



Report of the Chief Executive

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITS 2016/17

'Reassuring West Mercia's Communities'

Purpose

This is the annual report for 2016/17 of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme for the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner.

Background

Independent Custody Visiting schemes co-ordinate volunteers, called Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs), to make unannounced visits to police custody to check on the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of detainees, and the conditions of the custody suite. ICVs finding issues that need addressing urgently will bring them to the attention of custody staff on duty. These, and any other less urgent issues, will be included in the report sent to the Scheme Administrator, and brought to the attention of the custody lead for that custody suite. In West Mercia Police there is an Inspector responsible for each policing area, who in turn reports to the custody lead for the force.

ICVs provide an independent view of the custody environment detainees are held in, coupled with the personal views, where expressed, of those people held in custody. They provide reassurance to the communities of West Mercia that people are treated with respect, in a safe environment, which goes towards fulfilling the Police and Crime Commissioners 'Safer West Mercia Plan'.

At police area level, groups, or 'Panels', of volunteers are organised to visit custody suites in their area. Each panel has a co-ordinator who is supported by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. They organise the rota for the visits to their local custody suite.

Police and Crime Commissioners have a statutory responsibility to organise and oversee the delivery of Independent Custody Visiting (ICV), in consultation with Chief Constables. They must ensure they have a robust and efficient scheme in place, allocating appropriate resources to it. In West Mercia the responsibility of the ICV Scheme falls to the Chief Executive, who employs a dedicated member of staff as Scheme Administrator.

There are 5 Custody Suites in West Mercia:

Police Station	No of Cells
Kidderminster	11
Hereford	16
Malinsgate	15
Shrewsbury	16
Worcester	22

Independent Custody Visits 2016/17

The total number of detainees in Custody during the financial year 2016-17 was 19,241.

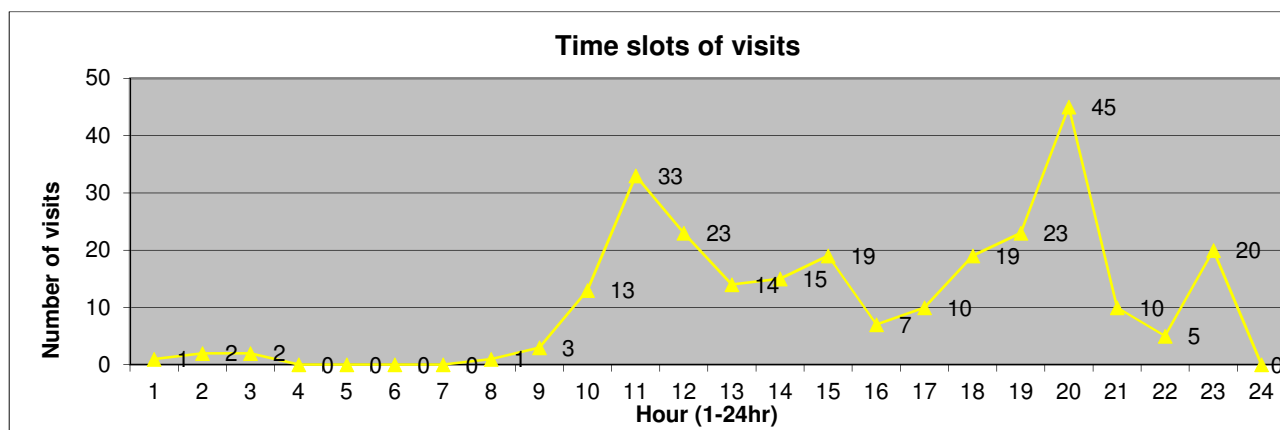
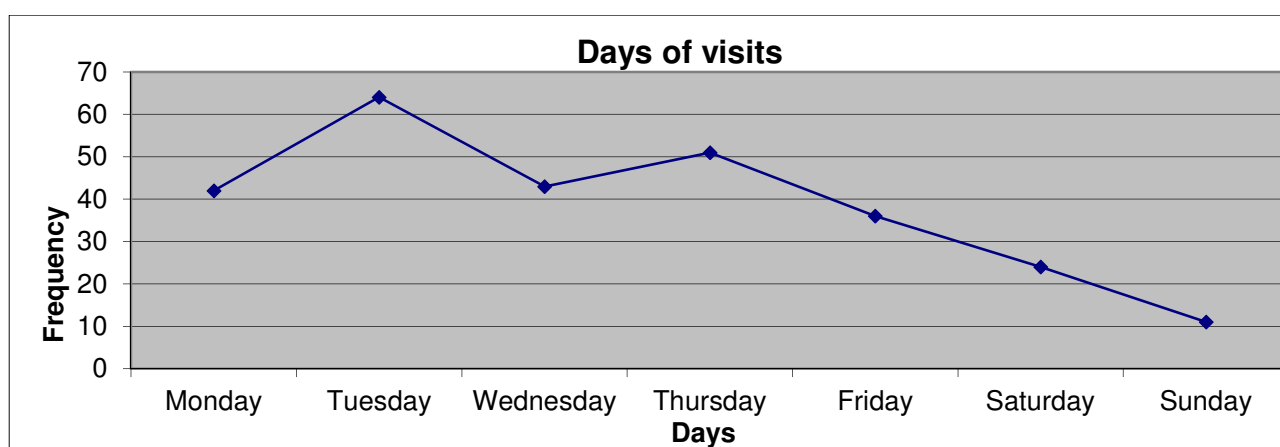
The total number of visits undertaken by Independent Custody Visitors during the year was 259.

There were in total 1127 people in custody at the time of the visits and of those that were available for visiting 77% consented to meeting with the Independent Custody Visitors. This shows a slight increase in detainees present, and also an increase in the acceptance of visits by available detainees, up from 76% the previous year.

	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
The total number of visits undertaken	259	255	278
Number of people in custody at time of visits	1127	1041	967
Percentage of detainees who were available for visiting who consented to meeting with the Independent Custody Visitors			
- Total	77% ↑	76%	82%
- Herefordshire Custody Suite	86% ↑	84%	88%
- Malinsgate Custody Suite	73% ↑	68%	86%
- Kidderminster Custody Suite	75% ↑	66%	73%
- Shrewsbury Custody Suite	78% ↓	79%	85%
- Worcester Custody Suite	78% ↓	79%	82%

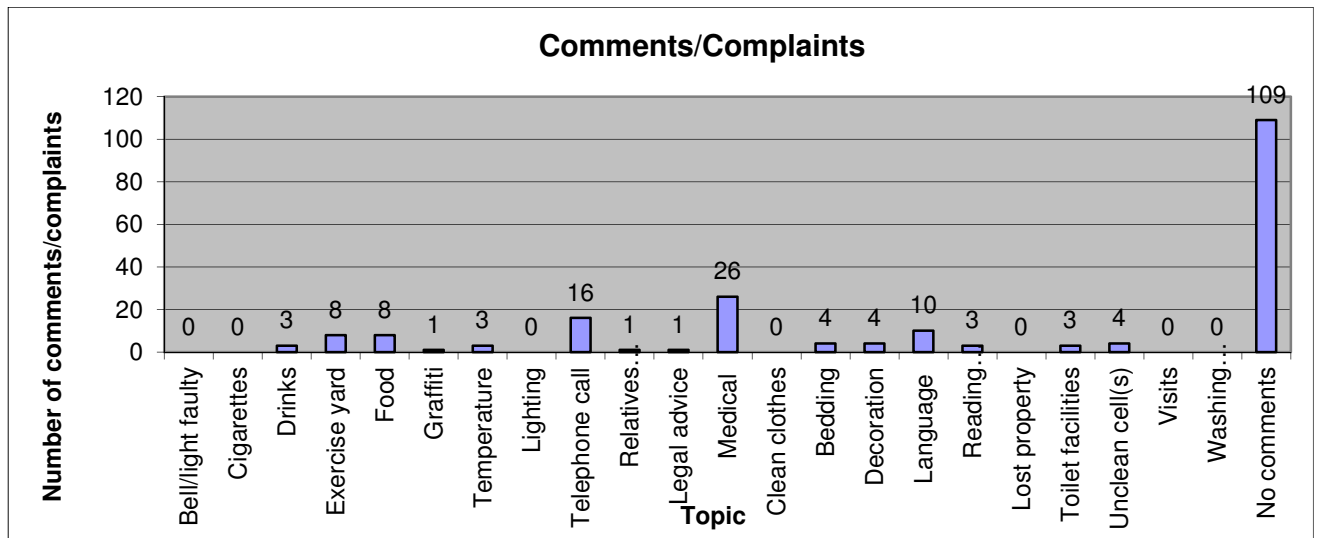
The ideal frequency of visits to each of the five suites is one per week. The co-ordinator of each team, or panel, arranges a rota for their members, who then organise themselves in teams of two to make their visit for their specified week on a time and date to suit themselves. It is encouraged that these visits be made over a variety of days, and times within those days, to give a balanced view of the custody population. They are also completely unannounced, so the staff are always unsure of when there may be a visit. This again encourages the suites to be ready for a visit by ICVs, and therefore fully up to expected standards, at all times.

During the period April 2016 to April 2017, there were 259 visits over the five suites, meaning that, while there were a very few weeks with no visits in some areas, with other weeks having double visits in some suites, the rate of visits across the force amounted to an average 100% success rate.



The times of the visits can be any time of the day and night. However, apart from the unsociability of expecting ICVs to visit in the middle of the night, detainees are quite properly entitled to a period of uninterrupted rest. Therefore some sense is adopted in the timing, to maximise the value of the volunteers' time. The visits for this period across the force area were conducted between start times of 0730hrs, through to the latest visit commencing at 2250hrs.

Various issues were raised, many of which could be resolved then and there by custody staff. However, some issues raised were taken forward to the custody Inspectors for considering and/or resolving.



Something that has had an impact on the consideration of certain issues, was the fact that an estates review is being conducted around the custody provision across the force. This meant some suggestions, such as disabled access to showers, have been deferred pending the outcome. It was recognised that big budget items would not be automatically rectified until the review was completed.

However ICV-raised suggestions were being acted upon to the benefit of detainees.

For example, members of the Kidderminster panel were in conversation with a health care professional in the custody suite, when they talked about provision of articles to assist in their day to day lives within the suite. Examples were cutlery adapted for use by those with poor dexterity, incontinence pads to maintain the dignity of those needing to use them etc.

It was decided at management level that these were easily purchased items that would indeed enhance the experience of those with certain disabilities within custody, and so were progressed. Other suggestions needed more thought, e.g. mobility aids, but these were nonetheless looked at, and feedback passed on to the visitors concerned.

Another improvement made as a result of ICVs suggestion was the provision in custody of mobile multi-phone chargers to guarantee access to the mobiles of detainees, for example those with a vulnerability, juveniles etc., to find their next of kin, carer etc., contact details, regardless of the amount of charge present in the device. These have now been purchased and placed in each of the custody suites.

Issues of Note Raised by ICVs

- Transport of detainees to court from suites became something of an issue on occasions, with the contracted company quoting problems in terms of being informed in time to arrange collections etc. This sometimes resulted in detainees being held for longer than they were expecting, but work has been done to resolve this during the year, and the reported instances of this happening have reduced.
- The outside contractor engaged as medical and health provider within the custody suites, was repeatedly flagged up as being the cause of detainees not receiving the attention within

the time they felt they needed it, and, more importantly perhaps, within the time-frame agreed at the time the contract was awarded. This was recognised by custody staff, and therefore by the police force, but was also regularly raised by ICVs. It was repeatedly brought up at Custody User Group, and Strategic Custody User Forum meetings by the scheme administrator. At the end of the contract period, this healthcare provider will be losing the contract, which is going out to tender to find an alternative provider.

Independent Custody Visitors

There are currently 53 visitors in the West Mercia scheme. We lost six visitors during the year due to resignations, but there have been 13 new visitors appointed since the beginning of April 2016, bringing the figures up to a manageable level.

There was some very sad news in April 2017, when we heard that Reginald Edwards passed away. Reg had been an ICV for over 26 years, conducting his last visit 12 months earlier. He had been a stalwart of the Kidderminster panel, and also gave his time to other voluntary groups and panels within and outside the policing circle. He had been a police officer with the West Midlands Police force in the past, and continued to contribute to the end of his 95 years.

Each of the four panels had meetings in the autumn, and again in the spring of 2017. Deputy PCC Tracey Onslow attended the Shropshire and Kidderminster Autumn Panel meetings. Unfortunately she was unable to go to the spring meetings at Hereford and Worcester due to diary clashes, but will be attending these meetings in the autumn of 2017.

The West Mercia ICV Scheme Administrator post was vacant from October 2016, following the resignation of Tracy Edwards, until January 2017. Liz Wydra then took over the role. She is a former police officer, and has experience of custody suites and the way they work.

Electronic Recording

A system has been developed by a software company in Warwick for the recording of ICV visits across the Alliance, accessed on the internet, in consultation with ICV Scheme Administrators. The rolling out of the programme has taken longer than expected, with updates being added over the months. It is now almost at a position when a live roll out can be planned.

All ICVs have now been introduced to the training database via e-mail, and have been told at panel meetings that they will receive face to face training in the near future. They all have passwords, and on interrogating this training database, to date it is apparent many of the visitors have had a practice. It is true, however, there are those who are less keen to transfer their recording practices to the new system, and it is these visitors who will be targeted in the coming weeks when Liz Wydra travels around the force giving practical help.

ICV Scheme- News of Note 2016 to 2017

- The former Scheme Administrator, Tracy Edwards, left the role in October 2016, following the move of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner from Shrewsbury, to West Mercia Police Headquarters at Hindlip, Worcester.
- Liz Wydra took on the role of Scheme Administrator in January 2017. She is a retired police officer, having served 34 years within West Mercia, and so offers continuity in her knowledge of the force area, the workings of a custody suite, and some of the staff coming into contact with the ICV scheme.
- The Herefordshire panel had a slight change in the panel make-up, but only in the fact that the co-ordinator and deputy swapped positions, with Anthony Hurdidge taking on the role at the panel meeting in March 2017. Also one of their number resigned due to other family commitments, and so there will be a vacancy to fill when an invitation for applications goes out at the end of 2017.
- North Worcestershire, South Worcestershire and Shropshire retained their Co-ordinators for another term.
- The recognition of long service continued to be recognised during the year, with certificates being presented at panel meetings.
- The newly produced Memorandum Of Understanding has now been signed by all members of the scheme across West Mercia.
- The electronic recording system continues to be tested and developed, with a view to roll out later in the year after further training.

Issues raised during ICV custody visits

Shropshire :- Shrewsbury and Malinsgate (Telford)

- Water pressure in the sinks too high, raising slip hazards due to water on the floor
- Some pillows needed replacing
- No exercise yard – this is frequently raised as an issue when detainees want exercise and there is no facility. It has been clarified that there is no requirement to provide, but consideration is given to transporting detainees to Telford under certain circumstances.
- Clocks within the suite and interview rooms showing different times
- Spare clothing suffering shrinkage due to poor laundering, causing shortage of certain sizes

North Worcestershire (Kidderminster) :-

- Exercise yard needing jet washing, and graffiti over-painting
- Pillows needing replacing
- Temperature too cold
- General decoration

South Worcestershire (Worcester) :-

- Transportation to and from court delayed
- General cleaning
- A fire alarm was faulty on one visit and needed repairing

- A question regarding the issuing of paracetamol, and availability of healthcare staff to administer.

Hereford :-

- Regular issues regarding the Healthcare provider, and the wait very often for one to attend, sometimes from other West Mercia stations.
- Fire doors being propped open, which has been resolved with an instruction to staff
- Clean and dirty laundry found to be in the same bag, resolved following contact by custody staff with the laundry

While ICVs highlight issues they see that need attention, either at the time of the visit, or as follow-ups by senior custody staff, they also highlight good practice they witness. This can be simply acknowledging the professional way they are escorted and the high standard of cleanliness found, or can give more specific examples of good practice, such as the calm manner in which staff deal with a disruptive or intoxicated detainee, and in Malinsgate 'exemplary' care was given to a female detainee who has diabetes and needed her sugar levels checked.