

OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR LANCASHIRE

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITOR SCHEME

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE SCHEME?

Independent Custody Visiting is a statutory requirement of Police and Crime Commissioners of which the purpose is to provide independent oversight of the detention of people in police custody. The aim of this is to provide the public with confidence that the police treat people lawfully and with respect.

Police and Crime Commissioners are responsible for maintaining and administering an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in their area. Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local community who volunteer to check on the welfare of people detained in police custody.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A CUSTODY VISITOR?

ICVs check on the welfare of people detained in police custody and the operation in practice of the statutory and other rules governing their welfare. Their main role is to look, listen and report what they observe during the visit. Most detainees welcome the opportunity to speak with an ICV, however, some may not. ICVs are required to maintain independence and impartiality at all times.

WHO ARE CUSTODY VISITORS?

There are no qualifications needed but applicants must:

- Be over 18 years of age;
- Live or work in Lancashire;
- Be a resident in the UK for at least three years;
- Demonstrate excellent oral and written communication skills;
- Demonstrate sufficient time, flexibility and commitment to carry out the role of a custody visitor;
- Be independent from the police, impartial and work in a non-discriminatory way; and
- Be able to maintain confidentiality.

Please see Person Specification for additional criteria.

ICVs cannot be serving Magistrates, police officers, police community support officers (PCSO), special constables, police staff or OPCC staff. All applications will be considered, however, care will be taken to avoid any potential conflict of interest. Applicants who have previously served as Magistrates, police officers, PCSOs, special constables, police or OPCC staff and are no longer in this role must allow a 12 month time lapse from their employment prior to applying for the role of ICV. This is to preserve the independency of the scheme. Special consideration will be given to the appointment of solicitors, employees of the probation service and persons closely working within the criminal justice system.

HOW ARE CUSTODY VISITORS APPOINTED?

Applicants will be shortlisted based on the information provided in the application form and invited for interview. It is important that application forms are completed fully and evidence of the qualities sought in an ICV are provided. All unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing. Applications are welcome from all sectors of the community, particularly young people and ethnic/diverse minority groups.

Successful applicants will be subject to a criminal records check, although it should be noted that having a criminal record or unspent convictions is not an automatic barrier to becoming an ICV. Individual circumstances will be assessed against the needs of the post and suitability of the applicant. All appropriate applications from members of the public are considered on their own merits.

Appointment of an ICV is dependent upon a satisfactory vetting result with Lancashire Constabulary and is initially for a three year period and will be confirmed following the satisfactory completion of a six-month probationary period. ICVs will then have the opportunity to be re-appointed every three years following a full re-assessment of suitability for the role (ICVs will be required to complete vetting renewal prior to the renewal of existing contracts). Re-appointment will be based on the continuing ability and willingness to perform the role effectively.

HOW DOES THE SCHEME OPERATE?

ICVs are appointed to one of four Panels and will undertake weekly visits at one of the following custody suites:

Eastern Area Panel - Custody Suite Blackburn
Northern Area Panel - Custody Suite in Lancaster
Western Area Panel - Custody Suite in Blackpool
Southern Area- Custody Suite in Preston

The Police & Crime Commissioner will reimburse all reasonable travelling expenses of ICVs.

TIME COMMITMENT

On average, an ICV would be expected to make a visit once every four weeks. A visit may only take a few minutes or last a couple of hours. A rota which is prepared in advance allocates the week in which named ICVs are scheduled to undertake a visit. Although visits can be undertaken 24 hours a day, seven days a week, ICVs will, at times, be required to undertake visits on weekends and during unsociable hours.

HOW ARE VISITS CONDUCTED?

Unannounced visits are made with a fellow ICV within the designated period on the rota. ICVs are permitted into the cells by custody staff who remain in view but out of earshot. It should be noted that all detainees have the right to refuse a visit and the Custody Officer may also refuse access, although the Custody Officer must provide a rationale. ICVs must confine their conversation to the detainee's welfare and the custodial arrangements.

Detainees are not advised of the Custody Visitors' names and Custody Visitors are not advised of the detainee's name or reason for detention. Custody staff will escort ICVs throughout the custody suite and any risks are properly managed.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A VISIT?

ICVs will report directly to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) detailing any issues that arise during an ICV visit to consider if appropriate action is required.

Recommendations made by ICVs can require the police to make improvements for the welfare of detainees. Any issues requiring immediate action are brought to the attention of the Custody Officer at the time of the visit.

HOW ARE CUSTODY VISITORS TRAINED?

New ICVs are issued with a handbook and attend an induction training session. They gain “on the job” experience by working with experienced ICVs. Additional training is offered via training sessions and the annual Regional ICV Conference. Quarterly Panel Meetings also provide a further opportunity for training.

HOW IS THE SCHEME MONITORED?

The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner on behalf of the Commissioner monitors the operation of the Scheme. The OPCC is responsible for appointing ICVs and making any changes necessary for the benefit of the Scheme. The OPCC produces an Annual Report relating to the Scheme.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the work of the Police & Crime Commissioner or the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme, please contact:-

Mrs Anna Cooke, Scheme Administrator, Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner.

E-mail: commissioner@lancashire-pcc.gov.uk Tel: 01772 533587