

Devon and Cornwall Police Authority

16 February 2007

Open for the purposes of FOI

Report of the Chief Executive & Clerk

INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING BI-ANNUAL REPORT (PA/07301)

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- i. That the Authority notes the content of the Report.
- ii. That the Authority acknowledge the dedication and support of all the volunteers involved in the scheme, with especial thanks going to those volunteers who are celebrating their 20th year as independent custody visitors.

Introduction / Summary

1. This report summarises the output from independent custody visiting for the period 1 June to 31 December 2006, and also provides information on significant initiatives during the period.

Background information

2. "Independent Custody Visiting is the well established system whereby volunteers attend police stations to check on the treatment of detainees and the conditions in which they are held and that their rights and entitlements are being observed. It offers protections to both detainees and the police and reassurance to the community at large". (Home Office code of practice 2003).
3. 2007 is the 20th anniversary of the Devon and Cornwall Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

Numbers of detainees seen

4. Designated custody units - the following designated custody units were visited during the period:

Barnstaple	Exeter	Newquay
Plymouth	Launceston	
Camborne	Torquay	

5. Records indicate that 151 of the planned 168 visits were undertaken during the period 1 June to 31 December 2006, during which there were 881 detainees held in custody. Of these, 557 were offered a visit and 361 were seen (65%). The highest percentage of detainees seen was at Camborne (83%).
6. Non-designated custody units - the following non-designated custody units were visited during

the period:

Cullompton	Tiverton	Crown Hill
St Austell	Bodmin	Honiton
Bude	Torpoint	Saltash
Sidmouth	Seaton	Newton Abbot
Falmouth		

There were no detainees in custody at the times of the visits.

Main issues arising from visits

7. A variety of issues arising during discussions with detainees were raised and addressed with the relevant police personnel at the time of the visit. These included requests for:-
- beverages and food, phone calls, requests for medical attention etc.
 - smoking facilities after the 2006 smoking ban was passed
 - clothing
 - detainee concerned at being placed in a camera cell

Many positive comments were received from ICVs undertaking visits during the period of June to December 2006 and these included: -

- Visit to Camborne – December 2006, an ICV phoned the office to inform us of the exceptional preparation that was undertaken by an escorting officer immediately prior to and during their visit. Thanks were passed onto the staff involved.
- All relevant custody related rooms were inspected at Exeter in December and feedback relating to their 'excellent' condition was received.
- All cells at Launceston were reported to be in good condition in November.
- ICVs on a visit to Newquay in October reported the custody area was clean and tidy and the escorting officer gave them a very good visit.
- All relevant rooms were inspected at Plymouth on a visit in July and were reported to be in a clean and tidy condition.
- ICVs who visited Torquay in October were "well received, with the staff most helpful and courteous".

Issues relating to the conditions in which detainees were held included:

- A concern on a visit undertaken in September 2006 that Charles Cross was looking 'tatty'.
- Some cells were undergoing repair at Torquay in November 2006.
- A leaking toilet in a cell at Newquay in July 2006.
- There was an issue regarding cells 'being very cold' at Exeter in November 2006.
- An ICV raised concern over the detainee's dietary requirements. It was noted there was little or no adequate food for a coeliac detainee.
- It was reported the step into the exercise yard at Launceston was a possible Health and Safety risk.

Appendix A shows a summary of the number of visits made and types of issues raised for each designated custody unit separately, and an overall summary which includes non-designated custody units.

8. As a result of custody visits, actions taken include:

- The Authority is aiming to put together a multi lingual checklist, based on the key checks Custody Visitors need to make during a visit, to enable better communication with International detainees. All being well this should be produced in the early part of 2007.
- An incident occurred at Exeter on 7 November when a detainee alleged he had to drink water from the toilet as no one answered the cell buzzer. The police investigated this issue and a satisfactory explanation was provided.

Outstanding issues / trends

9. The Custody Visiting guidelines recommend a meeting between the Scheme Administrator and the Chief Inspector of Custody once or twice a year to consider any outstanding issues as a result of custody visits. During 2006 there were no outstanding issues that required a meeting, however the Chief Inspector was advised of some concern expressed by Custody Visitors around the introduction of the smoking ban within custody centers. The smoking ban was implemented as a result of Government recommendations for the safer handling of detainees whilst in custody. It was reported as a result of the ban being in place, detention officers had benefited from a saving of around 70% of their time by not having to respond to demands to use smoking facilities. Contingencies were in place for nicotine gum to be prescribed to detainees who required it.

Recruitment of Independent Custody Visitors

10. A recruitment drive for volunteers interested in becoming Independent Custody Visitors was undertaken during the summer / autumn of 2006. 36 applications were received. Following interviews, 18 people were appointed. Training was provided on in November and feedback from those attending was very good. Arrangements for new volunteers to visit a custody centre prior to carrying out an official visit were put in place. The new volunteers will begin their official visits from February 2007.

Independent Custody Visitor Representation

11. Appendix B shows a breakdown of the ethnicity, age and gender of Independent Custody Visitors involved in the Devon and Cornwall scheme as at 31 December 2006.

Police Dog Welfare Scheme

12. The Devon and Cornwall Police Authority's Police Dog Welfare scheme enables members of the local community to observe and report upon the conditions under which police dogs are housed, trained and transported. Many Independent Custody Visitors also volunteer for this Scheme. Members may be interested to know that the way in which this scheme operates is

being changed to improve the numbers of police dogs seen by the volunteers. If Members would like more information about the improvements being made, Lisa Crandon or Eleanor Tanner would be pleased to provide it on request.

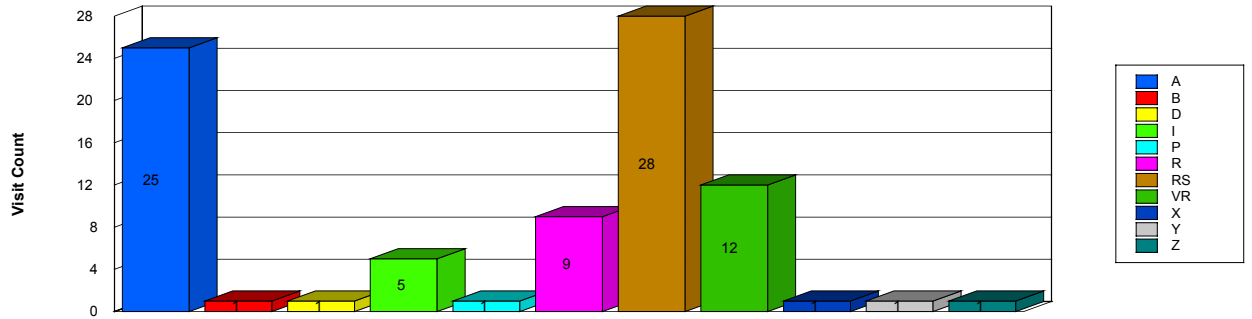
Contact for further information:

Eleanor Tanner, Member Services and Office Manager;
Tel: 01392 268311

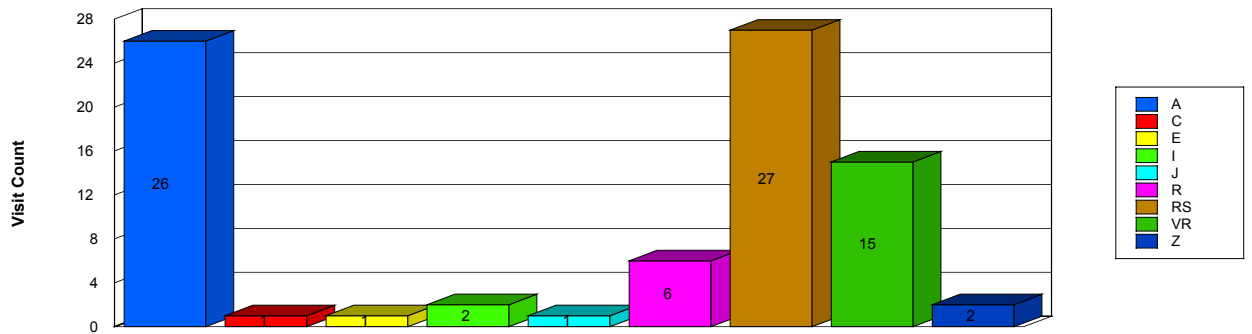
Lisa Crandon, Independent Custody Visiting Officer;
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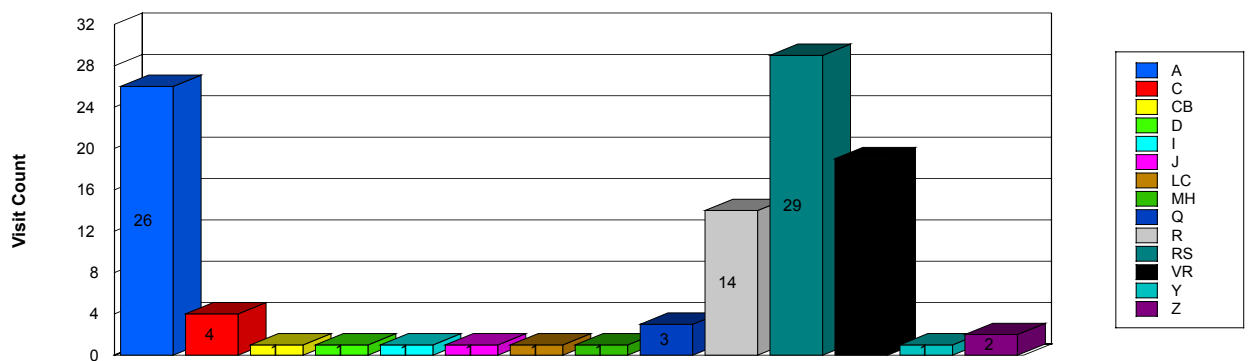
Camborne



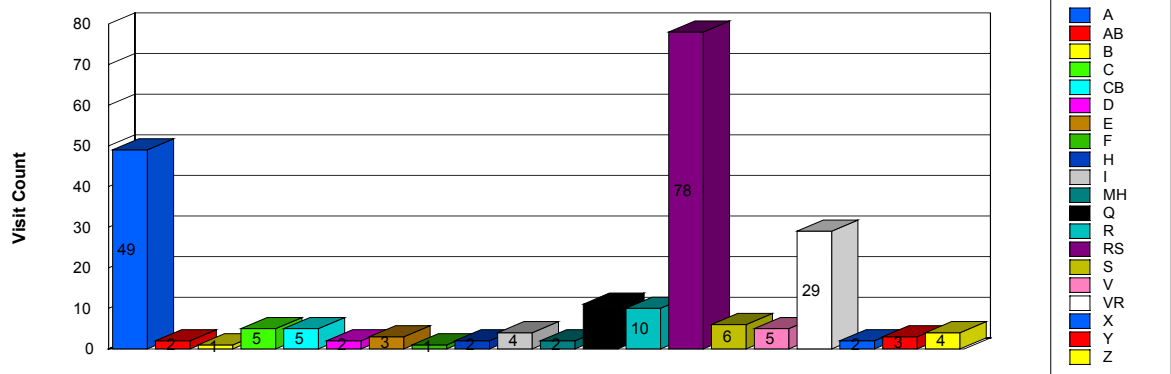
Launceston



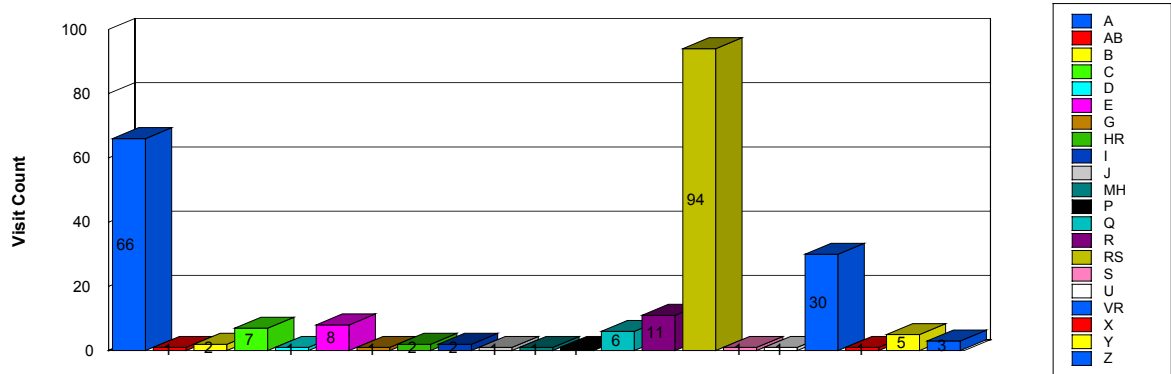
Newquay



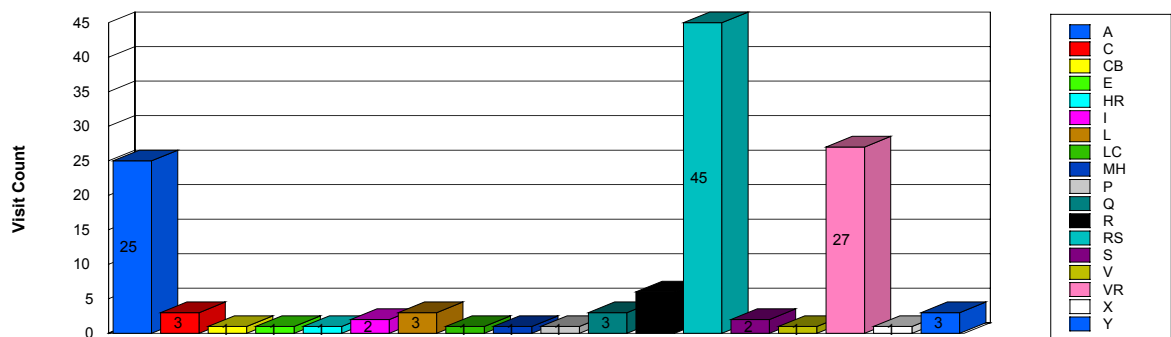
Exeter



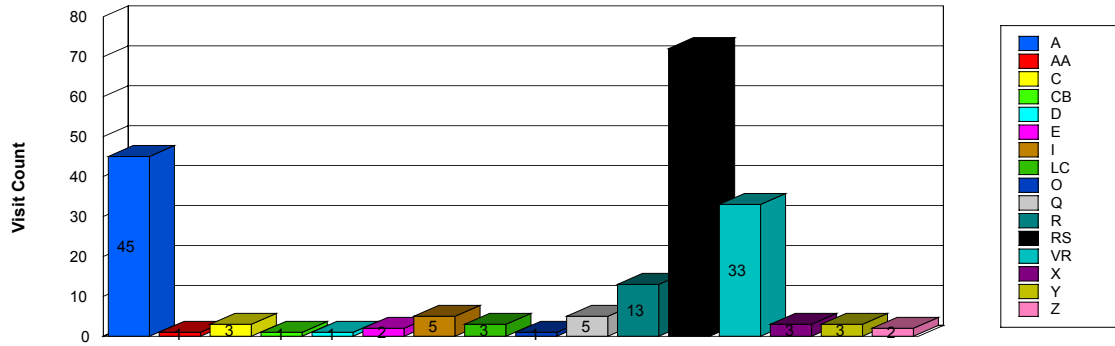
Torquay



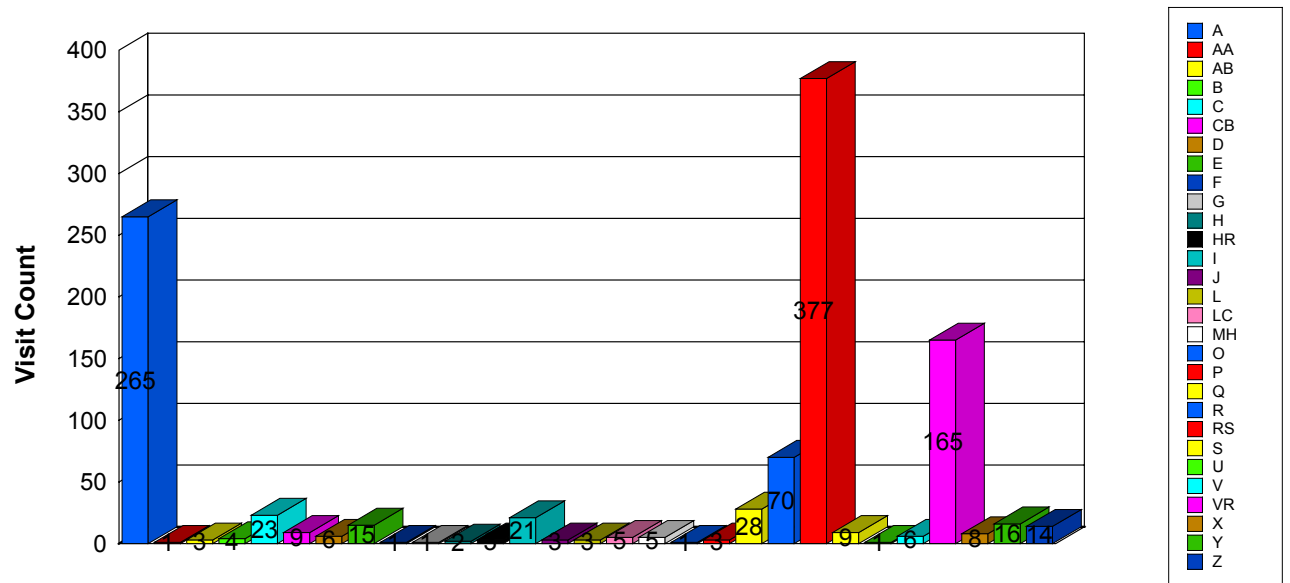
Barnstaple



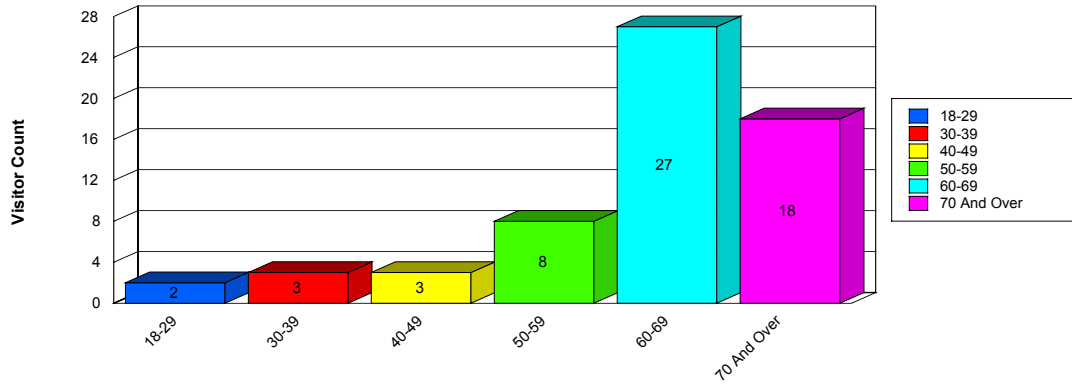
Charles Cross



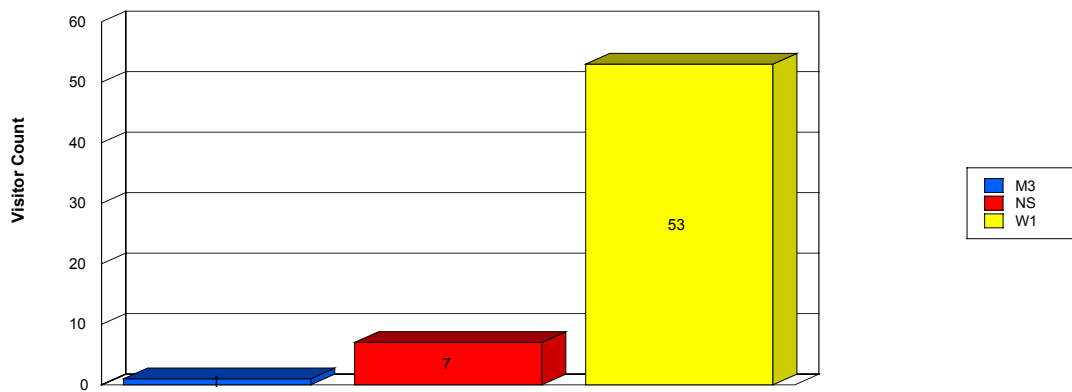
Overall visit statistics



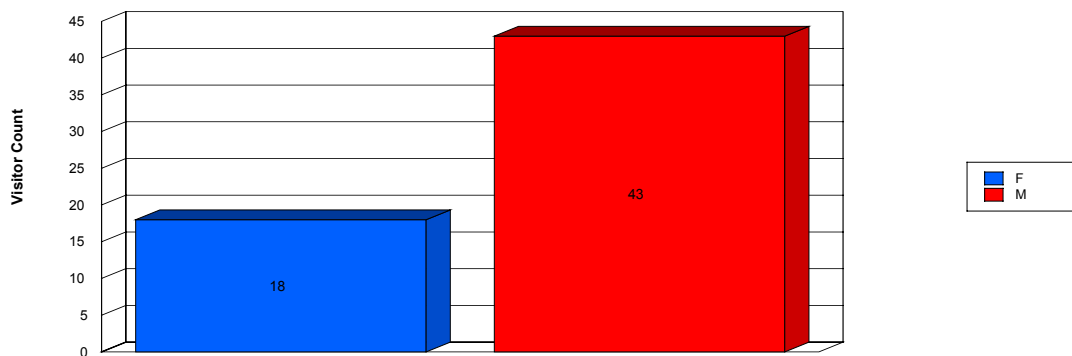
Age Range of Independent Custody Visitors in Devon and Cornwall



Ethnicity of Independent Custody Visitors in Devon and Cornwall



Gender of Independent Custody Visitors in Devon and Cornwall



Number of concerns raised for DCPA

ID Categories

A	No complaints
AB	Alarm bell not answered
AN	Noise
B	Request food
BB	Poor food
C	Medical attention
CB	Blanket
D	Cigarettes
E	Legal advice
F	Bail
H	Relative informed of detention
HR	Human rights issue
I	Visit from relative / Friend
J	Washing facilities
K	Dirty cell
L	Too hot
LC	Too cold
M	Ventilation
MH	Detained under mental health section
N	Clean clothing
O	Clean bedding
P	Alleged assault
Q	Request drink
R	Detainee unavailable
RS	Custody record seen
S	Exercise
T	Lost property
U	Toilet facilities
V	Reading material
VR	Visit refused
W	Change cell
X	Interpreted
Y	Telephone call
Z	Complaint general