



Report of the Chief Executive

## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITS 2017/18**

### **'Reassuring West Mercia's Communities'**

#### **Purpose**

This is the annual report for 2017/18 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 2017/18

The total number of visits undertaken by Independent Custody Visitors during the year was 232.

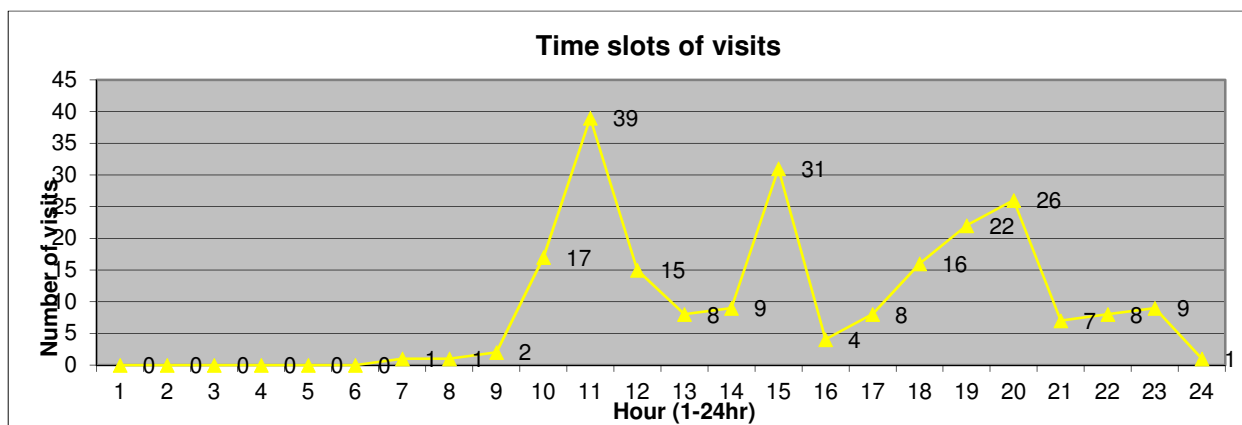
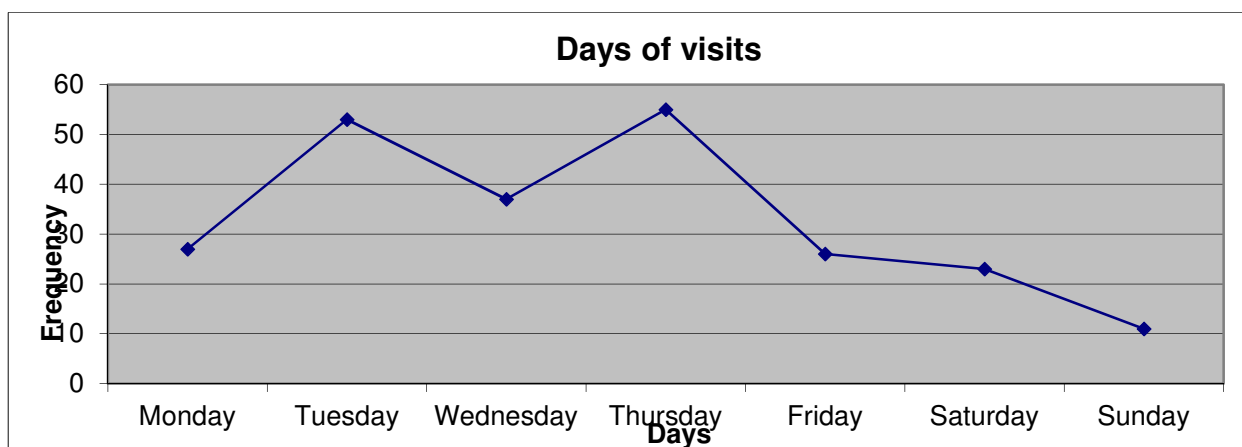
There were in total 839 people in custody at the time of the visits and of those that were available for visiting 81% consented to meeting with the Independent Custody Visitors. This shows a slight decrease in detainees present, but an increase in the acceptance of visits by available detainees, up from 77% the previous year.

	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
The total number of visits undertaken	232	259	255
Number of people in custody at time of visits	839	1127	1041
Percentage of detainees who were available for visiting who consented to meeting with the Independent Custody Visitors			
- Total	81% ↑	78%	76%
- Herefordshire Custody Suite	76% ↓	85%	84%
- Malinsgate Custody Suite	80% ↑	74%	68%
- Kidderminster Custody Suite	71% ↓	75%	66%
- Shrewsbury Custody Suite	91% ↑	78%	79%
- Worcester Custody Suite	81% ↑	78%	79%

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 2017 to April 2018, there were 232 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 of an almost 100% visit per week figure.

A slight drop in some areas, particularly Kidderminster, can be largely attributed to a drop in ICV numbers on that panel. This is being addressed with a recruitment drive May 2018.



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 0831hrs, through to the latest visit commencing at 2255hrs.

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.

West Mercia Police went through a huge transformation of the main IT systems. This system, Athena, is used in many fields throughout Police work, including intelligence, operational matters, and the management of custody. This has been a great change in custody, with staff learning a whole new system, but ICVs have been supportive of this new system, and the extra work this has brought to custody staff.

### **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 has been compounded by the Courts Service moving all remand cases to Kidderminster Magistrates Court. The Police have to work around the court's decision, and are reliant on the service they can get from the outsourced company who deal with the transport of detainees. 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 company that was contracted to fulfil the Healthcare role within custody, repeatedly failed in their targets promised in terms of time delays to attend following a referral. However, their contract came to an end in the late summer of 2017, and Mitie Care and Custody won the new contract. While there has been a period of 'bedding in', improvements have been noted by ICVs and Police alike.

## **Independent Custody Visitors**

There are currently 47 visitors in the West Mercia scheme. We lost some visitors during the year due to resignations, but there have been several people expressing an interest in becoming an ICV. The process of vetting and training them has started.

Each of the four panels had meetings in the autumn, and again in the spring of 2018. Deputy PCC Tracey Onslow has now attended all of the panels in the force area, and will continue her support of the scheme.

Liz Wydra has now been in post as Scheme Administrator for over 12 months, and is pleased to welcome a new colleague working as ICV Scheme Administrator in Warwickshire, Zeynab Gamiieldien.

## **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 2017 to 2018**

- The recognition of long service continued to be recognised during the year, with certificates being presented at panel meetings.
- The electronic recording system continues to be tested and developed, with a view to roll out later in the year after further training.
- The new Healthcare provider continues to perform well with a high percentage of calls being fulfilled within acceptable time limits. They are continuing to recruit in an effort to continue improvements in the service.

## **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
- 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) :-

- 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.
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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.

West Mercia ICV scheme is a member of the Independent Custody Visitors Association ( ICVA ), which produces newsletters, along with 'Bitesize' training packages for local delivery. West Mercia is pleased that one of the ICVs from the force area has been selected as the ICVA Regional Representative, following the retirement of the incumbent from Staffordshire. She will be looking forward to the ICVA Regional conference, which in 2018 is to be held at Hindlip, September.