

# BRIEFING FOR POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER CANDIDATES 2024

A GUIDE TO PCCS' DUTIES TO RUN AN INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME



## INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING

Every PCC has a legal duty to run an Independent Custody Visiting scheme, in which local members of the public volunteer to serve as Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) making regular, unannounced visits to police custody to check on the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of detainees as well as the conditions they are held in.

ICVs speak to detainees, review custody records and check custody suite conditions and essential stocks such as food, clothing and religious items. ICVs ask custody staff to resolve any immediate issues and complete visit reports, alerting the PCC to their findings.

Police custody is a high-pressure, high-risk environment. Staff working in custody suites interact with and care for people in difficult circumstances. People detained might be vulnerable, distressed or challenging. They may have complex needs, including drug and alcohol issues, mental illness or physical health problems.

ICVs provide a valuable safeguard for detainees and for police forces. ICV visits help to prevent ill-treatment and harm to detainees, and Custody Inspectors value the work of the ICVs in contributing to a safe environment and continuous improvement of custody.

Through the work of ICVs, PCCs are able to give assurance to the public that people detained by the police in their force area are being treated in a lawful, ethical and transparent way.

## YOUR DUTIES AS A PCC

Custody visiting forms part of a UK-wide network to prevent torture and ill-treatment of detainees and is part of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) required under the UN convention to prevent torture.

The Code of Practice on Independent Custody Visiting sets out PCCs' responsibilities which are that:

- there is a robust and effective ICV scheme running in your area with appropriate resources and a member of staff responsible for the scheme;
- regular visits take place in all areas of police custody, including terrorism detention;
- your volunteers are trained and well-managed;
- your scheme manager gives you regular reports on issues within custody and that you can identify issues and trends;
- you have regular and formal opportunities to raise concerns with the police and that the police and partners deal with ICVs' concerns; and
- if you have a terrorism detention facility in your area, that ICVs submit their reports to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.

## IMPACT OF CUSTODY VISITING

ICVs' reports regularly result in improvements throughout custody. Working together with partners throughout the police service, ICVA has used information gathered by ICVs and OPCC staff to impact meaningful changes such as a reduction in lighting levels to ensure detainees are able to get their legally entitled uninterrupted periods of rest, and the establishment of a new referral pathway for those who may be experiencing symptoms of the perimenopause/menopause in police custody.

## THE INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING ASSOCIATION (ICVA)

ICVA is a national organisation that leads, supports and represents custody visiting schemes.

PCCs in every policing region nominate a representative to ICVA's National Expert Forum to represent local schemes.

ICVA provides resources, support and representation that equip PCCs and their staff to deliver high-quality schemes. This includes:

- Representation at national meetings with the Home Office, National Police Chiefs Council and National Preventive Mechanism.
- Policy briefings, updates, training and guidance.
- An active members' website that provides a library of resources and a forum for discussion.
- A Quality Assurance Framework.
- Regular events and network meetings to share good practice and resources.
- ICVA represents England and Wales at the National Preventive Mechanism for the UK, helping to meet to UK duties under OPCAT and to share learning across detention settings.

For further information, visit [icva.org.uk](https://icva.org.uk), follow us on X @CustodyVisiting or e-mail [info@icva.org.uk](mailto:info@icva.org.uk).