

## The Policing Board's Role

The Northern Ireland Policing Board supports and administers the Custody Visiting Scheme. This includes recruiting volunteers for the scheme through open advertising and competency based interviews.

The key skills we look for in volunteers are:

- n concern for the welfare of others;
- n the ability to work as a member of a team;
- n impartiality and confidentiality;
- n effective communication skills, and;
- n time to carry out visits and attend team meetings.

To prevent any possible conflict of interest, police officers, police support staff, people involved in the criminal justice system and members and staff of the Policing Board cannot become custody visitors. We try our best to make sure that the custody visiting teams are as representative as possible in terms of community background, gender, age and so on.

The Policing Board's Community & Human Rights Committee carefully monitors the custody visitor's reports on a month-by-month basis. This includes looking at the treatment of detainees in terms of Code C of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE), human rights provisions, and the PSNI Code of Ethics.



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### DOCUMENT TITLE

REPORT ON THE BELFAST TEAM OF INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND 2005/2006

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This document is also available upon request in alternative formats including CD and large print. It can also be made available in minority languages or on audiocassette. Requests for alternative formats should be made to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

### ONLINE FORMAT

This document is available in PDF format from our website: [www.nipolicingboard.org.uk](http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk)

### MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about custody visiting or you are interested in volunteering for this role, you can contact the Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator as shown below:

Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator  
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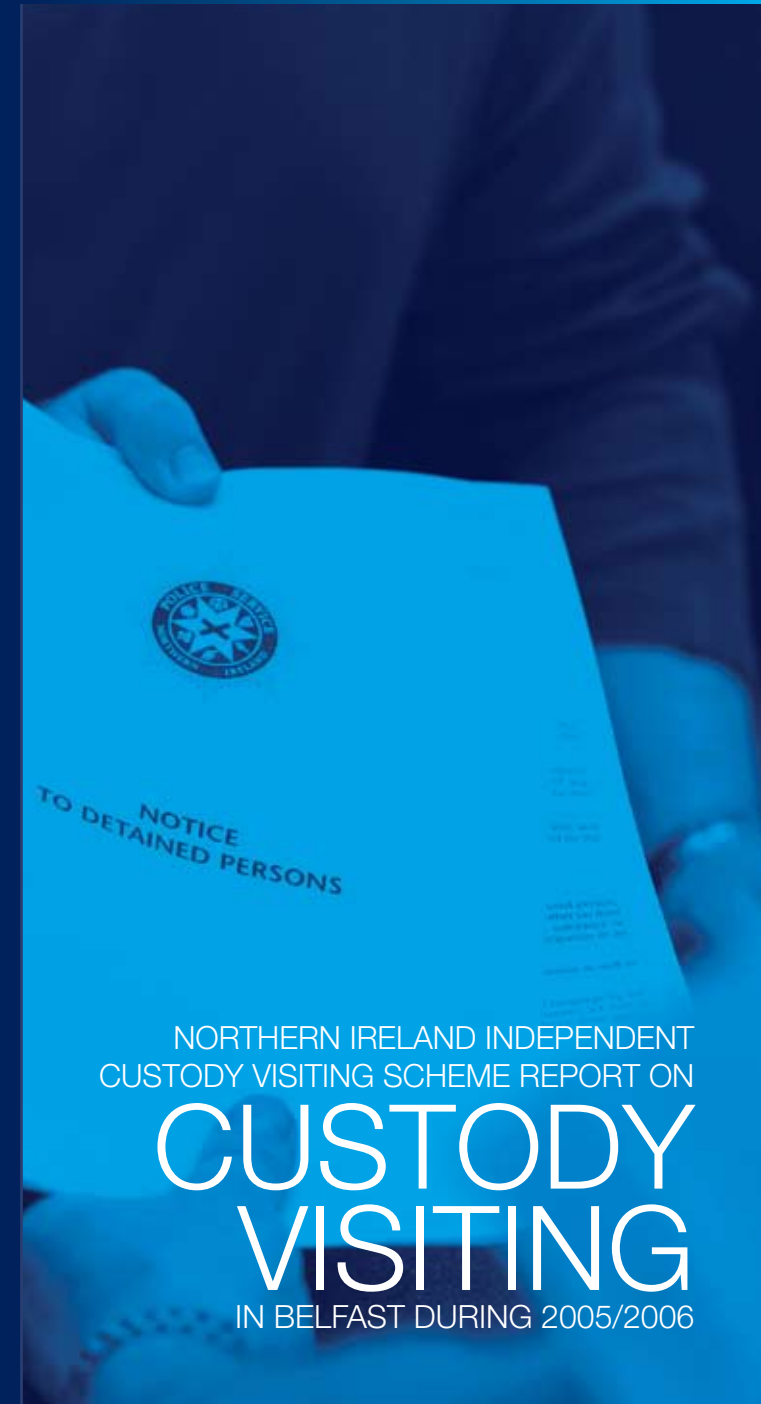
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### DESIGN

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NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT  
CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME REPORT ON

# CUSTODY VISITING

IN BELFAST DURING 2005/2006

**This leaflet is about the work carried out in 2005/2006 by the Belfast Team of Independent Custody Visitors. It also contains general information about custody visiting and details of how to contact the Northern Ireland Policing Board if you are interested in this voluntary work.**

## Background

Custody Visitors are volunteers from the community who make unannounced visits to police custody suites to check on the welfare of people being held in custody. They look, listen and report on what they find. In this way custody visiting means that people unconnected with the police or the criminal justice system can inspect and report on how arrested people are dealt with by the police and the conditions in which they are held.

There are five custody visiting teams covering Northern Ireland. These teams are:

- n Antrim
- n Belfast
- n Down/Armagh
- n North West
- n Tyrone/Fermanagh

Custody Visiting has been taking place in Northern Ireland since 1991, and was made statutory by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

## The work of the Belfast Custody Visiting Team during 2005/2006

There are 15 people in the Belfast team and they carry out visits in pairs to the custody suites in the following police stations: Antrim Road, Grosvenor Road, Musgrave Street, Strandtown and the Serious Crime Suite.

During 2005/2006 the Belfast Custody Visiting Team made a total of 321 visits to custody suites throughout the Greater Belfast area and the Serious Crime Suite, as shown in the following table.

Station	No. of visits
Antrim Road	80
Grosvenor Road	81
Musgrave Street	85
Strandtown	75
Serious Crime Suite	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>

In relation to the visits to Antrim Road, Grosvenor Road, Musgrave Street and Strandtown there were 624 detainees in custody during these visits, and the custody visitors saw and spoke to 332 (53%) of the detainees. Custody visiting is based on the consent of the detainee to see the visitors. Some 122 (20%) of the detainees did not want to see the custody visitors and the remaining 170 detainees were not seen for some other reason, for example because they were being interviewed or were asleep.

The custody visitors found that 280 (87%) of the 321 visits were entirely satisfactory and raised no issues about the treatment of detainees or the conditions in which they were being held. Most of the visits they found unsatisfactory were to do with the conditions of detention, such as cleanliness of cells or repairs being needed. These matters are brought to the attention of the PSNI and the Policing Board so that they can be addressed as soon as possible.

In relation to the treatment of detainees, six detainees complained to custody visitors about their treatment on arrest. Custody visitors do not investigate complaints - their role is to make sure that they have been referred to the Police Ombudsman for investigation.

Custody visitors reported that during their visits, two detainees had asked to contact their solicitor and custody visitors were able to check that this request had been dealt with by custody staff. They met six detainees who could not speak any English and found that in all cases custody staff had already made arrangements for an interpreter to attend.

Also during their visits, custody visitors encountered two detainees who had been assessed by custody staff as being at risk of self-harm. The custody visitors were able to check that custody staff were carrying out very regular checks on the detainees' well-being.

## The Serious Crime Suite

From 1 October 2005 the role of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Custody Visiting Scheme was extended to implement Patten Recommendation 64, thus enabling custody visitors to observe police interviews with detained terrorist suspects on remote camera, subject to the consent of the detainee.

During September 2005 a selected number of existing Custody Visitors were provided with training in preparation for this additional role. The training included an overview of detention, treatment and professional interviewing practice in relation to detained terrorist suspects with particular emphasis on human rights issues.

In achieving the implementation of another of the Patten recommendations, the Board has also made the Northern Ireland Custody Visiting Scheme the first such Scheme in the UK to extend its role in this way.

In relation to these visits to the Serious Crime Suite, the 18 visits undertaken by the Belfast panel between October and March were complimented by an additional 45 visits undertaken by the Antrim panel from April 2005 to March 2006

Between 1 October 2005 and 31 March 2006, those from the Belfast and Antrim panels trained to conduct visits to the Serious Crime Suite made 43 visits to the suite. During these visits 54 detainees were being held in custody, 15 (28%) of which had consented to a custody visit or to have their interviews observed on remote monitor. Custody visiting is based on the consent of the detainee to see the visitors. Some 23 (43%) of the detainees did not want to see the custody visitors and the remaining 16 detainees were not seen for some other reason, for example because they were being interviewed or were asleep.

Overall, the custody visitors found that 34 (54%) of the 63 visits were entirely satisfactory and raised no issues about the treatment of detainees or the conditions in which they were being held. Most of the visits they found unsatisfactory were to do with the conditions of detention, such as cleanliness of cells or repairs being needed. These matters are brought to the attention of the PSNI and the Policing Board so that they can be addressed as soon as possible.