

Police and Crime Commissioner

for Hertfordshire

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME

ANNUAL REPORT 2012 - 2013

Hoddesdon
Custody Suite...



Hoddesdon charge
area before refurbishment



Hoddesdon charge
area after refurbishment

...before and
after refurbishment

Forward and Introduction

Welcome to the Annual Report of Hertfordshire's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme. The Police and Crime Commissioner took over responsibility of running Hertfordshire's scheme in November 2012 following the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and the dissolution of Police Authorities. However as the Commissioner took over an active scheme from the Police Authority he is able to report the full year from 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013

Executive Summary

Hertfordshire's 54 Volunteer Custody Visitors carried out 175 visits to the county's four custody suites and interviewed over 700 detainees during the year. In general people were found to be well looked after. This view is supported by the small number of complaints recorded about police detention - 64 formal complaints were recorded by the Constabulary during the year against a total of over 23,000 detentions. The custody estate is well maintained and is generally found to be clean and tidy. The estate at Hoddesdon has recently been refurbished, resulting in much improved conditions for both detainees and custody staff. All suites have now been built to modern specifications or refurbished. Officers and civilian staff working in custody are well trained and act with professionalism towards detainees and visitors. Visitors made a number of observations, mostly minor concerns / requests for phone calls, food etc, all points were discussed with custody staff. Key concerns related to the provision of Appropriate Adults to vulnerable adults in custody following a change in the administration of the Appropriate Adult (AA) scheme. The Head of the Custody Unit confirmed that arrangements are in place and that no adult detainee needing an AA would be left without one for any significant period. A small number concerns were highlighted by detainees about welfare arrangements for their children whilst the parent was in custody. These were brought to the attention of custody staff by visitors prior to leaving custody suites.

Background

Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) schemes were set up following a recommendation in the Scarman report into the civil unrest of the 1980's. The purpose of the schemes is to provide transparency and to increase public confidence in the police service. This is achieved by enabling members of local communities to check that people detained in police custody are being properly looked after. It is an important role not least because visitors check on the welfare of detainees at a time when they may be vulnerable or confused. In addition, visitor's reports give the Constabulary and the Commissioner an independent view of the custody operation.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act of 2011 placed a duty on Police and Crime Commissioners to maintain Independent Custody Visiting schemes.

The recruitment and training of volunteers, as well as the management of the scheme, is the responsibility of a designated Scheme Administrator who is appointed by the Commissioner.

Visitors are unpaid volunteers who live or work in Hertfordshire. They are trained to interview people in custody to ensure that they have access to their rights and

entitlements and are being treated well. Visitors also check that the custody estate is up to standard and report their findings to Custody Staff, Custody Inspectors and the Scheme Administrator after each visit.

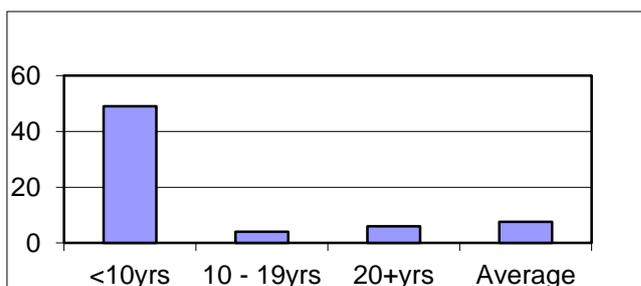
An experienced member of each visiting panel acts as a Panel Co-ordinator assisting the Scheme Administrator in training and mentoring visitors as well as co-ordination and management of the scheme.

Key concerns raised by visitors are followed up by the Scheme Administrator with Custody Inspectors. The Head of the Custody Unit also attends panel meetings and meets Panel Co-ordinators and the Scheme Administrator regularly to discuss visitor's observations.

Organisation of the Scheme

Hertfordshire Constabulary has four active custody suites situated in; Hatfield, Hoddesdon, Stevenage and Watford police stations. A total of 86 cells are available twenty four hours a day.

Visitors attend meetings twice a year to discuss matters arising from visits and to receive updates on changes to custody arrangements, legislative changes etc.



The chart to the left shows the length of service of our custody visitors. 59% of visitors are male and 41% are female, While the majority have been working for the scheme for less than ten years the average visitor has over 8 years' experience.

The table to the right shows a breakdown of the religious beliefs of our volunteers.

The majority of custody visitors are over 60 years of age.

Future recruitment will focus on a younger, wider demographic. The Commissioner would particularly welcome applications from less well represented religious or ethnic minority groups.

Religion and Belief	Number	Percentage
Buddhist	1	2%
Christian	25	43%
Hindu	0	0%
Jewish	2	3%
Muslim	0	0%
Sikh	1	2%
No Religion given	29	48%
Other	1	2%

The optimum number of volunteers needed to meet visiting targets is around 60. Currently there are 54 active Custody Visitors. With retirement rates running at of around 3 per year further recruitment will be needed by next year. Visitors are organised into four panels of between 12 to 16 visitors. Visits are carried out in pairs and are unannounced the target is to visit each suite once a week.

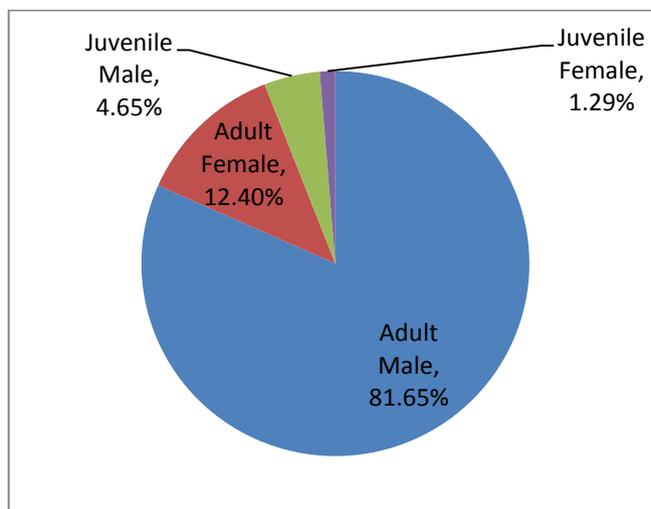
ANNUAL REPORT 2012 - 2013

From April 2012 to March 2013 just over 23,000 people were detained by police in Hertfordshire. 8% fewer than in 2011/12. This follows a 7% reduction from 2010/11 and a 13% reduction from 2009/10 when over 31,000 people were detained. A number of factors contribute to the reduction in detentions but the overriding reason is undoubtedly falling crime levels in the county. In 2009/10 over 70,000 crimes were recorded in the county by 2012/13 this had fallen to just over 53,000 an overall reduction of around 24% in four years. The average detention time during the year was just over 12 hours an hour longer than the previous year. An increased cell capacity means that there is less pressure to release suspects on police bail and more enquiries can be completed while suspects are in custody This has resulted in an increase in the percentage of positive disposals¹ at first detention (up from 49.8% in 2011/12 to 52.4% in 2012/13).

Against this background Independent Custody Visitors made a total of 175 visits to custody suites between April 2012 and March 2013. A total of 1,191 people were detained in custody at the time visits were made - around 5% of the number of people detained in the year.

The chart on the right shows a breakdown by age and gender of the people interviewed by custody visitors.

Not everyone in custody is available to be interviewed. Interviews are not carried out with people who are violent, intoxicated, asleep or in interview etc. Interviews are only carried out with the individuals consent. 774 people were interviewed by visitors (95% of people available to be interviewed). This was a 5% increase on the previous year and



probably represents the upper limit of acceptance.

During the year visitors raised 186 detainee concerns with custody staff. 22% related to medical or mental health issues – most of which were requests for medication or to see a health practitioner. 20% were requests for phone calls or to have someone informed of detention. 14% were requests for food or drink. 8% were requests wash facilities and 7% requests for solicitors.

Head of Custody Unit's response: *In the vast majority of these cases, it was found that the concerns of the detainee expressed to the ICVs, had already been dealt with by the Custody staff at the time. Often these resolutions were found by the ICVs themselves rather than being fed through to the Scheme Administrator for an 'investigation'. Any others, I investigate and feed back to the Administrator, implementing any changes where necessary within Custody.*

Visitors noted concerns about child welfare arrangements on six occasions (a similar number to the previous year), this is something that ICVs have been specifically asked

¹ Positive Disposal means a charge, caution, reprimand, or warning

to highlight. All concerns were raised with custody staff.

Head of Custody Unit's response: *It is vital to ensure that children are not exposed to danger due to the absence of the detainee who is in custody and that any concerns raised by detainees are responded to rapidly and appropriately, whether this is by contacting other family members who are able to assist or Social Services or in some other way. The intended actions and the outcome should always be fed back to the detainee to reassure them.*

Visitors also raised concerns about the provision of Appropriate Adults* to support vulnerable adults in custody. This follows the transfer of the Appropriate Adult (AA) scheme administration to the County Council's Youth Offending Team. *Appropriate Adults are independent of the police. They support juveniles in police custody by explaining police procedures, providing information on rights and facilitate communication with the police. They also provide the same support to adults in police custody who have mental health and/or learning disabilities.

Head of Custody Unit's response: *This is not just a local concern although Hertfordshire is tackling this matter head-on. We have asked the volunteers who act as AAs for juvenile detainees to also act for adults and we are in discussions with our colleagues in the Youth Offending Teams to discuss how to formalise this without impacting on Youth Services. Social Services' Adult Care Services can also provide AAs for adults where required, and no adult detainee who needs an AA would ever be left without one for any significant period whilst in Custody. – see **Appendix A** for additional comments*

No detainee concerns were recorded at all in 47% of visits and visitors also noted over 100 positive comments during visits. Custody staff responded to the majority of concerns raised immediately.

Visitors noted 40 issues with the custody estate slightly less than the previous year. 16 were cells out of action due to defects or damage mainly caused by detainees. 9 issues concerned cleanliness in suites (an increase on the previous year). The Cleaning contractor has recently been changed and cleanliness is expected to improve as a result.



WATFORD SUMMARY REPORT

Watford custody suite is situated in the old Dark Lane police station building. The suite was extended and refurbished in 2011 and now has 16 cells split over two levels which creates a unique set of challenges for custody staff. The suite was closed for remedial works for one month from 22nd May 2012 during which time Hemel Hempstead reserve custody suite was brought back into use. Watford custody suite is very busy with over 5,500 detentions in 2012/13 and has the highest ratio of cells to detentions in the county.

Watford panel co-ordinator's summary:

The Watford custody suite has become a very busy place since its refurbishment in 2011. Initially with 1 of the 2 Detention Officers almost constantly on loan to Stevenage it operated

under some strain. Now operating with 2 and sometimes 3 Detention Officers on duty it seems to be running well, staff morale appears high despite the lack of any natural daylight and there have been few, mainly minor concerns over the last 12 months. The custody suite and the ICV visiting scheme has never run better in the 10 years or so that I have been visiting with the new access arrangements having now been ironed out and generally good relations between staff and visitors.'

HATFIELD SUMMARY REPORT

Opened in 2008 and built to Home Office standards, Hatfield has 30 cells with an additional 10 reserved for the magistrate's court. Hatfield is the busiest custody suite in the county with just under 8,000 detentions in 2012/13. The estate remains in good order with few issues reported by visitors

Hatfield panel co-ordinator's summary:

'We are fortunate at Hatfield in as much the building and layout of the premises has been well designed and built with all minor snags resolved. Ease of access is good, internal decoration & cell lighting is conducive to calm and better take up of visits. Whilst self- introduction by ICV's to detainees has further increased the take up of interviews.'

Overall there have been few complaints, most of a minor nature, and none that have not been resolved at the time of visiting. Working relations with uniformed and civilian staff are professional but cordial, enabling visitors ease of access to detained persons. It is refreshing to note that there are several staff who are to be commended for their extra care & courtesy on many occasions towards detainees and the visiting team, this is greatly appreciated. My thanks to a loyal and keen team of visitors and an efficient back up from the Commissioner's Office'.

STEVENAGE SUMMARY REPORT

The custody suite is situated in the modern Stevenage police station built in 2009 to Home Office standards the suite is a modern facility with 24 cells. Just over 6,000 people were detained within the suite in 2012/13

Stevenage panel co-ordinator's summary:

'The Stevenage Custody Suite is a new facility provided as part of the new Police Station. With few exceptions the issues raised with us by detained persons are in the main of a domestic nature and much the same as elsewhere in the County.'

It is quite unusual to encounter a detained person with virtually no English and the ICVs box now contains a set of flash (language) cards with which we can ask a series of standard questions and illicit a response.

The number of members of our panel has fallen slightly of late: retirement, moving from Hertfordshire and a resignation. This has not caused any particular difficulty with the visiting rota and may be addressed later in the year when a recruiting exercise is undertaken.

The Detention staff are always helpful and pleasant. Panel members often express appreciation for the support we are given'

HODDESDON SUMMARY REPORT

The custody suite is situated in the old Hoddesdon police station building and has 16 detention cells. Just over 3,000 people were detained in 2012/13 around 1,000 fewer than expected due its closure for three months from January to April for refurbishment.

Hoddesdon panel co-ordinator's summary:

'The custody suite was closed for the last quarter of the year.

Hoddesdon ICVs are experienced and are able to deal with minor situations during the visit. There have been occasions when they have brought to the attention of Detention Officers concerns about detainees at risk (i.e. suicidal etc.) The lack of Appropriate Adults for vulnerable adults is delaying the detainee longer than necessary and does cause concern. The ICVs have made a number of positive comments regarding helpful staff and relationships are good.

ICVs feel that the custody suite is much more user friendly after the refurbishment for both staff and detainees. The installation of the intercom facility has greatly enhanced contact between detainees and staff, particularly in view of the lay out of the cell area and saves staff time. The CCTV also allows greater awareness of detainees at risk and their cell behaviour. All a great improvement.

However the new access arrangements for ICVs have been problematic causing some delays and frustration. This is being reviewed urgently and hopefully remedied.

The ICVs noted occasions when the unit was busy and a member of staff had been 'loaned' to another unit putting the remaining officers under extra pressure

The lead visitors receive excellent service from the scheme administrator who gives immediate response to our contacts'.

ICV SCHEME COSTS

Although their work is unpaid, visitors are reimbursed for travel costs and subsistence costs. The Commissioner also incurs other costs for running the scheme such as printing costs, catering for panel meetings, conference booking fees etc. In 2012/13 costs amounted to £3,266 for travel and £2,540 for other costs making a total of £5,806 compared to £4,819 incurred in the 2011/12 financial year. The apparent increase in 2012/13 was in regard to travel costs but these were in line with expected expenditure.

This report was prepared by the ICV Scheme Administrator with additional input from the chairs of the visiting panels and the Head of the Constabulary's Custody Unit.

For more information about the work of Hertfordshire's Independent Custody Visitors or to apply to become a visitor please visit our website www.hertscommissioner.org - click on the [Main Menu](#) and select the [Community Volunteers](#) link in the [Get Involved](#) section. If you have any questions about the scheme, please contact:

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ANNEX A

Comments from the Head of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Custody Unit

As Head of Custody in Hertfordshire, I regard the work of the ICVs as hugely important; their work helps me to identify strengths and weaknesses in our Custody arrangements, whether that be as a pattern across the four main custody units or instead highlighting a particular concern at one station. My overriding priority is the safe detention and handling of all the detainees who enter Hertfordshire's Custody units (*23,310 detainees in total during 2012/13*), and so an impartial view of our processes applied by the ICVs is vital to achieving that priority.

Custody has seen a lot of changes over the last year and there are more in the pipeline for this coming year. Hoddesdon Custody has now reopened following its £250k refurbishment and both Custody staff, ICVs and other users will see a tremendous difference to the facility as it will provide a much more efficient and healthy working environment for all. The issue about the ICVs not having ready access to the new unit has also recently been resolved. A second Virtual Court, to add to the one in use already at Watford, to be based within Hoddesdon Custody has also been agreed and I hope this will be operating fully in the near future.

So, what else is happening?

A 'Targeted Drug Testing' pilot continues at Hatfield, this has seen a positive testing rate of over 30% for opiates and cocaine of those persons tested in the initial six months. We are now expanding the pilot even further, ensuring we "target the offender, not the offence" in an effort to maintain the number of positive test outcomes and reduce the number of negatives. By identifying users we aim to divert people away from drugs, breaking the offending cycle as a result.

Recently, the High Court ruled that '17 year olds' should not be regarded as "adults" as they are defined in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. To become law, a legislative change is formally required but Hertfordshire has adopted a position which is in line with the ruling.

To bring my brief report to a close, I would like to thank all the ICVs for the wonderful effort this last year. To achieve such a high rate of visits, seeing over 700 detainees (95% of those asked!), is indeed exceptional. I look forward to continuing to work with you over the next twelve months

Shane O'Neill, Detective Chief Inspector 1284