



Wiltshire & Swindon ICV Scheme

Annual report 2023

Introduction by PCC Chief Executive, Naji Darwish

“Independent Custody Visitors (ICV’s) offer an extra level of protection to detained persons by providing independent scrutiny of their treatment and the conditions in which they are held.

By giving approved members of the local community an opportunity to observe, comment and report on these matters, the OPCC hopes to reassure the community, improve citizens' understanding of procedures at police stations and strengthen their confidence that these are being properly applied.

ICV schemes are an essential tool for ensuring transparency in custody, which is an area of policing that is often hidden. The Police and Crime Commissioner is keen to continue to invest in these kinds of schemes to hold these operational areas of policing to account.”

Custody Inspector Ho Tsang:

“The ICV scheme is a vital service provided by our volunteers. It ensures that our Custody function stands up to independent scrutiny and the importance of this cannot be overestimated. Our volunteers also act as a critical friend, and the feedback they provide is highly valued. I would like to thank our volunteers for taking time to complete this vital role.”

Background

In 1981 several outbreaks of unrest occurred in major cities throughout the country. The most significant of these disorders took place in Brixton when hundreds of young people attacked property and the police. After days of unrest, these serious incidents led to the government ordering an urgent inquiry and appointing Lord Scarman to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the events.

As part of the recommendations arising from the investigation and following report, Lord Scarman advocated a system for members of the public from local communities to inspect the way the police detained people in their custody. Originally referred to as lay visiting, independent custody visiting is the system that has been developed to meet this recommendation.

The Police and Crime Act 2002 made custody visiting statutory with the Home Office introducing the Codes of Practice for Independent Custody Visiting. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 introduced Police and Crime Commissioners and gave them the responsibility for operating and overseeing the scheme in their police area.

Introduction to Independent Custody Visitors

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from our local community who visit police custody suites in pairs, unannounced, to check on the welfare of detainees, ensuring that their rights are upheld. ICVs also undertake checks on the custody environment to ensure it is safe and of a good standard.

If any concerns are identified, they are raised by ICVs initially with the Custody Police Sergeant and via the Police and Crime Commissioner's office for discussion with senior officers in charge of custody matters. Updates on progress made in relation to matters of concern are provided to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in a timely manner.

Any overarching themes are fed into the appropriate governance boards for consideration of further action to be taken if appropriate. The ICVs' role offers protection to detainees and transparency of detention processes.

Police custody in Wiltshire and Swindon

Melksham Custody closed on February 20th, 2023, for a full refurbishment. Melksham Custody is over 20 years old and in need of significant investment to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. A planned reopening in May 2024 will offer Wiltshire Police a facility which can keep detainees safe as well as offering the best opportunity for evidence collection and preservation.

Since February, all detainees have been located at Gablecross in Swindon. There are a total of thirty-nine cells at the station available for use.

Swindon Custody. Gablecross Police Station, Shrivenham Road, South Marston, Swindon, SN3 4 RB.

Melksham Custody Melksham Divisional Police HQ, Hampton Park West, Melksham, SN12 6QQ.

Custody demographics 2022-2023

Arrival Fiscal Year	A1. Indian	A2. Pakistani	A3. Bangladeshi	A4. Chinese	A9. Any other Asian background	B1. Caribbean	B2. African	B9. Any other Black background	M1. White and Black Caribbean	M2. White and Black African	M3. White and Asian	M9. Any other mixed	NS. Not stated	O2. Arab	O9. Any other	W1. British	W2. Irish	W3. Gypsy or Irish Traveler	W9. Any other white background	Total
Q1 2022-2023	25	7	11	2	14	30	35	38	31	8	11	17	106	2	9	1618	19	2	141	2126
Q2 2022-2023	28	6	9	4	20	29	50	28	35	8	5	16	100	2	8	1765	17	1	127	2258
Q3 2022-2023	22	9	3	7	38	26	42	32	45	5	11	20	106	3	9	1688	14	1	147	2228
Q4 2022-2024	31	9	12	2	39	31	33	27	45	11	9	30	99	3	21	1717	25	3	142	2289
2022 2023	106	31	35	15	111	116	160	125	156	32	36	83	411	10	47	6788	75	7	557	8901

Arrival Fiscal Year	F	M	U	Total
Q1 2022-2023	353	1773	0	2126
Q2 2022-2023	335	1922	1	2258
Q3 2022-2023	337	1891	0	2228
Q4 2022-2024	328	1961	0	2289
2022 2023	1353	7547	1	8901

Wiltshire ICV Scheme

The ICVWS are a group of dedicated volunteers, many have been supporting the scheme for several years and offer considerable experience and commitment. At the panel meeting on December 5th, 8 of the ICV's were presented with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of 5 years' service.

The volunteers are divided into two groups: one for Swindon and the other Melksham. Melksham currently has eight volunteers, four male and four female; 2 ICV's retired from the scheme this year. The Swindon team consists of five volunteers, two male and three female: one retired from the scheme this year.

A Rota is prepared by the Scheme Co-Ordinator, and schedules weekly visits to the custody by two named volunteers.

Governance

The PCC has overall responsibility for overseeing the maintenance and operation of an effective Independent Custody Visiting Scheme for Wiltshire. However, the day-to day operation and management of the ICV's is the responsibility of the Scheme Manager, who is a member of the OPCC.

The ICV Scheme Coordinator/Panel Chair was elected at the Panel meeting on September 14th. The Scheme Co-Ordinator is integral to the interface between the ICV's and the OPCC, however all ICV's have access to the ICV email and can contact the Scheme Manager at any time to raise any concerns or questions.

The main duties of the ICV Panel Chair are to oversee the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. To monitor the wellbeing of fellow Independent Custody Visitors and liaise with the Scheme Manager on issues arising. To co-ordinate visits by confirming the availability of Visitors and devising a visit schedule for each quarter.

A ROLE DESCRIPTION: INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITOR can be found at Appendix A and outlines the responsibilities of the role.

During a visit it is important that ICV's are supported and encouraged to raise any concerns they may have. Confidence in the escalation process is essential and they are all given copies of the ICV Handbook which outlines the process.

Small issues are resolved by staff on duty at the time of the visit. Issues that ICVs could not resolve within the visit are escalated to the scheme manager and coordinator to resolve. ICV's regularly report feeling welcome and supported by staff as part of their visit. There have been no thematic or serious issues reported that required escalation through the OPCC to the Chief Constable or senior police staff.

Custody Inspectors and the Scheme Manager meet quarterly to discuss matters of mutual interest in relation to the operation of police custody suites/custody visiting.

Meetings will also consider and discuss outcomes from HMICFRS inspection reports of Force custody. The Scheme Manager will also identify any specific issue areas that require monitoring by ICVs and highlight these in the quarterly WICVS Newsletter.

Groups will meet jointly on a six-monthly basis in December and June each year. This allows the opportunity for open discussion between ICV's, the OPCC and custody staff. This is also an opportunity for the OPCC to thank volunteers and support them further through training and development.

Custody events

On 21/08/2023 Gablecross Custody Suite was closed due to a flea infestation; the custody suite was cleared of detainees that day. To prevent further infestation, no one was allowed to enter the custody suite unless operationally necessary. The infestation was treated as a matter of urgency.

Whilst the facility was out of use neighboring forces in Gloucester, Avon and Somerset, and Dorset were utilized to mitigate the impact on day-to-day policing.

ICV visits were suspended for the short time the custody suite was unavailable. As detainees were no longer present the incident did not affect the scheme or compromise the welfare of detainees.

Custody data and ICV visits

Wiltshire	Total number of detainees through custody	Number of ICV visits	Total number of detainees in custody at time of ICV visits	Total number of detainees unavailable	Number of detainees observed	Total number of detainees agreeing to visit / Interview
October to December 2021	2005	15	89	22	17	65
January to March 2022	1927	8	26	8	7	14
April to June 2022	2126	14	65	15	17	33
July to September 2022	2258	14	83	7	18	58
October to December 2022	2228	15	74	9	21	44
January to March 2023*	2289	9	63	20	14	48
April to June 2023	2378	2	16	2	2	12
July to Sept. 2023	2455	5	61	22	15	39
October to December 2023	2464					

*Melksham Custody closed February 20th.

ICV Comments and impact

Gable Cross Independent Custody Visits

September	No. of detainees (No. seen)		Comments
	Adult	Youth	
24th	9 (6)	2 (2)	Calm custody suite looked after well. Friendly staff.
28th	8 (5)	0	Quiet suite. Sgt. was very good, friendly, welcoming and engaged with ICV activities

November	No. of detainees (No. seen)		Comments
	Adult	Youth	
8th	7 (6)	0	No comments
15th	15 (8)	0	Busy custody suite-no concerns. Staff polite to us and detainees. Requests being fulfilled-officers noting requests from detainees.
30th			Visit failed; police staff failed to facilitate.

Appendix A.

ROLE DESCRIPTION: INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITOR

Key duties and responsibilities:

1. To arrange custody visits with fellow custody visitors, in line with the agreed schedules/Rota prepared by the Scheme Coordinator.
2. To keep the Scheme Coordinator and fellow custody visitors informed of any problems with scheduled custody visits.
3. To carry out visits to designated custody suites in line with the scheme guidelines, ICVA Custody Visiting Code of Practice and training.
4. To check on the conditions in which detainees are kept, particularly their health, well-being, rights, and entitlements, with reference to PACE Code C. This will include:
 - a. Clarifying and checking any concerns raised by the detainee, consulting the custody record where appropriate.
 - b. Discussing with the Custody staff any concerns and requests arising from the custody visit and bringing to the Custody Sergeants attention any matters requiring immediate attention.
 - c. Completing the Independent Custody Visitor Report Form (either electronically or on paper), ensuring that relevant information is recorded correctly, clearly, and concisely.
 - d. Share literature with details of partner agencies that can offer support and guidance to detainees both in custody and after release
 - e. To distribute the visits forms either via email or post as per scheme requirements
 - f. To notify the Scheme Coordinator of issues that need to be escalated and brought to the attention of the Scheme Manager.
5. To complete and submit expense claims in line with the scheme guidelines.
6. To attend continuous professional development training events as requested by the Scheme Manager.
7. To attend panel meetings of Independent Custody Visitors.
8. To carry out the duties of an Independent Custody Visitor having due regard to the health and safety requirements of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.
9. To notify the Scheme Coordinator and the Scheme Manager of any changes to your contact details as soon as practicable, or any changes which may affect your ability to carry out your role impartially.
10. Not to disclose details about any detainee you have spoken to, to any person, except those concerned with their detention.
11. Not to disclose details of any person you have met in custody on social media, to the press or any other media outlet.