

Warwickshire Police Authority – 21 May 2008

Report of the Voluntary Services Lead

Summary

This report provides an update for Members on the progress of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and the Special Constabulary

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

1. Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

(1) Training and Development

On 9 February 2008 the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) provided a training event for all Custody Visitors to consider the Code of Practice for visiting, national standards, and how these impact on visiting practices and processes. 14 visitors attended the session, which received positive feedback.

Whilst considering self-introduction, visitors felt that training on risk assessment would be useful for all visitors, to include areas such as warning signs and non-verbal communication. This training is being researched at present.

West Midlands Police Authority have made initial inquiries with Warwickshire, Staffordshire and West Mercia Police Authorities about the possibility of running joint regional training for Custody Visitors. I have responded with interest to the proposals, but have to consider whether visitors would be willing to travel across the region for training. There is the potential for cost savings and a wider variety of training available if training is shared between the four Authorities. I await further details on the proposal.

(2) Recruitment

There are 20 Custody Visitors, with 11 in the north and 9 in the south. In addition, two countywide Animal Welfare Visitors are based with the southern panel. They provide support to the Custody Visiting scheme in the south when required.

There may need to be some recruitment in the coming months, as the number of visitors has reduced over the last year. The situation will be monitored to ensure that there are enough visitors to fulfil the visits required.

(3) Chairs' Meeting

The Panel Chairs met with Debbie Mullis and myself on 9 February 2008 to discuss the Custody Visiting and Animal Welfare Schemes.

Areas discussed included:

- Reviewing the visitors' handbook.
- Developing a guidance sheet on sharing information between visitors and custody staff, e.g. staff/visitor changes.
- Self-introduction.
- The future of the Annual Joint Meeting (AJM).

Visitors will be consulted to establish their views on the future of the AJM, due to low attendance in recent years. The Chairs have suggested that the meeting does not continue, with regular Panel and Chairs' meetings sufficient for visitors. Once views have been sought, these will be reported to the Police Authority, with a recommendation on the future of the AJM.

(4) Self-introduction

At the Chairs' meeting it was decided to set up a working group for the trial of self-introduction for the northern panel. I chair the group, which consists of the Chairs of the northern and southern panels, a Custody Sergeant from Nuneaton and from Leamington and Debbie Mullis. The group have met once to consider the process for self-introduction, the guidance and training required, how the trial will be evaluated and health and safety. It was agreed to delay the start of the trial, to allow time for these issues to be considered and properly dealt with, to ensure that the trial is implemented with all aspects considered.

For those taking part in the trial, there will be an opportunity to practice self-introduction in the cells at Nuneaton Justice Centre, with visitors acting as detainees. This will allow visitors to become used to the practice and to raise any concerns.

The safety of visitors is of principal concern. The trial will not be commenced until health and safety risk assessments have been completed. It is likely that the trial will commence in the next few months, when the group are satisfied that all areas have been considered.

2. Special Constabulary

(1) National Special Constabulary Conference

Four Special Constables, along with ACC Bill Holland attended the conference from 28 to 30 March 2008 at Gatwick, which was reported to be very successful.

The National Strategy for the Special Constabulary was launched as well as an organisation called ASCCO (Association of Special Constabulary Chief Officers). This is a body that will run along the same lines of ACPO and will represent the Special Constabulary nationally.

(2) Recruitment

Recruitment has not been as good as the Special Constabulary would have liked, however this pattern has been reflected in Forces in other regions. 16 New recruits started in April.

During May 'Shop Watch' will be launched as a pilot in Rugby. The 'Shop Watch' scheme involves the retailer allowing a member of staff to be released on full pay, to become a Special Constable. Once the member of staff is fully trained, the store releases the person for one day each fortnight to carry out police duties in the store and the surrounding area. Whether the member of staff is on duty or not, they have the training to deal with incidents in the store such as theft or antisocial behaviour.

If the pilot is successful, the scheme will be rolled out across the county. It is hoped that more constables will be recruited to the Special Constabulary from the 'Shop Watch' initiative.

A report from Angie Dumper, the Special Recruiting Officer at Warwickshire Police is attached at Appendix A, which includes an action plan for recruitment and retention.

(3) Conclusion

Over the past 12 months the Special Constabulary has continued to perform well in assisting regular colleagues, and continues to help in various specialist departments.

**Eithne Goode
Lead Member**