

What is Custody Visiting?

Under the Police Reform Act 2002 and subsequently amended by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 all Police and Crime Commissioners are required to run a custody visiting scheme. Custody Visitors are trained volunteer members of the public who visit police custody suites and speak to people held in custody to ensure they have been fairly treated in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. A record of each interview is kept and any follow up action monitored.

When was the Scheme introduced and why?

Hampshire has had a Scheme in place since 1986. Custody visiting was introduced following a period of civil disorder in 1981. In some major cities across the UK hundreds of young people attacked property and police in protest about oppressive policing and alleged harassment of young black people. This indicated a lack of trust in law and order authorities and so custody visiting was established to increase public confidence in the police.

Why is the Scheme important?

It independently checks on the welfare of detainees at a time when they may be feeling vulnerable or confused and gives the public reassurance that detainees are treated fairly. Custody Visitors are encouraged to deal with matters of a more minor nature during the visit but more serious matters are forwarded to the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office. Custody Visitors play a very important role and the Commissioner is grateful for their continuing involvement and contribution.

Who runs the Scheme?

The operation of the Scheme is the responsibility of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and is managed by the Scheme Manager. The Office, in consultation with the Chief Constable, has the final responsibility in all matters relating to the operation of the Scheme.

Who can become a Visitor?

Visitors come from all sections of the community. They must be more than 18 years old, have been resident in the UK for at least 3 years prior to the date of application and currently reside in Hampshire or the Isle of Wight. No special skills are required as full training and support is provided, however Custody Visitors should be good listeners, non-judgemental, unprejudiced and generally have an interest in the community and the welfare of the people detained in police cells.

After a probationary period of six months which includes two observational visits with an experienced visitors, Custody Visitors are appointed for a further two and a half years. To avoid any potential conflict of interest, the Office will not appoint serving police officers or support staff or special constables as custody visitors.

Where persons in these categories have left or retired from the relevant duties, they may be considered suitable for appointment after a period of five years. In that event, factors such as geographical location where they would be carrying out visits, and the length of time since they left the relevant employment, will be considered.

Can I become a visitor if I am an Appropriate Adult?

New applications from interested custody visitors will not be accepted if they are currently an appropriate adult in the same area. This is due to a conflict of interests in the two roles, as custody visitors may, on occasion, have cause to give critical feedback regarding the provision of appropriate adult services in the area they visit.

How much of my time would it take up?

You will be required to attend an initial training event. Thereafter you will be required to make a minimum of eight visits per year. Visits may be made at any time of the day or night according to a rota system. The length of each visit depends on how many people are in custody at the time and how many detainees wish to see the visitors. The Commissioner's Office also organises other training opportunities including an annual seminar which provides an opportunity for visitors from across the two counties to meet and learn more about this important area of the Commissioner's work. The visitors are co-ordinated by one of four regional co-ordinators, who also hold quarterly meetings to discuss local arrangements and share best

What is a Panel?

The Scheme in Hampshire is divided into four panels and visitors are allocated to a panel depending on where they live. Each panel has a co-ordinator who is appointed from within the panel who organises the rota of visits and panel meetings.

Which geographic areas do the panels cover, which custody suites do the panels cover?

The four panels in Hampshire are the Isle of Wight, North, South East and South West.

The police investigation centres each Panel visits are as follows:

- Isle of Wight – Newport
- Northern – Basingstoke
- Eastern – Portsmouth
- Western – Southampton

Will I get paid/ what does it cost?

Custody visitors are volunteers and therefore do not get paid. However, all travel expenses incurred are reimbursed by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

What happens on a visit?

Visits are always conducted in pairs. The custody officer or a member of the custody staff accompanies visitors during the visit, but should remain out of hearing during discussions between visitors and detainees. The visitors conduct a short interview with the detainee, asking about their treatment whilst in custody. Visitors are also allowed to inspect the other parts of the custody suite including the kitchen, medical room and washing facilities.

Do I need to write reports?

During the visit, visitors jointly complete a form to report back on their findings, including comments from detainees on their treatment, and concerns raised by the visitors.

How does it influence the Constabulary?

The Scheme provides an opportunity for the Constabulary to make improvements to the way they operate in custody in response to observations made from the independent view-point of Custody Visitors.

What does the Constabulary do about ICV findings?

Serious concerns raised by visitors are quickly reported back to the Force Custody Manager. The concerns are investigated and actioned where necessary. The outcome is reported back to visitors at panel meetings.

What gets reported to the Office?

Visit reports are sent to the Commissioner's officer immediately after each contact with a detainee. Panels present the Commissioner with a twice yearly update on their performance highlighting any serious concerns that have been reported to Hampshire Constabulary.

I want to find out more? Who do I contact?

ICV Scheme Manager

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Unit 1, The Long Barn, Dean Farm Estate, Wickham Road, Fareham Common, Fareham, Hampshire, PO17 5BN

Or email to opcc.icv.scheme@hampshire.police.uk

Web: Hampshire & Isle of Wight Police and Crime Commissioner

(Enter ICV into the search function)