

I have been the ICV Scheme Manager for a number of years and in my time nothing has changed .. in fact custody visiting has not changed in format since its introduction (due to the Scarman report) in the 1980's.

Of course the world of custody has changed and in particular there is now a much greater focus on vulnerabilities in custody. It is now recognised that, in some cases, people may be both offenders and in need of care, therefore it is important that the requirements of the criminal justice system are adhered to but at the same time those vulnerable individuals receive care appropriate to their needs.

With this shift in focus within custody, coupled with a pertinent shift in focus from the HMICFRS when they're inspecting custody, this left me wondering how Custody Visitors can help to make a difference ..



Custody visiting is limited to a snapshot in time, when making a visit to custody who the volunteers speak to is dependent upon who is in custody and from those, who is available to speak to. In addition, it depends how long a DP has been held to get an understanding of the care they have received. For example, if a young person has only been in custody for one hour, the ICVs may never know if there was a delay in them receiving an Appropriate Adult or if they were held after charge purely because there were no Local Authority beds available.

So how could the volunteers make a difference? .. we decided that it would be enlightening to get an insight into the totality of care extended to vulnerable DPs and so we began a trial where our volunteers examined the Custody Records to review and report upon their full journey through custody.

The 6 month pilot (now named Custody Record Reviewing) started in April and I was lucky to have a team of volunteers who were ready to journey with us and shape what we hoped would be a new oversight model.



After we had started our pilot, the HMICFRS made an inspection to Custody and during our interview with the Inspectorate it became immediately apparent that this work was in tune with their inspection regime. Additionally, because the HMICFRS made a number of recommendations, the adaptability of the Custody Record Reviewing allowed us to effectively monitor whether measures being put in place to meet those recommendations were being met. The Commissioner had effective oversight of custody and feedback to the Force was well received as confidence could be taken that improvements were being made – WIN, WIN !

During the course of the 6 months, the pilot was tweaked and fine-tuned and by September, after a formal evaluation, the pilot was deemed a success - YAY - the hard work paid off .. and we have seen numerous benefits which include :

*This work can identify weaknesses and monitor if improvements are being made against measures put in place, therefore, the Constabulary receives valuable feedback which helps drive standards in Custody.*

*Detainees benefit from an informed scrutiny of their time in custody, from the perspective of a local member of the community, it brings an external human perspective to their time in detention in order to improve the experience and outcomes for vulnerable detainees.*

*ICVs benefit from this work as there is increased buy-in from the volunteers involved and their morale is lifted. The ICVs are now more knowledgeable and confident when making Custody Visits and this is cascaded down to visit partners.*

*This method of oversight allows the accrual of meaningful data and because the same criteria is examined for every record, it provides the opportunity to compare between months to see if improvements are being made.*

*The focus of the reviews can be changed to examine particular areas or different vulnerabilities.*

*This method of oversight allows the exploration of theories to be tested, e.g., it was suggested that any waits to receive rights may be due to the DP being intoxicated or aggressive. The reviewing now examines if this is an underlying factor*

*This method of oversight removes any potential subjectivity as ICVs are not dealing with DPs or Officers but are instead scrutinising a physical record.*

*The findings are more in line with the HMICFRS Inspection reports, thereby aiding Force preparedness for future inspections.*



It has now been formally agreed that we continue with this oversight model .. but we don't want to stop there ... to complement the Custody Record Reviewing we now want to explore a new method of 'visiting' which will continue to speak with DP's, but will also observe and report upon the culture, environment and wider processes underway in custody.

We plan to run a further pilot on a 'new style' of visiting in the new year and we hope that this, paired with the Custody Record Reviewing will add more value by providing a more holistic, deeper, richer picture of what is happening in custody, giving the PCC effective oversight of custody, providing the Constabulary with constructive, independent feedback, both of which will ultimately improve the experience and outcomes for the vulnerable detainees.

So here we go again, trialling something new is never easy ... but

