in a strange and unfamiliar situation. I have also been able to meet a variety of people from other walks of life, but all with a shared interest.

Custody Visiting continues to be an interesting and valuable voluntary activity, which provides an opportunity to make a contribution to society.

Nick Wootton, Wirral Custody Visitor

I have always had an interest in the Criminal Justice System, and this offered me the opportunity to both get involved, and to learn more about how the police detain, and look after people who they require assistance from, in the course of a criminal investigation.

From the senior staff of Merseyside Police Authority through to the local leaders of the Visitors, the scheme has offered me the opportunity to give something back into my local community. Carrying out the duties of an ICV is not only important to the detainees within the criminal system, but important to the local community in knowing that should anyone be detained by Merseyside Police, they will be looked after in a safe and caring environment, while investigations take place.

I would wholly recommend that any person with an interest in looking to help and develop bonds between the police and the local community joins the scheme.

Mike Ambery, Kirkby Custody Visitor

I had been heavily involved in volunteering for the Duke of Edinburgh Award before coming to Liverpool and had been looking for a different opportunity when invited to apply to become an ICV. At the time I was working with young people in the city and it was clear that their view of the police was not positive and all had a story to tell including treatment in custody. I felt volunteering to be an ICV would give me the opportunity to challenge some views with first hand experience. I was also very conscious that I was within the likely demographic of a detainee and felt this may be of benefit when visiting those in detention. The role is incredibly interesting and I feel that it is a worthwhile scheme.

A St Anne Street Custody Visitor

I believe that people become ICVs for many different reasons; personally my initial thought when I applied was that it looked interesting, perhaps a little scary but without doubt a very worthy cause. I had been doing a similar thing for a couple of years for the prisoner custody escort service PECS. Could I do both and hold down a full time job, I didn't know but decided to give it a go. My job involves doing shiftwork so to be able to do my visits I would need the help of my visiting partner. Nearly six years on I'm still doing both, still finding it interesting and important and still thanking my partners without whom I would not be able to continue.

Stephen McShane, St Helens Custody Visitor

For many years I was curious to know what went on behind the doors of police stations therefore when the opportunity arose to apply for the role as an Independent Custody Visitor I applied and was successful after interview. That was fifteen years ago. I consider it a privilege to be able to turn up at any time unannounced at a custody suite and speak to people who are detained to ensure their rights are being met and that they are being treated in a humane manner. This also benefits the community and the police and gives the public confidence that the police are carrying out their duties in a professional manner and that they are accountable for their actions. I undertake a similar role within the Prison Service and in monitoring people detained in short term holding facilities for the Immigration Independent Monitoring Boards.

Brian Jones, Copy Lane Custody Visitor

Having undertaken several volunteering roles previously, the advert for Independent Custody Visiting attracted my attention as it seemed a worthwhile and interesting scheme. Ten years on, I am still enjoying the challenges each visit brings together with the knowledge that detainees continue to have an opportunity to be seen and informed of their entitlements as a detainee. Even though I work full time I am still able to fit visits in. The ongoing training and support ensures I am kept up to date on important issues, which enables me to fulfil this important role.

Pam Wearing, Wavertree Custody Visitor

To find out more

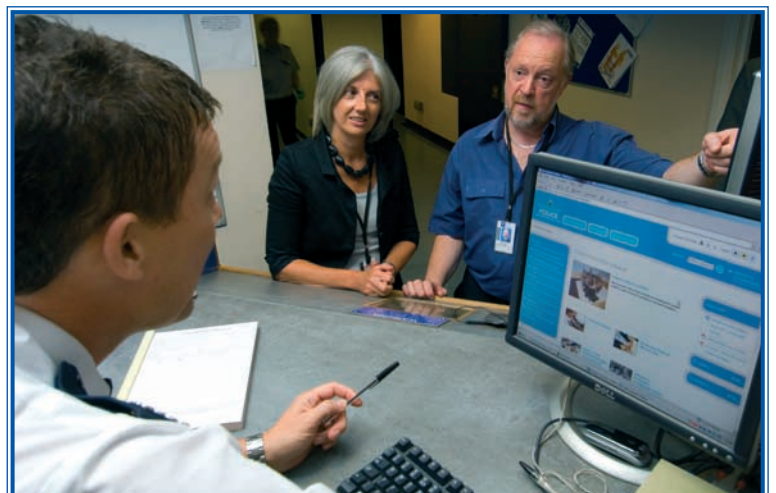
If you are interested in applying to be an Independent Custody Visitor for Merseyside Police Authority, or would like some more information, please contact the Communications Team through one of the methods below.

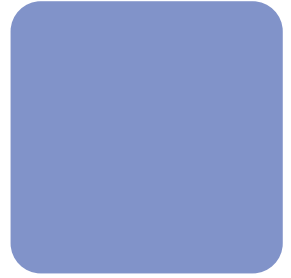
Post — **Merseyside Police Authority, PO Box 101A, West House,
Mercury Court, Tithebarn Street, Liverpool L69 2NU**

Telephone — **0151 236 4748** Fax — **0151 236 4527**

Email — **Communications@merseysidepoliceauthority.gov.uk**

Website — **www.merseysidepoliceauthority.gov.uk**





You can contact Merseyside Police Authority in any of the following ways:

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