



Avon & Somerset Police Authority Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

An Overview of the Custody Visiting Scheme

1. The Role of Custody Visitors

Independent custody visitors visit police stations and carry out specific checks. These ensure that people detained in police custody are being properly cared for in accordance with the guidelines and codes of practice stated in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984 (PACE).

In order to make these visits effective, visits to police stations are frequent, unannounced and random (day or night).

When making a visit, independent custody visitors' responsibilities are to observe, comment and report upon:

The legal rights of the person being detained –which include free legal advice, the right to inform someone of their detention and access to a copy of the codes of practice contained in PACE

The conditions of the facilities and environment in which they are being detained - The custody area and cells should be clean, safe and suitable for detaining people

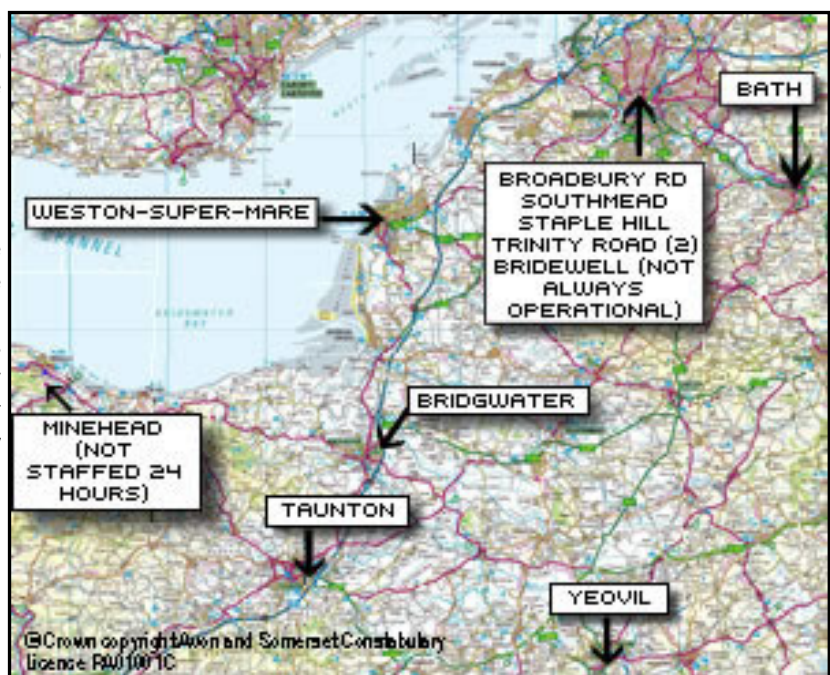
The health and wellbeing of the detainee - Which depends upon the way they are treated, adequate rest, food and drink, exercise and, if required, medical attention.

2. The Custody Visiting Scheme

The Scheme comprises 9 visiting panels, designated to visiting custody units in the Avon and Somerset force area.

Each panel is led by a Coordinator who organises the visiting rota, takes part in the recruitment of new visitors, chairs panel meetings and acts as first port of call for any visitor who cannot make their visit or has a question or query they need help with.

Having successfully completed a 6 month probationary period, custody visitors are appointed for a term of three years.





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Provided performance is satisfactory, after three years, visitors can apply to serve further terms of three years (subject to further vetting) up to nine years total service. Extensions to the maximum term of appointment to 12 years are granted in exceptional circumstances, subject to consideration by the custody visiting Member Working Group.

3. Administration of the Scheme

The Scheme is administered by the Police Authority under the day-to-day management of the Business Manager. Each panel is allocated a **Member Link** and an **Officer Link** who support the coordinator and attend quarterly panel meetings.

The Member link channels feedback to the Member Working Group who meet regularly to consider issues, suggestions and information from each of the nine panels and future improvements for the delivery of the scheme.

4. Recruitment and Selection

Volunteers wishing to become custody visitors submit written applications and selected candidates are asked to attend an interview.

Prior to appointment, the police authority office approach the two people/organisations identified on the application form as having agreed to give their opinion on the applicants suitability for appointment and the force vetting unit undertake a number of security checks.

Successful applicants are then invited to an initial induction session followed by a one day information / training day organised by the police authority office in association with internal and external training providers. The training programme is made up of practical and theoretical exercises covering all aspects of custody visiting, complemented by a set of guidelines and the basic principles of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

This provides visitors with a sound knowledge and thorough understanding of detainees' rights and police responsibilities.

Panel meetings are arranged locally to keep custody visitors informed on new developments and to share visiting experiences.

Application Form



Interview
(at local Police Station)



Check - References



Check – Police vetting



Appointment



Initial Induction



Regional Training Session



Complete a custody visit
(with experienced partner)



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5. Eligibility

- ▶ Custody visitors must be at least 18 years old and live or work within the Avon and Somerset force area.
- ▶ Visitors must be independent persons who are able to make unbiased observations and informed judgements in which the community can have confidence, and which the police will accept as valuable feedback when it is justified.
- ▶ Care will be taken to avoid any potential conflict of interest in order to maintain the independence and integrity of the scheme. For example, serving police officers and other serving members of police or police authority staff will be unsuitable for that reason. The same will apply to special constables, justices of the peace, members of the police authority and ex police officers, police staff and police authority staff.
- ▶ Other applicants may be considered to have a conflict of interest on the basis of existing direct involvement in the criminal justice system, such as solicitors and probation officers. Final decision will be at the discretion of the Custody Visiting Member Working Group.

All appropriate applications from members of the public are considered on their own merits.

Suitable applicants are invited to attend an interview based on the submission of a standard application form.

Once recruited, full training is provided.

6. Values

These values must be upheld consistently, especially in the way independent custody visitors act and behave during visits.

Equality

Avon and Somerset Police Authority seeks to represent local communities. We promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and positively welcome applications from all sections of these communities.

Custody visitors must treat all people equally, with dignity and respect, ensuring that everyone is offered the same extent of their support.

Independence

Independent custody Visitors do not represent the detained person nor the Police Service – they are appointed members of the public who represent their local community.



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Confidentiality

Respect the confidential nature of personal information about detainees and other information that may be disclosed during a visit

Impartiality

Custody visitors basically look, listen and report on what they see and hear during a visit without favouring one party or another. They must retain a strictly professional relationship with any party encountered during or after a visit.

Competence

Visitors need to be appropriately trained and have a knowledge of PACE and their own role and responsibilities so as to maintain the effectiveness of the custody visiting scheme.

7. Attitudes

Independent custody visitors should display positive attitudes when carrying out their roles.

Proficient - Independent custody visitors themselves are observing, commenting and reporting on the professional procedures of the police service.

Non-judgmental - It is essential that independent custody visitors do not make assumptions or form a personal opinion about detainees or the reasons why they are being detained. They must also display this attitude in all their dealings with police officers.

Assertive - Independent custody visits are carried out on behalf of the Police Authority and, whilst they may place an additional responsibility on custody staff, inspections need to be thorough.

8. Skills

Independent custody visitors need to develop keen communication skills that involve effective:

Questioning - Gather relevant information by use of a combination of open and closed questions.

Listening - So as to obtain accurate records of specific details and situations.

Observation - To be aware of what is happening during a visit and noticing the conditions in custody suites.

Negotiation - So as to be effective in requesting information and details of PACE entitlements.

Written and Oral Reporting - Through clear and accurate reporting of relevant comments arising out of their visits.



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9. Apply

If you would like to find out more and apply to become a Custody Visitor, why not -

CLICK www.aspola.org.uk

RING 01275 816377

EMAIL policeauthority@avonandsomerset.police.uk

WRITE TO The Business Manager
Avon and Somerset Police Authority
Valley Road
Portishead
BS20 8JJ

Useful links:

Avon and Somerset Constabulary
www.avonandsomerset.police.uk

The Independent Custody Visiting Association
www.icva.org.uk