

A day in the life of a custody visitor



Mr X is one of Norfolk Police Authority's Independent Custody Visitors - the volunteers who, working in pairs, attend Norfolk's custody facilities unannounced to check on the welfare of detainees and the conditions in which they are held. His work is largely unseen, but today Mr X shares his experiences of a typical 'visit' to custody:

"On arriving at the Police Investigation Centre (PIC), the detention officer collects us and escorts us to the charge desk so we can speak to the Custody Sergeant. There are only two detainees in custody today, and the Sergeant advises that one of them presents no issues, however the other has a mental health condition and is, therefore, being observed more closely. The Sergeant escorts us to wing A, where she 'introduces' us to the detained person to seek their permission

for the visit to go ahead. It is important that detainees understand that we do not need to know their name or the reason for their arrest - it is not relevant to our 'check'. The Custody Sergeant also requests permission for us to view the detention log (the register of events that have taken place since the person arrived in police custody) so that we can check what we are being told by the detainee against what custody staff have recorded. The detainee answers 'yes' to both questions and so we step to the door of the cell and ask some questions about how the person has been treated since being in police custody and make sure that their rights and entitlements have been upheld in line with PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act). The detainee is very upbeat and pleased with the care they have received whilst in police custody. This person has been in overnight as they are to attend court this morning. It is noted that reading material has been provided, so we are pleased to see that they haven't been staring at the walls for hours on end! We conclude our conversation and exit the cell. The Sergeant then escorts us to another cell where the other detainee is being held. Again, the Sergeant 'introduces' us and the individual agrees to the visit. The detainee is very open about their issues and how they manage them, and also acknowledges the potential impact if in custody for a long period of time. We continue to ask questions relating to the individual's care whilst in custody and again the detainee is content with their treatment, particularly given that he had seen a doctor not long after arrival at the suite. We exit the cell and talk with the Custody Sergeant to make sure they are aware of the issues that had been discussed (which they are). We are reminded that the cell is monitored by CCTV so officers are able to keep a close eye on the individual from their workstation, as well as conducting face-to-face checks at certain times. We are reassured that custody staff have the detainee's welfare needs managed as best as possible.

We then perform checks of other areas of the Police Investigation Centre. The new PICs are very good facilities and there is so much natural light compared with the previous custody suites that everything looks much cleaner. We do our usual checks of the empty cells, showers and food preparation areas, and also check the interview rooms to make sure they are in a good state of repair. As the PICs are much larger facilities than we have been used to, we 'sample' the areas we inspect so that we can manage the amount of time we spend in the facility.



Ultimately, whilst a statutory function, we don't want the officer escorting us to be prevented from getting on with other duties for too long. Once all this is done, the Custody Sergeant prints the detention logs that we have permission to see and escorts us to a designated waiting room. This provides us with some privacy to review the detention logs, discuss the visit and write it up formally on our ICV Report Form. It is through this form that the Police Authority are able to monitor the types of issues being encountered and discussed by ICVs and they can then monitor any trends across the county and resolve them in conjunction with the Constabulary.

Once we have completed our report forms, we use the buzzer to attract the attention of the



Custody Sergeant who collects us once more. We are then able to have a discussion with the Sergeant regarding any queries that may have been highlighted when reviewing the detention log and allow them to make comments on areas we have flagged within our report. We are pleased to say that today we have experienced another positive visit, whereby detainees have commented that they are being treated fairly and appropriately, and the conditions within which they are held are satisfactory.”

**For more information on the role of the Independent Custody Visitors, please visit:
www.norfolk-pa.gov.uk/visiting.cfm**