



VERA BAIRD^{QC}
POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

Report of Office of Police & Crime Commissioner

Independent Custody Visitors findings – March 2015

The Police & Crime Commissioner, Vera Baird QC, would like to take this opportunity to thank Independent Custody Visitors for the work they have undertaken when visiting custody suites within the Northumbria Force area. The ICVs are valued members of the volunteer team. Below are the points raised during March 2015 from the stations visited.

Alnwick

All areas clean and tidy

Area for Improvement:

Heating system within custody is broken. Staff stated that part has been ordered to make necessary repair.

Bedlington

All areas clean and tidy.

Well received by staff.

Area for Improvement:

Following the suite recently becoming a resilience suite. Visitors had difficulty accessing the suite as front desk staff were unsure of protocol. Staff to be informed that custody visitors require immediate access even when suite is unoccupied.

Hexham

All areas clean and tidy

No issues identified

Millbank

Suite clean and tidy and staff helpful

Southwick

Suite clean and tidy.

Helpful staff

Areas for improvement:

Five cells out of use – blocked toilet M23, no night light M7, blocked toilet F2, repair need to D1, loose hatch M23.

North Tyneside

Staff friendly and helpful

Areas for improvement:

Out of date hot drinks for detainees removed from kitchen.

Interview Room 8 + 9 + 10 out of order.

Cells 11 + 20 out of use due to broken alarms.

Cell 29 out of use due to broken intercom.

Forth Banks

Staff proactive, helpful and assertive with detainees even during busy times.

Areas for Improvement:

Number of cells out of order due to cracking plaster – 5, 23, 28, 32, 35, 36, 37, 44, 46 and 50.

Suite extremely warm.

Concerns raised by staff that a ligature knife had broken and may not be fit for purpose.

Assistant Chief Constable Jo Farrell responses to issues raised:

Alnwick

Area for improvement:

A new part has been fitted to heating system and it is now working.

Bedlington

Area for improvement:

All front office staff within the Northern Area command have been reminded that ICV's are to be allowed access to suites whether there are detainees in or not.

Southwick

Areas for improvement:

All repairs have been carried out.

North Tyneside

Areas for improvement:

1. Out of date drinks removed immediately, shift spoken to who are responsible for the checking of food/drinks.
2. Interview recording machines needed re setting this has been done.
3. All repairs carried out and cells in use.

Forth Banks

Areas for improvement:

1. There was a 4 week plan to decorate the cells. This was done on a Tuesday -Thursday, other than bank holiday weeks, to ensure the operating capacity of the cells were not affected. Nearly all the cells required some decoration work.
2. The heating is set so that it is comfortable for the detainees who are mainly static in cells. The cells are not individually controlled. The temperature in the cells has been checked and found to be appropriate. The temperature in the main part of the custody suite can feel a bit warm and estates have been asked to adjust the temperature as it is not controllable from within custody.
3. The ligature knives that are attached to the custody keys are the ones that are to be used. These are robust and have been inspected and are not blunt. Whilst DO's may want personal issue knives it is not cost effective or necessary. Most incidents where a ligature knife is required occur in cells where a key is needed to gain entry. It is entirely appropriate that the knife be attached to the keys. There are five sets of keys (one for each wing) and there is another set on order to take it up to 6. This means that 6 sets of knives in the suite at any one time.

Issues Raised following introduction of PCC ICV Questionnaire

Bedlington

- CCTV in CAMIC area not recording.

Response: CCTV has been repaired by barrier.

Forth Banks

- CCTV out of focus but has been reported.
- One detainee not offered shower or exercise yard.
- Staff raised issue of anti-ligature knives not being fit for purpose with knives attached to cell keys becoming blunt and insufficient in number.

CCTV out of focus but has been reported.

This is still under investigation by estates and the contractors. One opinion is that the focus of the CCTV depends on when you look at the system. The cameras have been focused by the contractor when the lighting is good (during the day in the summer last year). When the lighting is not so good some can be out of focus. The cameras have been adjusted however this adjustment generally is undertaken during the day. It has been suggested that the cameras be focused at night when the lighting is at its worst (cell night light on only) so that we can ascertain if the level of lighting is the issue or if it is a fault with the actual cameras. This is under consideration by estates and the contractor.

One detainee not offered shower or exercise yard.

Showers and exercise yard access are generally offered for detainees who are in for over 24 hours and in addition where appropriate. Not all detainees are offered as they are not in need of these facilities. Staff have been reminded to update the custody record with requests and offers for showers and exercise. The computerised custody record will assist greatly with the documentation of this.

Staff raised issue of anti-ligature knives not being fit for purpose with knives attached to cell keys becoming blunt and insufficient in number. As above.