

Independent Custody Visitors' Newsletter

December 2011

To all Independent Custody Visitors and Independent CCTV Monitoring Volunteers, with a particular welcome to those volunteers who are new to their role.

Sussex Police Authority is now in its final year of operation, and will be replaced by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex in November 2012. Although it is not clear how many of the existing functions of the Authority will transfer to the PCC, I can confirm that the vital independent custody visiting role will be delivered under the new Police and Crime Commissioners. The statutory responsibility for independent custody visiting will transfer from police authorities, and ICVs will continue to be independent from the PCC in much the same way as they are today in their relationship with the Police Authority. ICVs will continue to provide independent oversight of the human rights of those held, and to ensure that those detained are in conditions that are suitable and conducive to the purpose for which they exist. It is often the most vulnerable members of society who end up in custody care at some point in their lives, and the role of ICVs is therefore invaluable.

Mrs Kathy Gore, DL, High Sheriff of East Sussex, visited Eastbourne Custody Centre in July. Mrs Gore is pictured here with Clif Penny, Eastbourne Panel Co-ordinator, and Inspector Charles Vine



Retirement of Chief Executive

Sussex Police Authority Chief Executive, Mr Patric Welch, will retire at the end of 2012, having seen the transition of the Police Authority to the Police and Crime Commissioner. All other staff will automatically transfer, so for you, the volunteers, the changes will be minimal. I aim to keep you all updated on this process at key stages of its development. You were all sent a survey earlier this year, aimed at gauging how much ICVs know about the current structure and their understanding of how the PCC will change the policing landscape. An overwhelming number of ICVs said they did want to know more about the way we govern the police. We are encouraged by your responses and will use a variety of methods to keep you informed about the changes that will be taking place within police accountability over the next 12 to 18 months.

Sussex Police Authority has launched a new website to explain the Transition process:

www.sussexpcc.co.uk

Recruitment Drive for New ICVs

Recruitment of more ICVs across Sussex took place in the autumn, with six new volunteers joining the Crawley and Chichester panels. More ICVs will be sought in the New Year as a number of vacancies has arisen since the last round. If you know of anyone who might be interested in this role, do please let me know.

Changes to the Process of Handling Offenders

Numbers in custody continue to fall. In Sussex in the 6 months from April to Sept 2011, there were 19,471 DPs; the projected annual figure for this financial year is 38,900. This figure is considerably down on previous years (51,000 in 2007). This reduction is due to a number of intervention methods. This year 2,700 Community Resolutions will have taken place, with Youth Triage working to divert young people from custody. QUEST is the project designed for those that do not need to be arrested for

Independent Custody Visitors' Newsletter

December 2011

interview, and can be interviewed elsewhere. Now, only the most serious offences are dealt with in custody. The custody option should be used sparingly – for top end offences and prolific offenders. Across the board, custody is seeing a reduction in the number of young people.

Trial of new Custody Arrangements

The Crawley Custody Modernisation pilot has run from 7 September, and was designed to transfer administrative tasks such as booking in, listing property and entering personal details from custody officers to custody assistants, thereby freeing up custody officers to make decisions and get a clearer understanding of all the business undertaken in the block. Additionally this will allow the Force to reduce the overall number of sergeants. The project has been very successful and it has been recommended for roll out across the Force. Due to force commitments with the Olympics and the Lib Dem conference (Operation Otter 2012), it has been decided not to activate the roll out until after Otter in September.

National Annual Conference

The ICVA National Conference was held in Belfast on 19 November 2011. Special thanks were given by the Chairman of ICVA, Mr David Wood, to Independent Custody Visitors throughout the country for their involvement, commitment and dedication. To emphasise the importance of the ICVs' role, the following statistics should be borne in mind:

50% of DPs were aged 14 or younger when last in education; 20% of male DPs and 38% of female DPs reported emotional or mental health problems; 60% have speech, language and communication difficulties; 39% of male DPs are from a BME background; 33% reported having drug problems

Mental health issues in custody were covered extensively and included a presentation on the symptoms and conditions, and also

learning disabilities. The role of the custody visitor is to recognise those symptoms.

HMIC/HMIP Inspection of Custody Facilities

Following the inspection of custody facilities earlier in the year, Independent Custody Visitors were invited to a half-day training session at Sackville House to discuss the recommendations outlined in the joint HMIC/HMIP report. Overall the report was complimentary. It listed 2 main recommendations and 18 minor recommendations; 8 housekeeping points and 3 examples of good practice.

The two main recommendations concerned:

Ligature points; and

Mental Health Act S 136 detainees

A number of cells were found to have loose scree, which could form ligature points. Spy holes were also found to pose a risk, along with gaps in hatches. Grille apertures have now been reduced to 2mm. The Force has worked to improve the level of maintenance in custody cells, and Crawley and Hastings have identified refurbishment issues which will require capital expenditure. However, none of the cells was deemed so dangerous as to require being taken out of use.

The inspection team found too many S 136 detainees in police custody. Sussex has more S 136 detainees than any other force, with an average of 1,700 in custody per year, which is over seven times as many as the next highest force. There is broad agreement that a police station should be the last place of safety for detainees of this category. However, the Force was singled out for praise for its relationship with the health care agencies. The Force Mental Health Liaison Officer continues to make great progress in forging relationships with the primary care trusts. Historically, there was no alternative place of safety for this vulnerable group of detainees but now, due to intervention by the Force Mental Health Liaison Officer, there are four places available in Sussex. Additionally, there is a Mental Health court in Brighton – one of only

Independent Custody Visitors' Newsletter

December 2011

two such courts in the country. These courts have specially trained magistrates to deal with those who present mental health problems.

Areas singled out for praise were:

- Use of Force/Significant Incidents
- Religious provisions for detainees of faith
- Handover arrangements

The Force's handover arrangements were described as the best they have seen.

Statistics

During the period 1 April 2011 – 30 September 2011, ICVs made nearly a hundred visits to police custody across Sussex. The system of self-introduction is now well embedded in the custody visiting regime and continues to show an increase in acceptance rates.

Moves and Changes

The Police Authority was sorry to say "goodbye" to the Panel Co-ordinator for Hastings, Tom Wiggins, this month. Tom was an Independent Custody Visitor for 16 years. We wish Tom all the best in his new life in the Scottish Highlands.

A new Panel Co-ordinator for Chichester has been appointed, following the resignation of John Baker earlier in the year. Lynn Limm has been a panel member for the last 5 years.

Investing in Volunteers

The Authority has submitted the ICV and CCTV Monitoring Schemes for the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) quality standard for volunteer management. The Standard is based on the four areas of volunteer management:

- planning for volunteer involvement;
- recruiting volunteers;
- selecting and matching volunteers;
- and supporting and retaining volunteers.

It is envisaged that the Scheme, in preparing for accreditation, will be more efficient in

getting the best out of its volunteers and ensuring best practice is achieved in all areas. It is expected that the award will be granted in the autumn. More details will follow.

Keeping Abreast of Authority News

Visit the Sussex Police Authority website by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.sussexpa.gov.uk/about/index.aspx>

You can also follow us on Twitter and watch live webcasts of all our committee meetings. It is also worthwhile to take a look at the ICVA website from time to time. You will be kept up to date on important changes to your role, or amendments to the Code of Practice on Independent Custody Visiting, but for more news, click on the link below:

<http://www.icva.org.uk/publications/>

Thank you

Sussex Police Authority and Sussex Police are very grateful for all your hard work and commitment throughout the year. Many of you have volunteered to undertake additional tasks, such as providing an input into the training of Reliance staff; attending Police Authority meetings, training new ICVs, attending national conferences and, more recently, providing vital input into the Investing in Volunteers accreditation process. However much or little time you have to offer, your help is very much appreciated. I would like to extend my personal thanks to you all and on behalf of Sussex Police Authority, wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Dinah

