

Report of the Chief Executive to the Chair and Members of the Operational Policing Panel

Presenting Officer: Cllr Ron Lowes/Kath Allaway

Status: For Noting

Update on Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Operated by Cleveland Police Authority

1. Purpose

To update Member's on the operation of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. This includes recruitment, visits undertaken and training undertaken since the last report.

2. Recommendations

That Members note the visits undertaken.

That Members pass on their appreciation to the continuing commitment of the volunteers within the scheme.

3. Reasons

Police Authorities are required to operate an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme within the Police Reform Act 2002. Within guidance published it is recommended that regular visits are undertaken by volunteers recruited and managed by the Police Authority, to Police Custody units.

During 2007 visits have been undertaken to all Cleveland Police Custody units on a regular basis. Middlesbrough and Hartlepool are visited on a weekly basis, with Redcar and Cleveland District continuing to be visited two weekly. This reflects the low number of detainees held in the cells at Kirkleatham.

Panel meetings are held on a quarterly basis at Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. Hartlepool is now a separate panel and quarterly meetings have been held there this year. These meetings raise issues experienced within the visits and are attended by Cllr Ron Lowes, Lead Member of the Police Authority, the Scheme Manager, a representative from the Custody Inspectors and representatives from reliance now also attend.

The Scheme Manager is in regular contact with the Co-ordinators to discuss issues that may affect their panels. Briefings are held on topics relevant to the Custody Visitors which are open to all visitors which also provides them with an opportunity to meet together across the area rather than just in their own panel. Briefing topics have included PACE, Mental health issues applicable to Custody and a visit to the ID suite.

Visits are undertaken in pairs and are unannounced. Visitors must be allowed access to the Custody area immediately unless there is a safety issue in which case this must be recorded.

There has been occasions when delays are experienced and this is addressed immediately by the Police Inspector. Posters have been displayed in the front desk areas and in Custody to assist in this matter. A briefing note is also been compiled by the scheme manager with the Inspectors and reliance.

Middlesbrough Panel is at full strength, Redcar has sufficient visitors to carry out two weekly visits, recruiting more would enable more visits but the number of detainees means that this is not an issue. Visitors can undertake more than one visit in their allocated two weeks if they wish. There are also two applications being processed which could be allocated to Redcar. Hartlepool continues to be underrepresented but weekly visits are still undertaken at Hartlepool Custody due to the level of commitment of the panel co-ordinator. Middlesbrough panel visitors also assist with visits at Hartlepool. The Volunteer group at Hartlepool have been contacted but to date this has not resulted in any applications.

The Volunteers Manager, in liaison with the scheme manager, has also sent applications to volunteers who have applied to Cleveland Police for areas where there are no suitable vacancies at present.

Future briefings have been arranged for Diversity, Juveniles in Custody, Health and Safety, Alcohol referral, youth projects and Human Rights. Refresher training will also take place. Some briefings will be held jointly with members and staff giving the Custody Visitors a wider knowledge of the Authority and also enabling members to engage with the Visitors.

A regional meeting has been arranged and will be hosted by Cleveland in August and a Regional Conference also hosted by Cleveland will be held in September.

Formal appraisal of Custody visitors has now been put in place and the forms are being returned at the present time. Any training implications will be compiled into a plan for the next year.

The Volunteers welcome the attendance of Cllr Lowes as the Police Authority representative at the meetings and briefing sessions and have thanked him for his continued commitment.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report

4.2 Diversity and Equal Opportunities

The Custody visitors receive Diversity training. The number of visitors from an ethnic minority background is low. Details have again been given to members of the IAG in an attempt to increase the representation and discussions are taking place to rectify this issue. The age and gender of the visitors continue to be more representative of society as a whole.

4.3 Human Rights Act Implications

There are no implications directly resulting from this report although Human Rights training has been arranged for the Custody visitors. The nature of the scheme in monitoring the rights and welfare of detainees in Police Custody by its nature has an impact on the compliance with human rights.

4.4 Sustainability

Although recruitment of volunteers continues to be difficult this is not to a degree which will affect the sustainability of the scheme.

4.5 Risk

As the Scheme remains sustainable the risk to the organisation of not meeting its statutory obligations is managed

5. Conclusions

The police authority continues to fulfil its obligation and commitment to the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme with sufficient volunteers to maintain their interest and yet not overburden the individuals. On average individual

visitors undertake a visit every 6-8 weeks which meets the Authority's requirements.

Joe McCarthy
Chief Executive