

Northern Joint Police Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme – Annual Report 2006/07

BACKGROUND

Custody Visiting was introduced in the Northern Constabulary area in 2000 with the first visits made in June 2000. The scheme was initially run as a pilot project with visits being undertaken in Inverness only. Following the success of the pilot the scheme was gradually rolled out to a further four stations – Dingwall and Alness (October 2000), Aviemore (February 2002) and Nairn (March 2002).

The Board initially appointed 20 visitors in 2000. Numbers have fluctuated since, with 9 of the original visitors reappointed in 2006 for a second 3-year period. At 31 March 2007 the number of visitors stood at 14, 2 new visitors having joined the team in the course of the 2006/07 year.

STATION VISITS

Visits are made to the stations as follows:

Station	Frequency of Visits
Inverness	One per week
Dingwall	One per three weeks
Alness	One per month
Aviemore	One per month
Nairn	One per month

Breakdown of visits per station

During the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007 84 visits were made with 277 detainees held in custody at the time of the visits. Of these, 62 agreed to a visit.

Station	No. of Visits	No. of Detainees	No. Detainees seen
Inverness	38	256	50
Dingwall	13	2	2
Alness	13	16	8
Aviemore	10	1	0
Nairn	10	2	2
Overall Totals	84	277	62

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Issues Raised

The majority of concerns raised by detainees relate to:

- desire for a wash
- request for extra blanket/clothing
- whether or not their solicitor has been contacted.

No other serious concerns were raised during 2006/07.

Occasional issues relating to the management of the custody suites have included:

- Delays in access to the Custody Suite
- The physical condition of older Stations.

Developments

During the year Northern Constabulary introduced a custody pilot scheme involving the Inverness, Ross, Cromarty & Skye Command area and the Badenoch, Strathspey & Nairn Command area, which saw most of those brought into custody during daytime hours Monday to Friday transported to the Inverness cell suite for holding. This arrangement clearly had implications for the scheduling of visits, given the reduced likelihood – already low - of anyone being found in custody during those hours in the other stations covered by the Scheme. In addition, the Dingwall cells were closed for refurbishment during February and March.

Group Activity

All issues raised by either detainees, police or visitors are discussed at regular meetings of the visitors. The meetings are chaired by the Scheme Administrator and are attended by Inspector Gordon Macleod, Northern Constabulary Custody Visiting Liaison Officer, or, if unable to attend, by Constable Donnie Macdonald. These meetings offer the visitors a regular opportunity to network and share experience.

A number of visitors attended the Scottish Annual Conference held in Glenrothes on 16 September 2006.

Training

Continuous development is seen as a cornerstone of custody visiting throughout Scotland. A refresher training course for all Visitors was held in November 2006, with the participation of Brian Pirie, Scheme Administrator for Lothian and Borders Police Board and member of ICVA's Executive Committee.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Further local training is planned for 2007/08, including on matters such as mental health, drugs and alcohol issues and equality and diversity issues. Recruitment efforts will be strengthened.