

Warwickshire Police Authority – 29 July 2009

Report of the Voluntary Services Lead

Summary

This report provides an update for Members on the progress of the Independent Custody & Animal Welfare Visiting Scheme, and the Special Constabulary.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

1. Independent Custody Visiting & Animal Welfare Scheme

(1) Custody and Animal Welfare Visiting Scheme Annual Report 2008-09

The Annual Report for 2008-09 is attached at Appendix A for information.

(2) Recruitment

A recruitment process has taken place for the Northern Custody Visiting Panel, who visit Nuneaton and Rugby Police Stations. To promote the role articles and advertisements were placed in local newspapers and on the Police Authority website, a custody visitor did a radio interview, posters were placed in libraries and Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action promoted the position on their website and in their newsletter. There were 60 expressions of interest, with 26 applications received before the closing date. A shortlisting process took place with interviews held over two dates.

An induction training day was held for those selected, which included a tour of the custody area at the Nuneaton Justice Centre.

8 visitors have been appointed and will commence their 6 month probationary period on 1 August 2009. This will bring the number of visitors on the Northern Panel to 15.

The Southern Panel visit Leamington Police Station. There are currently 11 visitors, including an animal welfare visitor. Recruitment is not required for the Southern Panel at this time.

(3) Training and Development

Self-introduction training was provided to the Northern Custody Visiting Panel in March 2009. The session provided the opportunity for visitors to practice self-introduction before the trial commenced.

A diversity training session is being planned for the autumn for all visitors.

The Independent Custody Visiting Association will provide a session considering visiting practices and procedures for all Warwickshire visitors in February 2010. The session will be part of the training for the new visitors and a refresher for the existing visitors.

A regional custody visitors' conference will take place in September in Birmingham. The event will provide the opportunity for visitors to network and to hear presentations relevant to the role.

The Annual ICVA conference will take place in November in Leicester. The conference will include a presentation on mental health and a Home Office representative has been invited to discuss developments in custody suite design.

(3) Custody Visiting and Animal Welfare Annual Meeting

The Authority holds an annual meeting for all custody and animal welfare visitors, providing the opportunity for visitors to discuss the scheme with representatives of the Authority and the Force.

Only 5 visitors attended the annual meeting in November 2007. It was agreed to circulate a survey obtaining visitors views on what they would like to be included at the meeting and when they would prefer it to be held. As a result of the survey responses it was decided to hold the meeting in spring or early summer on a weekday evening. Visitors also requested a presentation be included at the meeting.

The 2009 meeting took place on 27 May. 10 visitors attended the meeting, which was chaired by Ian Francis. Peter Brown from the Warwickshire Police Professional Standards Department provided a presentation about how complaints are handled and near-miss incidents in custody. The presentation was well received by the visitors.

Chief Inspector Colin Reynolds attended the meeting and provided an update on behalf of the Warwickshire Police Force. CI Reynolds reported that the number of detainees in custody in Warwickshire has been falling since 2007. This does not reflect the national trend.

Consideration is being given to housing Hinckley detainees in Nuneaton custody cells on Friday and Saturday nights. Hinckley will provide custody staff which will increase the overall staffing levels in the custody area on these nights. If it goes ahead, the project will commence with a pilot in the next few months.

Ian Francis raised concern that there is no appropriate provision for section 136 Mental Health Act detainees in Warwickshire. Some are not held under PACE and are being kept in a police cell as a place of safety. The Police continue to work with the NHS to develop a hospital-based place of safety.

Concerns were raised about the amount of time that immigration detainees can be held in police custody. CI Reynolds informed visitors that data is being collected to consider whether any action is required.

(4) Self-introduction

The self-introduction trial commenced in May for the Northern Custody Visiting Panel. There had been some delays whilst it was ensured that all appropriate measures were in place, including a risk assessment.

So far, the trial has gone well, with the visitors commenting that although not all of those detained wish to speak to them, they still get to see the person and the cell they are held in, which was not the case when the custody officer sought permission from those detained. The evaluations completed by the custody visitors after each visit show positive results so far, with visitors feeling comfortable and safe making the introductions.

The trial will be evaluated after 6 months, but if there have been no problems, self-introduction will continue for the Northern Panel whilst the evaluation takes place and recommendations are made to the Police Authority.

(5) Custody Inspections

Under the UN Optional Protocol (OPCAT - 2003), independent inspections must be undertaken of all police custody facilities. In England and Wales, Ministers agreed that HMIC and HMI Prisons would jointly carry out the inspection of police custody facilities. The inspections have been piloted throughout 2008-2009.

The primary aim of the inspections is to inspect the force responsibilities. However, police authorities own the estate that holds police custody suites, and have a statutory responsibility to ensure an effective Independent Custody Visiting Scheme operates in the area.

Since March 2009 the joint inspection regime has been fully operational. 12 - 13 unannounced force inspections will be carried out each year.

In Warwickshire, self-inspections were conducted in March 2009 using the HMIC and HMI Prisons inspection framework. A team of custody staff, Health & Safety officers, Reliance staff and independent custody visitors carried out the inspections, identifying any issues. A more rigid and frequent inspection framework has been developed internally following the self-inspections to ensure that any issues are resolved.

(6) Animal Welfare Visiting

In light of the recent incident in an East Midlands Police Force where 2 police dogs lost their lives whilst left in a police car, thought is being given to the animal welfare visiting scheme in Warwickshire. Animal welfare visiting is not a statutory duty, however it is viewed as good practice. There is one animal welfare visitor in Warwickshire but he has been unable to make visits for some time. Consideration is being given to training additional visitors to ensure that the scheme continues to function in the county.

2. Special Constabulary

A strategic review of the Special Constabulary is taking place, considering recruitment procedures and the tasking and deployment of specials. A small working group of regular officers and specials are working on this review.

The Special Constabulary now has a dedicated trainer who is looking at the training of recruits and all aspects of ongoing training that may be required.

ACC Bill Holland and Glyn Gardner, Chief Officer of the Special Constabulary, are working with other Special Constabulary Chief Officers from the region on the implementation of the national strategy.

The Special Constabulary continues to support regular officers with various operations and assists at weekends with the Enhanced Policing Initiative. Specials will be assisting at the

Global Gathering event and the Bulldog Bash. Rugby Specials continue to carry out operations using a metal detector as part of an initiative to cut down the possible fear of knife crime.

A main priority for the Chief Officer of the Special Constabulary this year is to support Angela Dumper, the Specials Recruitment Officer, in trying to recruit a further 100 specials by 2011, with the aim of bringing the number of specials in Warwickshire to 300. A report and action plan considering Special Constabulary recruitment can be found at Appendices B and C.

Phillip Morris-Jones
Lead Member