

# NORTHERN JOINT POLICE BOARD

13 MAY 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

## INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME – ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

### Report by the Clerk

#### **Summary**

This Report invites the Board to approve the appended Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Annual Report for 2008/09, which will be submitted by the Clerk on behalf of the Board for inclusion in the Scottish Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Progress Report for 2008/09.

#### **Background**

1. As Members are aware, the Board operates an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme, whereby independent, volunteer members of the community, following appropriate training, make random, unannounced visits to police stations, allowing them the opportunity to inspect and check upon the conditions and welfare of those held in police custody.
2. The Board is affiliated to the Independent Custody Visiting Association, a voluntary organisation that promotes the custody visiting process nationally, through advocacy, training, publicity and ongoing support to all involved in the process. The Association publishes a quarterly magazine and an Annual Report. In recognition of the different applicable legal and guidance framework in Scotland, it also publishes a separate Scottish Annual Report on the operation of Independent Custody Visiting in Scotland, incorporating reports from each individual Police Authority/Joint Board operating a Scheme.
3. Once approved, the Board's Report will be submitted for inclusion in the Scottish Annual Report for 2008/09.

#### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to approve the terms of the appended Report.

Signature

Designation Clerk

Date 5 May 2009

Author Mrs R Moir, Assistant Clerk

## Northern Joint Police Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme – Annual Report 2008/09

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### 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 number of visitors in the scheme has fluctuated since its establishment, with 9 of the original team reappointed in 2006 for a further third 3-year period. At 31 March 2008 the number of visitors stood at 8.

### 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 2008 to 31 March 2009, 81 visits were made with 258 detainees held in custody at the time of the visits. Of these, 81 agreed to a visit.

Station	No. of Visits	No. of Detainees	No. Detainees seen
Inverness	35	248	74
Dingwall	11	1	1
Alness	16	4	3
Aviemore	9	2	1
Nairn	10	3	2
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>81</b>

## **REVIEW OF THE YEAR**

### **Issues Raised**

The majority of concerns raised by detainees relate to:

- request for medication or for extra blanket/clothing
- whether or not their solicitor or family member had been contacted.

Issues relating to the management of the custody suites have included:

- delays in access to the Custody Suite [new guidance issued to custody staff]
- lack of clarity on access to juveniles [guidance issued to custody staff]
- lack of familiarity with the Scheme among new custody staff [training under review]
- relatively minor health and safety issues, e.g. a particular cell door catching against the floor, potentially inhibiting speedy closure [repaired]

### **Developments**

The construction of a new Police Station in Nairn saw the closure of the old station in January 2009 and the transfer of the station staff to temporary accommodation, without cells. Visits to Nairn have accordingly been suspended during the construction project. A further project to increase the size of the Inverness custody suite was nearing completion at the end of the review period.

The Northern Joint Police Board hosted the Scottish Annual Conference in the Highland Council Chamber in Inverness on Saturday, 20 September 2008. The event was preceded on the Friday evening by a civic reception kindly hosted by the Provost of Inverness. Conference speakers included Mr Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Community Justice, and Mr Paddy Tomkins, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland. Feedback from the event, which was attended by around 94 delegates, was overall very positive.

Towards the end of the review period, visitors were invited to comment on relevant extracts of Northern Constabulary's draft revised Custody and Care Manual.

### **Group Activity**

Issues raised by detainees, police or visitors are discussed at regular visitors' meetings, as are wider developments in the field of Custody Visiting. These meetings are generally chaired by the Scheme Administrator and attended by Chief Inspector Julian Innes, Area Commander for Inverness, who took over the role of Northern Constabulary's Custody Visiting Liaison Officer during the review period and with whose assistance admission procedures at the main custody suite in Inverness have much improved. Members of the Northern Joint Police Board's Independent Custody Visiting Sub-Committee have also attended the team's regular meetings, which offer visitors an opportunity to network and share experience.

**Training**

Continuous development is seen as a cornerstone of custody visiting throughout Scotland. A training session on equality and diversity issues has been scheduled to be held in May 2009.

**THE YEAR AHEAD**

The extension of the Inverness custody suite is likely to see a further increase in the number of custodies transferred to the Inverness cell suite from other areas. Implications for the scheduling of visits will be considered.

Opportunities for further training sessions and to boost recruitment will be explored.