



Independent Custody Visitors' Survey 2011

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Executive Summary

Why conduct the survey?

The survey aimed to obtain the views of Custody Visitors on a range of policy, support and practical issues in order to help the Policing Board (the Board) provide a high quality service to its Custody Visitors.

Response rate

36 Custody Visitors returned questionnaires (a 67% response rate).

Attitudes to Custody Visiting

Overall respondents have a positive attitude to Custody Visiting. However, one in five respondents (19%) stated 'no' when asked if '*Custody staff welcome our visits*'. Just one respondent disagreed that '*Custody visiting ensures detained persons have been offered their rights and entitlements*'.

Respondents stated that Detainees benefit most from Custody Visiting, followed by the Board and Custody Staff, while Custody Visitors benefit least from the scheme.

Training, Resources and Support

At least six out of seven respondents agreed with each of the eight statements relating to the training, resources and support they receive. Six respondents did not agree with some of the statements.

One in six respondents (17%) correctly identified Mary McKee as the Board's Lead Member for Custody Visiting.

Visits and Working Arrangements

The majority of respondents were happy with the scheme's working arrangements. However over one out of five respondents (22%) did not believe '*we see a sufficient proportion of detained persons held in custody*' and one out of four respondents (25%) did not '*obtain feedback about issues raised from Custody visits*'.

Awareness of Specific Scheme Aspects

Over nine out of ten respondents were aware of Self Introduction, changes to the ICV Handbook and Investing in Volunteers. However, just over half of respondents (56%) were aware of the Operational Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) National Preventive Mechanism (NPM).

Overall Service

Six out of seven respondents (86%) were very/fairly satisfied with the way the Board runs the Custody Visiting scheme.

1. Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) operates the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Northern Ireland. Custody Visitors are volunteers from the community who make unannounced visits to Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) custody suites to check on the welfare of people being held in custody. They look, listen and report on what they find. Thus, Custody Visiting means that people unconnected with the police or the criminal justice system can inspect and report on how detained people are dealt with by the police and the conditions in which they are held. Custody Visitors' work is reported to the Board, which assists it monitor the PSNI's compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 1.2 In order for the Board to continue to provide a high quality service, the Board's statisticians conducted a survey of the views and experiences of Custody Visitors. (The statisticians are on long term loan from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and provide a professional, independent and impartial statistical and research service to the Board and District Policing Partnerships).
- 1.3 The survey was conducted during January and February 2011. A questionnaire was sent to the current 54 Custody Visitors and 36 were returned, representing a response rate of 67%. Response rates varied by Custody Visiting Team, from 92% for the North-West Team to 57% for the Belfast/Antrim Team (Table 1). A copy of the questionnaire is shown at Appendix 1.

Table 1: Survey Response Rates by Custody Visiting Team

Team	Number of Custody Visitors	Number of Responses	Response Rate
North-West	12	11	92%
Tyrone/Fermanagh	12	7	58%
Down/Armagh	9	6	67%
Belfast/Antrim	21	12	57%
Total	54	36	67%

- 1.4 14 responding Custody Visitors (hereafter referred to as respondents, 39%) had been a Custody Visitor for less than two years, 9 (25%) between two and three years and 13 (36%) for more than three years.

[Note that not all 36 respondents answered all survey questions. Thus percentages shown in certain tables may not add up to 100%.]

2. Attitudes to Custody Visiting

- 2.1 Overall, respondents have a positive attitude to Custody Visiting, based on answers to the ten statements shown in Tables 2 and 3.
- 2.2 All respondents agreed that ‘*Custody visiting provides an independent, impartial check on the treatment of detained persons*’. At least four out of five respondents agreed with the other statements, with the exception of ‘*Custody staff welcome our visits*’. Seven out of ten respondents (69%) stated ‘Yes’ but one out of five (19%) stated Custody staff did not welcome our visits.
- 2.3 Twelve respondents did not agree with some of the statements (six from the Belfast/Antrim and three from the North-West Teams). Five of these respondents have been a Custody Visitor for less than two years.

Table 2: Attitudes to Custody Visiting

Statement	Yes	%	No	%
Custody visiting provides an independent, impartial check on the treatment of detained persons.	36	100%	0	0%
Custody visiting helps public scrutiny of police activity.	34	94%	2	6%
As a Custody Visitor I feel that I help promote public confidence in policing.	32	89%	4	11%
Custody staff understand the role of Custody Visitors.	31	86%	3	8%
Custody staff accept my status and recognise my responsibility as a Custody Visitor.	31	86%	4	11%
The role of a Custody Visitor is what I expected it to be.	29	81%	5	14%
Custody staff welcome our visits.	25	69%	7	19%

- 2.4 All respondents strongly agreed/agreed that ‘*a main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to check on the welfare of people being held in police custody*’. Almost all respondents strongly agreed/agreed that ‘*a main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to make sure detention conditions are adequate*’ and ‘*Custody visiting ensures detained persons have been offered their rights and entitlements*’. Just one respondent disagreed with any of the statements shown in Table 3, relating to ‘*Custody visiting ensure detained persons have been offered their rights and entitlements*’.
- 2.5 While four out of five respondents (81%) strongly agreed/agreed that ‘*my role as a Custody Visitor is rewarding*’, six respondents (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed (three were from the Tyrone/Fermanagh Team and four have been a Custody Visitor for less than two years).

Table 3: Attitudes to Custody Visiting

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to check on the welfare of people being held in police custody.	27	9	0	0	0
	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
A main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to make sure detention conditions are adequate.	18	17	1	0	0
	50%	47%	3%	0%	0%
Custody visiting ensures detained persons have been offered their rights and entitlements.	25	9	1	1	0
	69%	25%	3%	3%	0%
My role as a Custody Visitor is rewarding.	14	15	6	0	0
	39%	42%	17%	0%	0%

2.6 Respondents ranked in order of priority who they thought benefits most from Custody Visiting (Table 4). They stated that Detainees benefit most, followed by the Board and Custody Staff, while Custody Visitors benefit least.

Table 4: Who Benefits Most from Custody Visiting?

	Most	Second	Third	Least
Detainees	29	4	1	1
Policing Board	4	9	11	7
Custody Staff	2	11	9	8
Custody Visitor	0	7	9	14

3. Training, Resources and Support

- 3.1 At least six out of seven respondents agreed with each of the eight statements relating to the training, resources and support they receive (Table 5). Six respondents did not agree with some of the statements (five were from the Belfast/Antrim Team and four have been a Custody Visitor for more than three years).
- 3.2 The Scheme Administrator may wish to consider organising refresher training in checking Custody records and dealing with incidents that may occur during a Custody Visit. Organised training events should, as far as possible, be arranged at a convenient time for Custody Visitors.

Table 5: Training, Resources and Support

Statement	Yes	%	No	%
As a Custody Visitor I receive support from my fellow team members.	34	94%	1	3%
I have been adequately trained to fulfil my role as a Custody Visitor.	33	92%	1	3%
I have been adequately trained to know what to do if a detainee makes a complaint against the police to Custody Visitors.	33	92%	1	3%
I am kept informed of the items contained in the Scheme Administrator's Monthly Update.	33	92%	1	3%
My expense claims are processed within a reasonable timescale (within 10 days of the Policing Board receiving the accurately completed form).	33	92%	0	0%
I have been adequately trained to check custody records.	32	89%	2	6%
I have been adequately trained to deal with most incidents that occur while carrying out custody visits.	31	86%	2	6%
Organised training events are at a convenient time.	31	86%	2	6%

- 3.3 Mary McKee is the Board's Lead Member for Custody Visiting. However, as Table 6 shows, almost three out of ten respondents (28%) stated it was Acting Board Chairman Brian Rea (28%), while one out of four respondents did not answer (25%). One out of six respondents correctly stated it was Mary McKee (17%).

Table 6: Who is the Policing Board Lead Member for Custody Visiting?

	Number of respondents	%
Brian Rea	10	28%
<i>Did not answer</i>	9	25%
Ian McCrea	7	19%
Mary McKee	6	17%
Sir Desmond Rea	4	11%

4. Visits and Working Arrangements

- 4.1 Custody Visitors were asked to indicate whether they agreed/disagreed with four statements relating to custody visits and working arrangements (Table 7).
- 4.2 Over four out of five respondents agreed that *'Adequate arrangements are in place to feedback issues to the Policing Board'* and *'Our visiting arrangements are sufficiently regular to support the effectiveness of the scheme'*. Compared to the other survey questions, this section had the most respondents who disagreed with the statements - 15 respondents, of who seven were from the Belfast/Antrim Team and three were from the Down/Armagh and Tyrone/Fermanagh Teams. Five have been a Custody Visitor for less than two years, and six have been a Custody Visitor for more than three years.
- 4.3 Over one out of five respondents (22%) did not believe that *'we see a sufficient proportion of detained persons held in custody'*. One out of four respondents (25%) stated that they did not *'obtain feedback about issues raised from Custody visits'*. Seven of these respondents were from the Belfast/Antrim Team.

Table 7: Visits and Working Arrangements

Statement	Yes	%	No	%
Adequate arrangements are in place to feedback issues to the Policing Board.	31	86%	4	11%
Our visiting arrangements are sufficiently regular to support the effectiveness of the scheme.	29	81%	5	14%
I believe we see a sufficient proportion of detained persons held in custody.	26	72%	8	22%
I obtain feedback about issues raised from Custody visits.	25	69%	9	25%

5. Awareness of Specific Scheme Aspects

- 5.1 Custody Visitors were asked about their awareness of specific scheme aspects. Two were new in 2010:
- (i) Self Introduction – where a detainee confirms they wish to speak to Custody Visitors by self introduction from the Custody Visitors, rather than being introduced by the Custody Officer, and
 - (ii) Investing in Volunteers – the UK’s quality standard for organisations that involve volunteers in their work. The Investing in Volunteers standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and publicly demonstrate their commitment to volunteering.
- 5.2 Over nine out of ten respondents were aware of Self Introduction, Changes to the ICV Handbook and Investing in Volunteers (Table 8).
- 5.3 During 2009/2010, as part of the UK’s commitment to the Operational Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme was designated as one of the four Northern Ireland bodies that form the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), carrying out a system of regular visits to places of detention in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The work of the UK NPM is coordinated by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and reports to the United Nations sub-committee on the prevention of torture. Further information on OPCAT NPM can be found at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/opcat/index.htm>.
- 5.4 Although over half of respondents were aware of OPCAT NPM (56%), almost one out of three were not (31%). Of respondents not aware of OPCAT NPM, five were from the Belfast Antrim Team and five have been a Custody Visitor for less than two years.
- 5.5 The Scheme Administrator may wish to consider organising refresher training on OPCAT NPM for Custody Visitors.

Table 8: Awareness of Specific Scheme Aspects

Statement	Yes	%	No	%
Self Introduction	34	94%	1	3%
Changes to the ICV Handbook	34	94%	1	3%
Investing in Volunteers	33	92%	2	6%
OPCAT NPM	20	56%	11	31%

6. Overall Service and Comments

6.1 Six out of seven respondents (86%) were very/fairly satisfied with the way the Board runs the scheme, while just one respondent was fairly dissatisfied (Table 9).

Table 9: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way the Policing Board runs the Custody Visiting Scheme?

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Number	17	14	3	1	0
%	47%	39%	8%	3%	0%

6.2 Custody Visitors were asked to ‘list any additional comments you have about your role as a Custody Visitor or any comments/suggestions for improvements in the Custody Visiting Scheme’. The comments received were categorised as follows:

Suggested Scheme improvements

<i>Custody Suites should be visited every week if the overall scheme is to be truly effective.</i>
<i>More visits. On-Line communication with visitors. Increase in mileage allowance.</i>
<i>View DP interviews.</i>
<i>The role of the Custody Visitor may well have opportunity for further development and within OPCAT NPM the Policing Board may consider the front line, first point of contact of the Custody Visitor avails a unique platform for feedback to PBNI developed further into the future.</i>
<i>The C.V. scheme has been cut back due to cut backs. This is unfair to Custody Visitors and Detainees alike. Not enough people are seen while held in custody. Also, there is no publicity about the sterling work CV visitors actually do. Why do we not read about Custody Visitors recruited from ordinary members of the public who visit detainees and do a great job?</i>
<i>I would like to see more Custody Visitor posters in all PSNI stations. Also another suggestion would be for role play to be part of monthly team meeting agenda.</i>
<i>Because I am only out of my probation I may have missed these comments: 1) would it not be a good idea to have scenarios were we use local people and use some ideas I have, 2) I am glad to see that the O2 cylinder will be looked at in more detail; because of my experience within ***** I have seen times when there was no O2 in the cylinder.</i>
<i>A structured approach to the rota system for visits - enable the CV to be aware of the area they are to cover in the month and the number of visits permitted within the budget.</i>
<i>a) Stop the "feedback" being selective and be more aggressive in obtaining feedback from the PSNI. b) Do away with the 6 year limit on tenure as it loses valuable experience. c) Really "value" CVs, don't just say it!</i>

Some CV's place too much emphasis on finding fault. There could be more (i) consideration of possible disruption caused by timing/frequency of visits (suggest rota should be "rotated" objectively - everyone working with everyone in turn), and (ii) attention paid to safety precautions - such as CV's standing too close to detainees (instead of just inside the door). Agreed warning signals for terminating interview if one CV concerned.

Improvements can best be found by better communications/instructions from the Board to CV's and custody staff. The same problems come up time and time again. e.g.: car parking, access to custody records, delays in access etc.

It's great to observe that there can be transfer of area covered from one CV region to another e.g.: where one region is overburdened to another which is performing beyond targets e.g.: the addition of Ballymena custody suite to Northwest region.

Positive Comments

I enjoy my role as an ICV and have always found [Scheme Administrators] more than helpful if and when I had any queries.

The Scheme has got excellent Scheme Administrators, to be congratulated.

Self introduction is working well, a great and very supportive team.

We should see custody visiting as encouraging good practice & co-operation, ultimately promoting a peaceful, healthy community.

Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire



2011 Custody Visitor Survey

The Policing Board's Service Monitoring Branch administers the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. Custody Visitors' work is reported to the Policing Board, which assists the Board monitor PSNI's compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998. The Board wishes to gather the views of Custody Visitors on the Scheme to ensure they receive the service they require.

The Policing Board's statisticians, who are on long-term loan from NISRA, are undertaking this independent survey on behalf of Service Monitoring Branch. This questionnaire seeks your views on various aspects of the Custody Visiting Scheme. Most questions can be answered by simply placing a tick in a box. Your views are important and your cooperation appreciated.

SECTION 1: Background Information

		Belfast/Antrim	Down/Armagh	North West	Tyrone/Fermanagh
1.	Which regional team do you belong to?	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
			Less than 2 years	Between 2 and 3 years	More than 3 years
2.	How long have you been a Custody Visitor?	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	

SECTION 2: Attitudes to Custody Visiting

<i>Please tick yes or no to the following statements:</i>		Yes	No
3.	As a Custody Visitor I feel that I help promote public confidence in policing.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
4.	Custody visiting helps public scrutiny of police activity.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
5.	Custody visiting provides an independent, impartial check on the treatment of detained persons.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
6.	Custody staff welcome our visits.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
7.	Custody staff understand the role of Custody Visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
8.	Custody staff accept my status and recognise my responsibility as a Custody Visitor.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂
9.	The role of a Custody Visitor is what I expected it to be.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂

<i>Please indicate whether you agree/disagree with the following statements:</i>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10.	A main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to check on the welfare of people being held in police custody.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
11.	A main responsibility of a Custody Visitor is to make sure detention conditions are adequate.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
12.	Custody visiting ensure detained persons have been offered their rights and entitlements.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
13.	My role as a Custody Visitor is rewarding.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

14. Please rank who you think benefits most from the Custody Visiting scheme (1 being who benefits most and 4 being who benefits least).

Custody Visitor	Custody staff	Policing Board	Detainees
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION 3: Training, Resources and Support

<i>Please tick yes or no to the following statements</i>		Yes	No
15.	I have been adequately trained to fulfil my role as a Custody Visitor.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
16.	I have been adequately trained to check custody records.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
17.	I have been adequately trained to deal with most incidents that occur while carrying out custody visits.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
18.	I have been adequately trained to know what to do if a detainee makes a complaint against the police to Custody Visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
19.	Organised training events are at a convenient time.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
20.	As a Custody Visitor I receive support from my fellow team members.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
21.	I am kept informed of the items contained in the Scheme Administrator's Monthly Update.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
22.	My expense claims are processed within a reasonable timescale (within 10 days of the Policing Board receiving the accurately completed form).	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

23. Who is the Policing Board Lead Member for Custody Visiting?

Ian McCrea	Sir Desmond Rea	Mary McKee	Brian Rea
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

SECTION 4: Visits and Working Arrangements

<i>Please tick yes or no to the following statements</i>		Yes	No
24.	Our visiting arrangements are sufficiently regular to support the effectiveness of the scheme.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
25.	I believe we see a sufficient proportion of detained persons held in custody.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
26.	Adequate arrangements are in place to feedback issues to the Policing Board.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
27.	I obtain feedback about issues raised from Custody visits.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

SECTION 5: Awareness

<i>Please indicate if you are aware of the following:</i>		Yes	No
28.	OPCAT NPM	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
29.	Investing in Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
30.	Self Introduction	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
31.	Changes to the ICV Handbook	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

SECTION 6: Overall Service and Final Comments

32. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way the Policing Board runs the Custody Visiting Scheme?

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

33. Please list below any additional comments you have about your role as a Custody Visitor or any comments/suggestions for **improvements** in the Custody Visiting Scheme?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the envelope provided by
Monday 31st January 2011.

Please contact Alexandra Pauley in Statistics & Research Branch if you have any questions about this survey (telephone: 028 9040 8502, e-mail: alexandra.pauley@nipolicingboard.org.uk).