

CHESHIRE CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME 2015/16 REPORT



Visits to Police custody suites by members of the public commenced in 1985, following Lord Scarman's critical report into how people were detained following the riots in Brixton and other areas. To have an effective custody visiting scheme became a statutory requirement in 2002. Custody Visitors are volunteers who make unannounced weekly visits to custody suites to check on the welfare of persons being held there and that the rules governing their detention are being properly applied.

Cheshire has an active and vibrant Custody Visiting Scheme. In 2015/16, there were 25 volunteers who undertook weekly visits to the three custody suites in Cheshire – Blacon, Runcorn and Middlewich. They also attended training events to share experiences and other regular meetings to discuss their findings.

In 2015/16, 157 visits were made to the custody suites in Cheshire. Of those people being held at the time and available to be seen by the Custody Visitors, 95% (637 detainees) agreed to meet the Custody Visitors and have a discussion with them. These visits were spread throughout the year, across every day, and all hours of the day.

Of those people held in the custody suites that were spoken to by Custody Visitors, 53% (341 detainees) raised issues with the Custody Visitors. These were generally about how long they were likely to be detained, a request for medication or to see the Custody Nurse, or to make a telephone call. The Custody Visitors were able to raise these issues directly with custody staff and in the majority of cases action was taken immediately, whilst the Custody Visitors were still present. Issues which could not be resolved at the time were referred to the Chief Inspector responsible for the operation of the custody suites, who was able to consider the issues and give a response to the Custody Visitors to ensure the appropriate action was taken.

On only two occasions in 2015/16 were issues raised by Custody Visitors escalated to the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, which related to the lack of

awareness by Detention Officer of the custody visiting procedures; and issues relating to delays with transport to court; length of detention; and a request for a nurse. Any issues, which cannot be resolved by the Custody Sergeant, are referred to the Chief Inspector responsible for custody for consideration and appropriate action.

Custody Visitors also submitted complimentary reports about their visits, which included the speed in accessing the custody area; the cleanliness of the custody area; and the positive attitude and efficiency of the custody staff.

In considering this annual report, David Keane, the Police Crime & Commissioner said "I've been impressed by the commitment of Custody Visitors in safeguarding the welfare of people being held in police custody. From my visits to the custody suites in Cheshire, I know their work is also valued by the Constabulary. The public should be assured that the custody suites in Cheshire are well run with weekly independent checks being undertaken by this dedicated group of volunteers and I'd like to thank them for their continued work."