

## Introduction

Cambridgeshire Police Authority is required by law to have a scheme that ensures that persons detained in custody are:

- Treated humanely and fairly by Officers and Police Staff.
- Receive their legal rights and entitlements.
- The conditions under which detained persons are being held in custody are satisfactory.



In December 1986, Cambridgeshire Police Authority started a Lay Visitors Scheme for people held in Police custody, which later became known as the Independent Custody Visitors Scheme.

### What is an Independent Custody Visitor

Independent Custody Visitors are members of the public who volunteer to visit Police stations to check on the treatment and well being of detainees. They are recruited by the Police Authority, but are independent of both the Police Authority and Constabulary.

The visitors come from various backgrounds and sections of the community. They will not have any other involvement with the Criminal Justice System, for example the Police, Courts or Prison service in order to maintain the integrity of the scheme.

Independent Custody Visitors must be impartial and independent in order to make informed judgements in which the community can have confidence in.

The Custody Visitors make visits to Police stations unannounced and in pairs. They observe, comment and report on the conditions under which persons are detained at Police stations and that the rights and entitlements of detainees are being respected by the Police, with a view to securing greater public understanding and confidence in these matters.

After each visit a report is completed. Copies of these reports are subsequently provided to the Chairman of the Panel, Divisional Custody Manager, Scheme Co-ordinator and the Police Authority Custody Visitors Panel for checking and any necessary follow up action.

## How the Scheme is organised in Cambridgeshire

In Cambridgeshire there are eight custody suites. Visits to these are shared between three local Panels. The Panels and their allocation to custody suites are shown below:

<u>Cambridge Panel</u>	Parkside Ely	Cells 15 Cells 4
<u>Huntingdon Panel</u>	Huntingdon St Neots	Cells 10 Cells 5
<u>Peterborough Panel</u>	Thorpe Wood Bridge Street March Wisbech	Cells 30 Cells 10 Cells 4 Cells 5

Each Panel has its own team of visitors with a Panel Chairman. The Panel Chairman is responsible for co-ordinating the rota for forthcoming visits and chairing the quarterly Panel meetings.

In Cambridgeshire there are 38 Custody Visitors in total. Below is the breakdown of the number of Independent Custody Visitors assigned to each Panel.

Cambridge Panel – 10  
Huntingdon Panel – 13  
Peterborough Panel – 15

The three main custody facilities within Cambridgeshire are visited on a weekly basis, (Thorpe Wood Peterborough, Parkside Cambridge and Huntingdon) the five less frequently used custody facilities are visited on a fortnightly or monthly basis.

On arrival at the Police Station Custody Visitors are to be given immediate access to the custody area. A member of the custody staff will accompany the visitors around and also introduce the Custody Visitors to the detainees, confirming with each detainee whether they would like to speak with the Custody Visitors or in some cases request the detainee's permission for the Custody Visitors to view the detainee's custody record.

### Statistics

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, the following numbers of detainees were held within Cambridgeshire Constabulary's custody facilities:-



Huntingdon	3702
March	132
St Neots	392
Wisbech	2533
Bridge Street	315 (162 Operation Safeguard d/p's)
Thorpe Wood	9198
Ely	588
Parkside	6739

During this same period, a total of 213 custody visits were conducted at which time 1068 people were detained. Of the 624 detainees who were available to receive a visit, 418 were seen (70%). There are a number of reasons in addition to refusal, why detained persons are not visited, this includes detainees being asleep, at interview or with their solicitor etc.

The table below provides a breakdown of visits to the four main custody suites; Thorpe Wood, Parkside, Huntingdon and Wisbech.

No.	Thorpe Wood	Parkside	Huntingdon	Wisbech	Total
Visits	48	49	49	25	171
Detainees Present	455	364	183	54	1056
Detainees Seen	181	139	60	30	410
Detainees Refused	89	74	36	5	204
Detainees Asleep	32	29	41	2	104
Detainees at Interview	62	64	28	5	159
Detainees Other	91	58	18	12	179

Not all detainees that are held within Cambridgeshire's custody facilities are PACE detainees. A number of Immigration, Remanded and Sentenced Prisoners, Place of Safety (Mental Health Act 1983) and Court Bail detainees are also held.

The average detention period of a PACE detainee is 6 ¼ hours.

### Main Issues arising from Visits

The Police Authority is pleased to note that the Independent Visitors have reported no breaches of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984, the legislation covering the treatment of detainees.

The Authority also notes that the Panels have commented positively on the professional and co-operative approach of Custody staff.

Below is a list of some of the key issues which were identified by Custody Visitors during their visits:-

- Cleaning standards
- Staffing levels
- Out of date meals
- Graffiti
- General repairs and maintenance
- Lack of privacy for detainees when showering
- Recording of information not up to date on detainees Custody Records
- Requests for blankets
- Inadequate lighting / lights not working

The Constabulary has completed a programme of remedial work to seven of its custody suites. There are also plans to close custody facilities at Wisbech and open additional cells at March. This is a result of a wide-ranging Health and Safety review by the Constabulary in early 2008.

In November 2008 a Joint Inspection of Cambridgeshire's custody facilities was undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP).

Feedback received from HMIC/P around procedures is currently being addressed by the Constabulary and included within a Force Action Plan, which is being closely monitored by the Police Authority.

### Response from the Constabulary regarding issues raised by Custody Visitors

When any issues are highlighted in the custody visitor report forms, the Constabulary has generally dealt with them in a prompt manner.

The Divisional Custody Managers are invited to attend the local quarterly Panel meetings which are held for Custody Visitors. This enables them to address issues and concerns which have been identified and also clarify information.



**Comments from Cambridgeshire Constabulary**  
**Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hopkins**

The scrutiny role performed by the Independent Custody Visitors

(ICVs) is essential in providing the public with an impartial, transparent insight into the workings of Cambridgeshire's custody suites. The Force very much welcomes their visits and the reports that follow.

The pragmatic work undertaken by the visitors helps us significantly in our aim to make sure that our suites and the persons who use them, in particular the detained persons, are provided with the most appropriate level of service and facilities.

The Force is rightly proud of the good working relationship it enjoys with the ICV's and has already started working with them to address some of the issues raised in the HMIC/P Inspections of our custody environment to improve further this area of business.



**Comments from Cambridgeshire Police Authority**  
**Benjamen Damazer, Chairman of the Police Authority Custody Visitors Panel and Professional Standards Committee.**

Custody visiting is a voluntary job - but an important one. Comments made by Independent Custody Visitors and their impressions of conditions in police cells are treated seriously, and are regularly reported to and discussed by the Police Authority. If necessary, any issues of concern are referred by the Police Authority's Custody Visitors Panel to the Chief Constable for appropriate action to be taken.

Cambridgeshire Police Authority has 38 Independent Custody Visitors who made 213 unannounced visits to police stations in their area. Volunteers work in pairs and make their inspections about once a month. Inspections can take place at almost any time during the day or evening and most take around 45 minutes.

Independent Custody Visitors have a working knowledge of operational procedures, detainee rights and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and undergo regular training updates to ensure their knowledge is current and relevant.

The Authority always welcomes applications from members of the community who are resident in Cambridgeshire, or who work or study here.

### **Comments from the Local Custody Visitor Chair's**

#### **Tom Quilligan, Chair of the Huntingdon ICV Panel**

The Huntingdon Custody Visitors Panel comprises 13 members of the public who live in the Huntingdon

area. They give freely of their time to visit the custody facilities at Huntingdon and St. Neot's police stations. Member turnover within the panel is low, typically about 2 per year, therefore the panel has very many years experience. Members make, on average, one visit every six weeks with visits lasting about half an hour.

As in previous years, compliance with PACE codes was found to be very high. The panel found that staff in the custody suites were conscientious and hard working. Indeed, much of the anecdotal evidence of this came from detainees themselves. The Police Force values the contribution of the Visitors Panel and is responsive to any concerns.

The fabric of the custody estate has improved recently and the panel hopes that it will now be easier to maintain high standards. The cleaning service, which was seen to be sporadic in previous years, has also improved and the panel hopes this effort can be sustained.

#### **Peter Kerswell, Chair of the Cambridge/Ely ICV Panel**

During the past year the members of the Cambridge Independent Custody Visitors Panel have worked well together.

Unfortunately we have lost three members of the team because of ill health. Two have had to retire completely whilst one has taken temporary leave of absence.

Many members of the Panel have attended courses which proved to be interesting and informative.

The Custody Suites at Parkside and Ely Police Stations have been upgraded. The Custody Visitors note that detainees are still defacing the cells with graffiti.

#### **Andrew Wilcox, Chair of the Peterborough/Fenland ICV Panel**

The Peterborough and Fenland Panel has a membership of 15 people who visit the Custody suites at Thorpe Wood and Bridge Street in Peterborough and those at Wisbech and March.

During the year a number of alterations have been made to improve the custody suites. Upgrade work has been completed at Thorpe Wood. CCTV coverage has been improved along with life signs monitoring systems installed in additional cells.

The Panel have concerns over the availability of access to exercise for persons detained over 24 hours, PACE states "Brief outdoor exercise should be offered daily if practicable."

During the course of the year the custody staff have been observed working in a professional and caring manner. They should be commended for their commitment in maintaining high standards of care for those people detained in custody.

### Activities and Events held during the year

During 2008/09, the Police Authority organised the following events for our Independent Custody Visitors:



- Three ICVA training sessions, covering various areas of Custody Visiting.
- A Social/Training Evening, with a presentation on the treatment of mentally disordered or mentally vulnerable detained persons within custody.
- Hosted a highly successful Regional Independent Custody Visiting Association Conference at which delegates received presentations on topics including; an update on ICVA; Roles and Responsibilities of the Custody Sergeant; IPCC Learning the Lessons (Deaths in Custody) and the Constabulary's Medical Providers.
- Seven Custody Visitors and one Police Authority Member from Cambridgeshire attended the 2008 ICVA National Conference. Delegates enjoyed an informative and interesting day. Topics included Improving Custody, Raising Community Awareness; the HMIC/P Inspection of Police Custody Facilities; Supporting Independent Monitoring Boards and the ICVA launch of the new training material.

### Noteworthy Items

- As part of the Police Authority's commitment to assess the work of the Police Authority in its delivery of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and its policies. The Authority Officers commissioned a review of the scheme to be included within its Internal Audit Programme for 2008/09.

The Auditors concluded that the Authority can take "substantial" assurance that the controls

upon which the organisation relies to manage this area are effective.

- The Police Authority continued to deliver throughout 2008/09 Independent Custody Visiting training to recently recruited Custody staff. The PA Custody Visitors Panel Chairman also briefs Police Officers under training as custody staff on the Custody Visiting Scheme.
- Operation Safeguard - During 2008/09 Cambridgeshire Constabulary was also involved in the holding of people who could not be accommodated in prisons. Some 162 prisoners were detained at Bridge Street, Peterborough. These detainees were also offered visits by the Custody Visitors.

### Conclusion

The role of the Independent Custody Visitors is a crucial element in providing the public with reassurance that the police are acting properly and within the law when dealing with people assisting them with their enquiries.

The Police Authority is grateful for and acknowledges the contribution of the Independent Custody Visitors.



**If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor then please contact:-**

Natalie Cooper (ICV Scheme Co-ordinator)  
Cambridgeshire Police Authority  
Hinchingsbrooke Park  
Huntingdon  
PE29 6NP  
Tel: 01480 425990

Email: [police.authority@cambs.pnn.police.uk](mailto:police.authority@cambs.pnn.police.uk)

Information about the scheme is also available on the Authority's Internet Website:

[www.cambs-pa.gov.uk](http://www.cambs-pa.gov.uk)

**Detailed Statistical data on the visits carried out by Custody Visitors within Cambridgeshire can be viewed as a separate appendix on our website.**