

Welcome to the Annual Report of Norfolk's Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

This report covers the period
1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011
and provides an overview
of the Scheme



Norfolk's Independent Custody
Visiting Scheme is managed
by Norfolk Police Authority

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme is the well-established system whereby volunteers visit police stations to check on the treatment of detainees and the conditions in which they are held. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) also ensure that the rights and entitlements of the detainees are being observed, which in turn offers protection to both detainees and the police and reassurance and confidence to the community at large.

ORGANISATION OF THE SCHEME IN NORFOLK

As at 31 March 2011, there are 30 Independent Custody Visitors serving the Scheme across the county.

The Scheme as a whole has historically been operated by five panels ensuring visits are undertaken at all of Norfolk's custody facilities (Norwich, Great Yarmouth, North Walsham, King's Lynn, Thetford and Dereham police stations), however throughout the course of 2011, six Police Investigation Centres (PICs) will be opened in a joint venture between Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies and Police Authorities. The PICs will provide vastly improved custody facilities and services to support operational officers. As a result, Norfolk Police Authority reviewed the configuration of its current Panels and, noting that four of the six PICs are located in Norfolk, reduced the number of Panels from five to four with effect from 1 April 2011.

Each Panel nominates from amongst its Independent Custody Visitors a 'Co-ordinator', whose responsibility it is to produce a rota of visits, as well as a quarterly update relating to visits in their area which are monitored by the Police Authority.

Pictured: Police Investigation Centre at Aylsham



The Custody Visiting Scheme seeks to be representative of our communities, including different ethnic origins, males and females, and different age ranges. The appointment of new members to the Scheme takes account of the need to preserve and enhance this diversity.

The following table provides a breakdown of the age, gender and ethnicity of our current custody visitors:

Norfolk ICVs Data						Ethnic break-down of total population (Norfolk) Source: ONS data 2007
Gender:		Age:		Ethnic Group:		
Male	57%	18-30	3%	White	97%	95.98%
Female	43%	31-45	0%	Mixed Ethnicity	3%	1.00%
		46-60	34%	Asian or Asian British	0%	1.30%
		61-75	63%	Black or Black British	0%	0.79%
		75+	0%	Chinese or other ethnic group	0%	0.94%

ISSUES REPORTED FROM CUSTODY VISITS

No issue of serious harm or threat has been reported from visits undertaken throughout the past year and, in fact, 86 comments were logged whereby detained persons had specifically commented that they were satisfied with their treatment whilst in police custody.

Custody Visitors have highlighted issues in relation to the fabric of the building, e.g. a light was not working, a tap was not working properly, a gap by the vents in one cell and graffiti in a few circumstances. In all cases, the Constabulary has responded immediately and satisfactorily addressed the matters.

Under the scrutiny requirements of the UN Optional Protocol against Torture, the UK has an obligation to ensure regular and independent inspection of all places of detention. To meet this requirement, HMIC and HMIP have established a programme of inspections of custody conditions in all police forces, with individual published reports for each inspection and periodic 'thematic reports' on emerging trends or findings of particular importance. The inspections look not only at the implementing of statutory requirements, but also at the conditions of detention and the treatment of detainees.

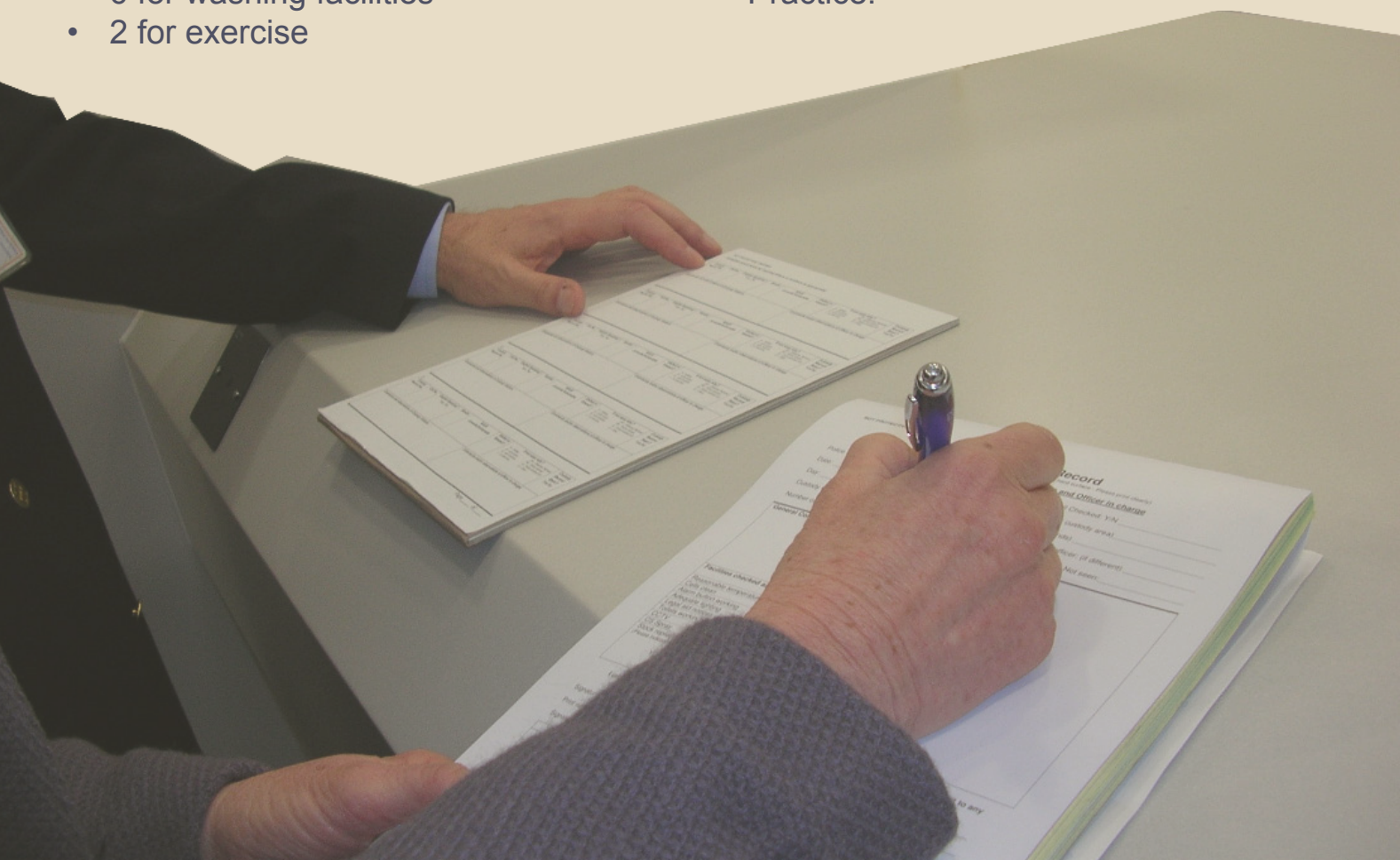
Whilst Norfolk has yet to be inspected, our ICVs have been focusing on the findings in other areas and, as a result, have assisted the Constabulary in tightening up their policies, not least in relation to the dignity of detained persons whilst in police custody. An example of this relates to procedures for female detainees and now all females are offered the opportunity to speak to a female officer so that any specific requirements can be catered for.

In addition, ICVs visiting Norwich highlighted that the shower areas were stocked with bars of soap and, following investigation, soap dispensers were fitted to improve hygiene in this area.

The exercise yard at Thetford had been fitted with a roof during 2009, however in the summer of 2010 when the temperatures soared, this roof acted as a 'lid' making the area very stuffy for anyone requiring fresh air. ICVs championed a remedy to this and improvements were made to allow air to be circulated more effectively.

In addition, as a result of conversations with detainees, custody visitors have recorded the following requests which were raised with custody staff and subsequently dealt with:

- 15 for blankets
- 12 for refreshments
- 6 to see a solicitor
- 6 to make a phone call or have someone informed
- 14 to see a doctor or receive medication
- 6 for washing facilities
- 2 for exercise
- 3 for reading material
- 8 minor cleanliness issues
- 3 requests for toilet paper
- 1 request for their spectacles
- 1 request for nicotine substitute
- 1 request for a copy of the Codes of Practice.



VISITING STATISTICS

During the period covered, a total of 251 visits were made. 946 persons were detained in custody at the time visits were conducted and 427 of these were visited. This included 34 juveniles (people aged below 17 years). Whilst offered a visit, detained persons are not obliged to speak with ICVs and have the right to decline.

Overall, the number of detained persons visited annually compared to those available to be visited is approximately 62%, albeit it is acknowledged that there are variations for the stations visited. More detail is provided in the table on the next page.

BREAKDOWN OF VISITS CONDUCTED FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2010 TO 31 MARCH 2011

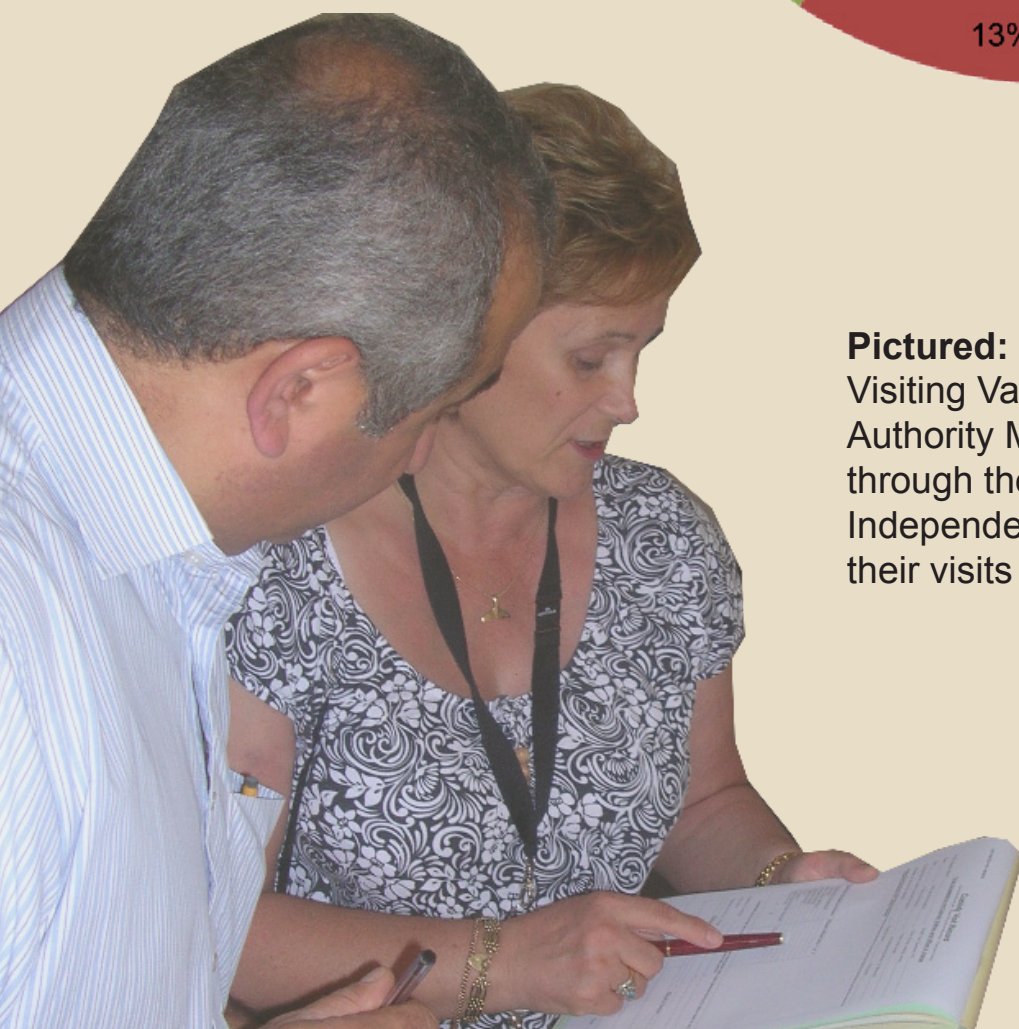
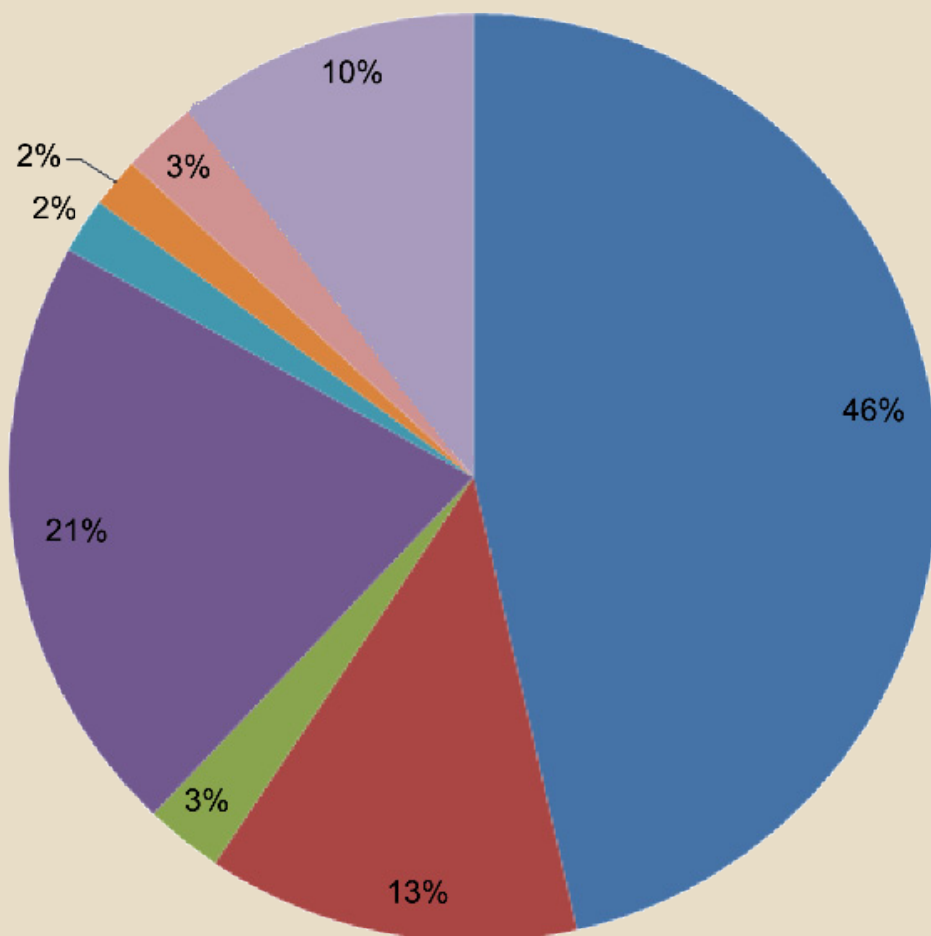
Police station visited	No. of visits	No. of DPs* held	No. of DPs available to visit	No. of DPs visited	% DPs visited (of those available)	No. of juveniles visited	No. of DPs not visited
Bethel Street (Norwich)	49	420	314	182	58%	16	238
Great Yarmouth	50	190	137	91	66%	8	99
North Walsham	45	59	48	33	69%	3	26
Aylsham**	5	9	7	4	57%	0	5
King's Lynn	51	197	138	86	62%	6	111
Thetford	48	71	50	31	62%	1	40
Dereham	3	0	0	0	n/a	0	0
Overall Total	251	946	694	427	62%	34	519

* NOTE - DP stands for 'detained person'

** Aylsham PIC opened on 28 February 2011

In addition to the visit being refused or police advising not to visit on health and safety grounds, there are a number of reasons why detained persons are not visited by ICVs. This pie chart provides an illustrative breakdown of the reasons detained persons were not available during the period:

- DP declined visit
- DP rest period/sleeping
- Visit refused by Custody Officer
- DP in interview
- DP with solicitor
- DP with doctor
- DP being released
- Other (e.g. being booked in, hospital, etc)



Pictured: Lead Member for Custody Visiting Val Jenkins talks fellow Police Authority Member Amjad Malhis through the reporting form used by the Independent Custody Visitors during their visits to Norfolk's custody facilities.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2010/11

In April 2010, the Home Office reviewed its Code of Practice with regard to custody visiting and, as a result, the Scheme updated its own Guidelines to account for any changes. The review enabled the Codes of Practice to account for any legislative changes made since 2003, particularly in respect of Safer Detention guidance issued in 2008.

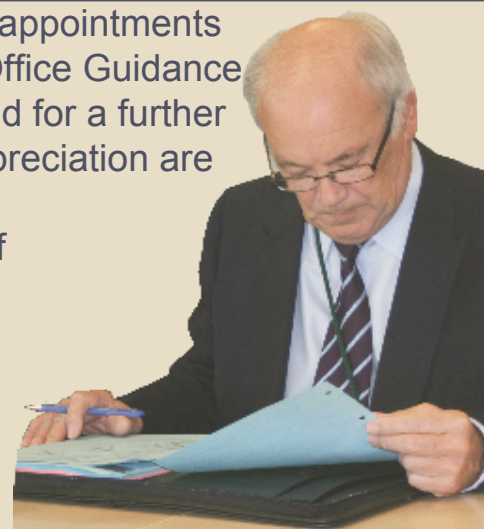
Also in April 2010, the Scheme successfully completed the design and distribution of a poster to promote the work of custody visitors around the county. The role of the ICV provides reassurance to the wider community that detainees are treated with fairness and respect, however that work goes largely unseen.



Throughout 2010/11, the Police Authority has been working alongside colleagues in Suffolk to prepare for the transition to the shared PIC facilities. As a result, the Schemes have successfully aligned their recruitment processes, Scheme Guidelines and report forms. As well as sharing best practice, such collaborative work has also provided efficiency savings for both Authorities.

In addition, the three-yearly review of our custody visitor appointments was undertaken during August 2010, in line with Home Office Guidance. Whilst this saw the majority of our visitors being appointed for a further term, six individuals left the Scheme. Our thanks and appreciation are extended to all for their considerable support and efforts. In order to ensure we maintained an adequate number of suitably trained and accredited visitors available, we subsequently embarked on a countywide recruitment campaign.

Pictured: Police Authority Member David Reeve reviewing the custody visitor appointments



During the year, the Police Authority was pleased to formally recognise the valuable contribution and dedication of another of its ICVs. A certificate to commemorate 10 years service and support for the Scheme was awarded to the individual, two years of which were recognised for her additional support in the Co-ordinator role.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR

During 2010/11, Norfolk Police Authority organised for Independent Custody Visitors to:

- Observe police officer training for using CS spray / restraint techniques and emergency restraint belts
- Attend refresher training sessions including 'back to basics', diversity and Children's Act requirements, Safer Detention, improved ICV Report Form completion and 'informing the police' risk assessment processes
- Attend the National ICVA Conference during November 2010 in Leeds
- Attend the Regional ICVA Conference in Hertfordshire during June 2010.

CONCLUSION

Independent Custody Visiting continues to be essential in providing independent scrutiny of the treatment of detained persons and the conditions in which they are held. As well as the mutual level of protection it offers, the Scheme draws on the commitment of volunteers, helps to build partnerships between the police and the communities they serve, and raise confidence and satisfaction generally.

The commitment and enthusiasm on the part of Panel members is substantial, and continued thanks go to all those who give freely of their time in support of Independent Custody Visiting in Norfolk.

The Authority is pleased that the continuing visits to all of the police stations across Norfolk indicate that the treatment of detained persons held in custody is fair and in accordance with the rules and regulations as outlined in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (referred to as PACE), and the associated Codes of Practice relating to detained persons.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Custody Visitor, please contact:

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For more information regarding the role of Norfolk Police Authority, please visit our website: www.norfolk-pa.gov.uk

For more information regarding the role of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA), please visit their website: www.icva.org.uk

