



ICV History

Introduction

Custody visiting allows members of the public to check on the welfare of people being detained in police custody and its origins date back to the 1980s following the Scarman Report into the Brixton Disorders of 1981. The then government welcomed custody visiting as a means of bringing the police and the community closer together, partly from having a better understanding of what goes on in police stations.

Custody visitors are appointed to local panels, each of which appoints its own co-ordinator, who draws up the rota for visits. There are 6 panels in Kent, which are responsible for undertaking visits to police stations at not less than monthly intervals, in accordance with the Authority's current guidelines.

Although Independent Custody visitors are voluntary (unpaid members of the local community) they do receive traveling expenses (mileage/parking) when undertaking visits.

Independent Custody Visitor Process

Custody visitors attend police stations where those arrested are detained, in pairs, at any time. The visits are unannounced and custody visitors carry out their inspection of custody conditions and talk privately with those detainees who agree to be seen by custody visitors. Discussion is confined to the conditions under which detainees are being held and how they are being treated; NOT the reasons why they are in custody.

After inspecting the custody centre, custody visitors complete a report, leaving the original copy with the custody officer and sending a copy to the Authority.

Independent Custody Visitors - Profile

Custody visitors are ordinary members of the public, living in Kent and over 18 years of age. No formal qualifications are required but they need to be independent persons of good character who are able to make informed judgements. Ideally, custody visitors represent a good cross-section of the community in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. They should enjoy the confidence of the local community and be seen as fair critics by the police. Confidentiality and impartiality are key aspects to custody visiting.

Appointment Process

Anyone interested in becoming a custody visitor is asked to complete an application form. Applicants may then be invited for an interview, involving the local Panel Co-ordinator and a member of the Authority's Secretariat staff.

Once appointed, custody visitors attend a training session and are issued with an identify card which will enable them to enter police stations. Initially, visits will be undertaken under the guidance of the Panel Co-ordinator. Further training together with opportunities to attend meetings (local and county-wide) and conferences will be available.

Custody Visitors are initially appointed for four years (with a 6 month probationary period), after which appointments are reviewed. Refresher training will be provided after four years.

To prevent possible conflicts of interest for the individual and to maintain the independence of the Scheme as a whole, applicants should not have any direct or indirect involvement in the criminal justice system. This includes being a magistrate, a serving police officer or special constable (depending on when and where) probation officer or solicitor.

Anyone who, within the last five years has served imprisonment or who has been convicted of an offence that could carry a prison term will not be considered. Applicants must agree to police checks being carried out.

For any further information, please contact:

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Please also see the Independent Custody Visiting Association's (ICVA) website:
www.icva.org.uk