



LEICESTERSHIRE
POLICE AUTHORITY

Independent Custody **Visiting Scheme**



Annual Report 2007/08

Introduction

Independent Custody Visiting Schemes exist to provide assurance to local communities that they can have confidence in how the police treat people held in police custody.

The Scheme is run by the Police Authority who are independent from the Constabulary. The Police Authority recruit volunteers to undertake the role, provide training, scrutinise reports from visits and oversee all aspects of administration.

How the Scheme Works

Volunteers are recruited from the local community to visit police stations, in pairs, and speak to individuals who are held in police custody. Visits are unannounced and arranged at a time and date convenient to the custody visitors. Visitors look, listen and observe and report back on their findings. The Scheme plays an important part in maintaining police accountability to the local community.



Custody visitors come from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community. They must be over 18 years of age and have no direct or indirect involvement in the criminal justice system. At the current time Leicestershire Police Authority have 56 volunteers undertaking this role.

Whilst Independent Custody Visiting is the responsibility of the Police Authority the scheme is delivered in consultation with the Chief Constable.

How the Scheme is organised in Leicestershire

In Leicestershire there are four primary custody suites as follows:-

- Euston Street (36 cells)
- Loughborough (8 cells)
- Keyham Lane (17 cells)
- Beaumont Leys (14 cells).



Each site has its own team of visitors with a team leader, known as an Area Co-ordinator, who is responsible for organising a rota and convening quarterly team meetings.

Each pair of visitors is provided with a 'window' of seven days in which to make a visit. It is left to the visitors themselves to arrange the time and date the visit will take place.

On arrival at the police station, custody visitors produce their identity card and are given immediate access to the custody suite. A member of the custody staff will accompany them around the suite and will confirm with each detainee whether or not they wish to speak to the visitors. Visitors speak to detainees in the cell in which they are being held.

Having spoken to detainees visitors also inspect the overall health and safety of the custody suite. At the end of the visit a report form is completed and forwarded to the Police Authority.

The Scheme is overseen by the Authority's Professional Standards Committee.

Visiting Statistics for 2006/07

During the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 a total of 212 custody visits were undertaken as follows:-

Euston Street	52
Keyham Lane	48
Loughborough	56
Beaumont Leys	56

Issues Reported from Custody Visits

No major issues of concern have been reported from visits undertaken throughout the past year. From conversations with detainees custody visitors have recorded the following requests:-

- 75 for blankets
- 73 for refreshments
- 67 to make a phone call
- 37 to see a doctor or to receive medication
- 25 for magazines or reading material.
- 19 to see a solicitor
- 11 for washing facilities
- 7 for exercise

All requests were reported to the Custody Sergeant with the majority being dealt with at the time.

Custody visit reports also identified some cleaning issues, failure to record fridge and freezer temperatures and occasionally defective items of equipment. In all cases the Constabulary have responded immediately resulting in all issues being addressed.



At the time that visits were undertaken 909 detainees were asked if they wished to speak to custody visitors of which 691 agreed (76%).



New Developments

Self-Introduction Pilot - during the past year the Scheme has introduced a self-introduction pilot at Euston Street and Keyham Lane Custody Suites. This has involved custody visitors entering a cell and introducing themselves to detainees without being first introduced by custody suite staff. The pilot commenced on 1 January 2008 and will run until 30 June 2008. During the first three months of the pilot the percentage of detainees accepting a visit from custody visitors at Euston Street increased from 71.3% to 98.2% and from 82.9% to 96.6% at Keyham Lane. The benefits of an increased take-up rate include more detainees receiving an independent check on their environment and welfare. Custody visitors have shown their enthusiasm for this new approach and no serious negative comments or issues of concern have been identified. It is expected that the pilot will be rolled out to the other two custody suites during 2008/09.

Operation Safeguard - this is the formal arrangement of the utilisation of police cells to accommodate Home Office prisoners when prison service accommodation has reached its operational capacity. In Leicestershire, 'Safeguard' commenced in April 2007 and custody visitors were invited to make visits to check on the welfare of those detained. Between April and December 78.6% (187 prisoners) offered a visit agreed to be seen.

First East Midlands' Regional Conference
 – was held on Saturday 8 September 2007 at Police Headquarters, Leicester. The event was attended by 67 custody visitors from Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. The conference provided an opportunity for joint training, sharing of good practice and a chance to mix with others undertaking the same role in various parts of the East Midlands.



Whilst there has been some delay in admittance to the custody suite due to staff being busy there has been more than one occasion where staff have stayed on after their shift to accompany visitors to the cells. Custody visitors have been impressed by the professionalism of the staff and their diligence in their care of detainees”.



Marilyn Barnfield is the team leader for visits to Beaumont Leys Custody Suite. She says:-

“During the past year 52 visits have been made to Beaumont Leys Custody Suite and 4 to Hinckley. The majority of detainees held at Beaumont were satisfied with the conditions under which they were held, occasionally commending staff for the ‘service’ provided. Requests have mainly been for drinks, blankets and phone calls all of which were dealt with by detention officers during the visit. No breaches of rights and entitlements have been recorded.

Comments from Area Co-ordinators



Kathleen Summerfield leads the team who visit Euston Street Custody Suite, she states:-

“Between 01/04/2007 and 31/03/2008, when we visited, there were 578 detainees in custody, of whom 369 were offered a visit and 278 agreed. 52 visits have been made during this period. The great majority of detainees seen were very satisfied with the care and attention they were receiving whilst in custody. The professionalism and dedication of the staff concerned should be applauded.”



Denise Burton is responsible for running the team who visit Keyham Lane Custody Suite. She comments:-

“A total of 48 visits were made to Keyham Lane Custody Suite last year during which 259 detainees were held in police custody. Of these 82.9% were seen by custody visitors with that increasing to 96.6% with the self-introduction pilot. All issues regarding detainee welfare were promptly attended to by custody staff.



Kate Sealy runs the team who visit Loughborough Custody Suite. Kate comments that:-

“Loughborough is not a custody suite fraught with problems in fact quite the opposite. Throughout the year there have been 56 visits undertaken by 15 custody visitors. At the time of the visits 127 detainees were in police custody and of these 78.1% were spoken to by custody visitors. All issues raised by detainees were dealt with by custody staff.”

Comments from Leicestershire Constabulary



David Lindley, Deputy Chief Constable of Leicestershire Constabulary states:-

“Leicestershire Constabulary welcomes the scrutiny provided by Independent Custody Visitors and throughout the year my officers have worked tirelessly to ensure that all issues reported by them have been dealt with. Police station custody suites are stressful and potentially volatile environments and it is with great pride that I can acknowledge that the police officers and staff who work in these areas continue to provide a professional and caring approach to persons in custody.”



Comments from the Police Authority



Mrs Mary Sherwin, Police Authority lead member for Custody Visiting and Chairman of the Authority's Professional Standards Committee says:-

“The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme run in Leicestershire continues to provide assurance both to the Police Authority and to the local community that persons detained in police custody are well looked after. From the 212 custody visits undertaken last year custody visitors identified a number of issues to be addressed but these were all minor in nature and for the large majority, action was taken at the time. From the reports received by my Committee I am confident that police officers and police staff in Leicestershire do everything in their power to ensure the welfare of persons in their care and in all cases full rights and entitlements have been provided. Independent Custody Visitors do an invaluable job in providing assurances that this continues to be the case.”



Mr Byron Rhodes,
Chairman of the Police
Authority stated:-

“The Police Authority is grateful to its independent custody visitors for the commitment they have shown over the past twelve months towards ensuring the safety and wellbeing of persons detained in police custody. That no serious issues have been reported is due to the police officers and police staff of Leicestershire Constabulary who I commend for their professionalism. The local community can have faith that the treatment of persons held in police custody meets all the standards expected.”

Equality and Diversity

The Authority strives to ensure that custody visitors recruited to the Scheme are reflective of the local population. Current custody visitors, in percentage terms, are as follows:-

- 58% are female and 42% male.
- 21% are aged below 35, 42% are between 35 - 54 and 37% are 55 and over.
- 12% are disabled.

If you would like further information on the Scheme please contact:

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