



What is an Independent Custody Visitor?

Who can be an Independent Custody Visitor?

Independent Custody Visitors are members of the local community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the welfare of people in police custody. They come from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community. They must be over 18 and have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system, for example, serving police officers or special constables are not able to apply. Other people such as solicitors or probation officers may be excluded, to prevent possible conflict of interests for the individual. This maintains the independence of the scheme as a whole.

When and where are visits made?

Independent Custody Visitors visit police stations in pairs once a week. The actual timing of visits is entirely a matter for the Independent Custody Visitors, but should be random and unannounced. Independent Custody Visitors will normally only visit those police stations within their local area.

What happens when Independent Custody Visitors make a visit?

Independent Custody Visitors must maintain their independence and impartiality. They do not take sides but look, listen and report on what they find in the custody unit. On arrival at the police station, Independent Custody Visitors will be escorted to the custody area. The detainees will be identified by their custody numbers and strict rules of confidentiality will apply. Independent Custody Visitors may occasionally be denied immediate access to the custody unit for safety reasons and asked to wait. Interviews with detainees are carried out within sight, but out of hearing of the escorting officer, for Independent Custody Visitors' protection.

Reporting procedures

A report is completed after each visit. It provides an insight into the running of the custody area at the time of the visit. Copies of the reports are available to the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and other Independent Custody Visitors. They provide a vital source of information on the custody environment and welfare conditions in which detainees are held. The information is analysed and the areas for action are taken forward as appropriate.



Independent Custody Visitors are expected to attend local panel meetings quarterly. These are attended by the ICV Scheme Manger, fellow Independent Custody Visitors and the local Custody Inspector.

Other duties

Independent Custody Visitors must treat as confidential the details of what they see and hear on their visit.

How are Independent Custody Visitors selected and trained?

Volunteers wishing to become Independent Custody Visitors will need to complete an application form and a Surrey Police vetting form. They will then be invited to attend an interview. Interviews are normally held every nine months or so depending upon vacancies, however all applications will be held on file until the next round of recruitment.

Successful applicants attend a one day induction training day organised by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey. The training programme is made up of practical and theoretical exercises covering all aspects of custody visiting and is complemented by a set of guidelines and the basic principles of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). Independent Custody Visitors need to have a sound knowledge and thorough understanding of detainee rights and police responsibilities in order to perform their role effectively.

All volunteers are issued with an official identity card which they must use when visiting. Further training sessions are arranged locally to keep Independent Custody Visitors informed on new developments and to share experiences.

Newly appointed Independent Custody Visitors complete a probationary period, and then appointments are made for a set period of three years. This is renewable subject to further appraisal and mutual agreement.