

# Independent Custody Visiting Scheme for Merseyside

## Recruitment Pack



2020



**POLICE COMMISSIONER**

*Working For Merseyside*

## CONTENTS

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1	Introduction .....	3
1.1	What is an Independent Custody Visitor? .....	3
1.2	What is their role? .....	3
1.3	When and where are visits made? .....	3
2	Eligibility.....	4
3	Role Description / Main Duties.....	6
4	Person Specification .....	7
5	Frequently asked questions .....	8
5.1	What is the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in the scheme?.....	8
5.2	What is it like carrying out a visit? .....	8
5.3	How much of my time would I need to put into the scheme? .....	8
5.4	What experience is required?.....	8
5.5	What is the dress code for visits?.....	8
6	How can I apply? .....	10

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 What is an Independent Custody Visitor?

Police and Crime Commissioners are responsible for maintaining and administering an Independent Custody Visiting scheme in their area. Independent Custody Visitors (also known as ICVs) are members of the local community who volunteer to check on the welfare of people detained in police custody. They call at police stations in pairs, unannounced and complete short report forms about their visit. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside is then informed of any issues that arise during a visit to consider if appropriate action is required. Recommendations made by Independent Custody Visitors can require the police to make improvements for the welfare of detainees. They play a valuable role in maintaining public confidence in this important area of policing.

## 1.2 What is their role?

An Independent Custody Visitors main role is to look, listen and report what they observe during the visit. Most detainees welcome the opportunity to speak with an Independent Custody Visitor however, some may not. Independent Custody Visitors are required to maintain independence and impartiality at all times.

Independent Custody Visitors do not take sides with the police or the detainee. On arrival at the police stations, Independent Custody Visitors will be escorted to the custody area. Interviews with detainees are normally carried out within sight, but out of hearing of the custody officer or custody assistant.

## 1.3 When and where are visits made?

Independent Custody Visitors always make visits to custody suites in pairs, randomly and unannounced. Visits can be undertaken 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Volunteers are required to undertake a minimum of 1 visit per month, unless otherwise agreed by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner. Independent Custody Visitors will be required to visit all custody suites throughout the duration of their appointment.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme has been unable to operate under normal circumstances. During the lockdown, physical visits to police custody suites were temporarily suspended in adherence with social distancing measures. Instead, Independent Custody Visitors utilised virtual custody visits and communicated with detainees via unannounced telephone calls to suites. These visits allowed the scheme to maintain oversight of police custody and ensure that detainees continue to be treated appropriately and have access to the required facilities. More recently, a small number of custody visitors embarked on their first physical visit back into custody suites, however, at the moment the scheme is still undertaking a combination of both physical and remote telephone visits.

## 2 ELIGIBILITY

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There are no qualifications needed but applicants must;

- Be over 18 years of age.
- Live or work in Merseyside.
- Have good communication skills.
- Have the time and flexibility to carry out the role of custody visiting.
- Be independent from the police, impartial and work in a non-discriminatory way.
- Be able to maintain confidentiality.
- Independent Custody Visitors cannot be serving Magistrates, police officers, police community support officers (PCSO), special constables, police staff, members of Police and Crime Panels or Office of Police and Crime Commissioner staff.

All applications will be considered however, care will be taken to avoid any potential conflict of interest. Applicants who have previously served as Magistrates, police officers, PCSOs, special constables, police or Office of Police and Crime Commissioner staff and are no longer in this role must allow a three year time lapse from their employment prior to applying for the role of Independent Custody Visitor. This is to preserve the independency of the scheme.

Applicants will be subject to a criminal records check. However, it should be noted that having a criminal record or unspent convictions is not an automatic barrier to becoming a custody visitor. Individual circumstances will be assessed against the needs of the post and suitability of the applicant. All appropriate applications from members of the public are considered on their own merits.

Successful applicants will receive initial and on-going training and support. Out of pocket expenses and a casual car users allowance are available.

Appointment of an Independent Custody Visitor is initially for a three year period and will be confirmed following the satisfactory completion of a six-month probationary period. Independent Custody Visitors will then have the opportunity to be re-appointed every three years following a full re-assessment of suitability for the role. Independent Custody Visitors will be required to complete a medical health questionnaire and

vetting procedure prior to the renewal of existing contracts. Re-appointment will be based on the continuing ability and willingness to perform the role effectively. Independent Custody Visitors are restricted to a nine year maximum tenure to protect the independence of the scheme.

### **3 ROLE DESCRIPTION / MAIN DUTIES**

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**The roles and responsibilities of an Independent Custody Visitor are:**

1. To attend police custody suites to check on the welfare, conditions and treatment of detainees in custody.
2. To arrange visits with fellow Independent Custody Visitors, in line with agreed rotas.
3. To undertake some weekend and late night visits to designated custody suites.
4. To accurately record all visits on the Independent Custody Visitor visit report form, ensuring all relevant information is recorded, and to circulate copies as directed.
5. To adhere to the 'Memorandum of Understanding' and the 'Scheme Handbook' issued by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner on commencement of the role.
6. To follow all appropriate procedures when dealing with issues relating to detainees.
7. To check on the conditions in which detainees are kept including their legal rights and entitlements, with reference to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Code C.
8. Where appropriate, check detainees custody records to clarify any concerns that they raise.
9. To maintain professional working relationships with police staff, and to bring to the attention of custody staff any issues that need to be dealt with.
10. To complete and submit expense claims in line with scheme guidelines.
11. To attend all quarterly meetings and other training and information sessions as required by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner.
12. To carry out all reasonable instructions given by the Chair of the Independent Custody Visiting scheme.

There may be other duties not mentioned in this list that Independent Custody Visitors may be required to complete from time to time.

## 4 PERSON SPECIFICATION

<b><u>Essential Criteria:</u></b>		<b><u>Measured by:</u></b>
1.	Must be at least 18 years of age and able to pass Non Police Personal Vetting.	Application
2.	Must live or work in the Merseyside area.	Application
3.	Able to use simple IT systems such as emails.	Application
4.	Have sufficient time, flexibility and commitment to carry out the role of custody visiting, training and meetings.	Application and interview
5.	Be able to work with colleagues as part of a team.	Application and interview
6.	Be able to undertake visits safely and abide by the health and safety procedures as set by Merseyside Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.	Application and interview
7.	Hold diversity and equalities in high regard, showing respect for the opinions, circumstances and feelings of colleagues and members of the public regardless of background, status, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or religion.	Application and interview
8.	Able to demonstrate an independent and impartial view in relation to all parties involved in the custody visiting process.	Application and interview
9.	Be an effective communicator both verbally and in writing, able to communicate ideas and information to a range of audiences clearly and concisely and with an appropriate style for the audience.	Application and interview
10.	Good observational and listening skills.	Application and interview
11.	Able to maintain strict confidentiality and adhere to policies and procedures, with a commitment to continued development.	Application and interview
12.	Have the ability to travel to conduct visits and attend meetings.	Interview

<b><u>Desirable Criteria:</u></b>		<b><u>Measured by:</u></b>
1.	Have some knowledge of Custody Visiting.	Application and interview
2.	Have an interest in the rights and welfare of individuals in the Criminal Justice System	Application and interview
3.	To be able to complete forms clearly and concisely.	Application and interview

## 5 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### **5.1 What is the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in the scheme?**

Independent Custody Visiting is a statutory requirement of Police and Crime Commissioners of which the purpose is to provide independent oversight of the detention of people in police custody. The aim of this is to provide the public with confidence that the police treat people lawfully and with respect.

The scheme is administered by the staff within the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner. The office is a point of contact for the Independent Custody Visitors.

### **5.2 What is it like carrying out a visit?**

No two custody visits are the same. All Independent Custody Visitors undergo training to prepare them for the role. There may be risks when entering a custody suite but both Independent Custody Visitors and the custody staff are trained to recognise these risks and respond accordingly. You do not make physical contact with any detainees, instead you will be positioned in the door way of the cell, whilst the detainee is usually sat down.

### **5.3 How much of my time would I need to put into the scheme?**

Independent Custody Visitors are required to carry out one custody visit per month. However, visits can be undertaken seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At times this will include conducting a visit on weekends and during unsociable hours. Independent Custody Visitors will be given a rota with the week commencing date in which a visit is required. Independent Custody Visitors will then arrange with their visiting partner the exact date and time the visit will be conducted to suit their availability. There is no time limit for a custody visit, they can take either 30 minutes or three hours depending on the number of detainees in custody or if any issues are found during the visit.

Independent Custody Visitors are also required to attend training sessions and quarterly meetings throughout their time as a volunteer. Upon appointment, Independent Custody Visitors are required to complete an induction training programme following which refresher training sessions will be held for all volunteers.

### **5.4 What experience is required?**

When recruiting, the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner strive to appoint individuals who demonstrate good communication and listening skills as well as the ability to work with people from a wide range of backgrounds. Please refer to the person specification on page seven of this guide for more information.

### **5.5 What is the dress code for visits?**

Independent Custody Visitors are advised to wear suitable attire that will not cause any health and safety risks to themselves or others in the custody suite. Certain items of clothing or accessories such as neck ties, scarves, necklaces, short skirts or shorts the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner advise Independent Custody Visitors to refrain from wearing. Formal wear such as suits should not be worn as this may give



the impression that the visitor is an 'official' or 'authority figure' rather than an independent individual.

## 6 HOW CAN I APPLY?

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To apply to be an Independent Custody Visitor, please complete the application form available on the website and forward to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner via email or post at the contact details below.

**Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside**  
**Mather Avenue Training Centre**  
**Mather Avenue**  
**Liverpool**  
**L18 9TG**

**Tel:** 0151 777 5155

**Email:** [OPCC.ICV@merseysidepcc.info](mailto:OPCC.ICV@merseysidepcc.info)

**Website:** <https://www.merseysidepcc.info/home/get-involved/independent-custody-visitors.aspx>

Interviews will be conducted either virtually or physically following a review of current Covid-19 guidance at the time of shortlisting.

Please do not hesitate to get in contact with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner if you any have any other queries.