



CUMBRIA POLICE AUTHORITY
INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME
INFORMATION SHEET

Who are Independent Custody Visitors?

Independent Custody Visitors are members of the public over 18 years of age and resident or working in Cumbria who visit police stations unannounced to check on the welfare of people in police custody.

They come from all backgrounds and have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system, for example they cannot be serving police officers, special constables, police staff or members of the Police Authority. Some other people, such as probation officers and solicitors may also be excluded to prevent possible conflicts of interest. This helps to maintain the scheme's independence.

The Police Authority has to seek to ensure that overall the Independent Custody Visitors are representative of the local community and are suitably balanced, in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. The Custody Visitors themselves must be independent people able to make informed judgements in which the community can have confidence and which the police will accept as fair criticism when it is justified.

Independent Custody Visitors are appointed for three years, subject to the completion of a six month probationary period. At the end of the initial three years period they may be re-appointed for a further three years, the maximum length of service is nine years, with the express permission of the Police Authority.

In Cumbria, Independent Custody Visitors are appointed to one of the four Panels – Barrow, Carlisle and Penrith, Kendal and West Cumbria. Each Panel is composed of 12 Custody Visitors. Within the area covered by each Panel is a main (or “designated”) police station which is visited weekly and other smaller police stations which are visited less frequently.

How are visits conducted?

Independent Custody Visitors make their visits in pairs. The timing of visits is a matter for the Independent Custody Visitors. All visits should be random and unannounced, though the Panels will operate rotas so that two pairs of Custody Visitors don't visit the same police station at the same time. Independent Custody Visitors should be admitted immediately to the custody area, unless they are asked to wait for safety reasons.

Independent Custody Visitors are escorted around the custody area. During visits, Independent Custody Visitors must remain independent and impartial. Without taking sides, they look, listen and report on what they find in the custody area. Interviews with detainees are, for the Independent Custody Visitors' safety, conducted within sight, but out of hearing, of the escorting officer.

What happens after visits?

After each visit the Independent Custody Visitors complete a form about the visit. Taken together these forms help to provide the Police Authority with a picture of the way detainees are treated in Cumbria. Any specific issues are either taken up locally or raised with the police by the Police Authority. All of the Panels meet regularly to discuss issues arising from past visits and their future visiting programme.

How are Independent Custody Visitors appointed?

Anyone wishing to become an Independent Custody Visitor must complete the Police Authority's official application form. If necessary there will be a short listing process followed by interviews for shortlisted applicants. Interviews will be held within the area of the Custody Visiting Panel to which successful applicants will be appointed.

All those selected to be an Independent Custody Visitor will then attend an induction training session. All new Independent Custody Visitors must attend this training session before commencing their six month probationary period.

Further training will be provided both formally and informally at Panel meetings.

Do Independent Custody Visitors get paid?

Independent Custody Visitors are not paid an allowance. However, the Police Authority does reimburse legitimate expenses incurred in carrying out their role. The current mileage rate is 40p per mile.

Are Independent Custody Visitors insured?

The Police Authority makes arrangements to provide insurance for Independent Custody Visitors whilst they are carrying out their role.

Further Information

For further information on Cumbria Police Authority's Independent Custody Visiting Scheme, please contact:

Joanne Thornborrow
Cumbria Police Authority
Police Authority Office
Carleton Hall
Penrith
Cumbria
CA10 2 AU

Telephone 01768 217416

E-mail joanne.thornborrow@cumbria.police.uk

For further information on Cumbria Police Authority please visit our website www.cumbriapoliceauthority.org.uk

Useful websites for further information on Independent Custody Visiting or Police Authorities in general are:

Independent Custody Visitors Association: www.icva.org.uk

Association of Police Authorities: www.apa.police.uk