

Visiting Times

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LAY VISITING

What's in a name?

charting the way forward -
the new draft Home Office
guidance for lay visitors

Also in this issue:

Staying Connected

A reminder of the launch of the NALV website
...an excellent source of information

A Very Warm Welcome

A tale of a typical visit?!

Riot!

Nearly 20 years on -
do you remember the riots?

Stationed on Wheels!

The Staffordshire Mobile Nick

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Hello and welcome to Visiting

Times. I hope you find it a worthwhile read.

It's certainly been an interesting year for Lay Visiting on the national front with much activity taking place on proposed new guidance. This has culminated in the draft guidance set out in full in



this issue. Time is tight so if you have views, get them in to the Home Office as soon as you can. We've been waiting a long time for new impetus and this has now arrived. Views of lay

visitors have been fed into this process from the start but don't let this opportunity to influence the new guidance go!

By necessity, this edition focuses on the new guidance as it is such a big issue. But that is not to say the rest of our 'routine' work and issues should slip of course. I hope that you will find something in the edition that is of interest or relevance to you. If not, then what would be? Please don't stop thinking of items for VT. It is only with the contributions, ideas and input from the ground up can this magazine truly flourish and give you what you want.

I hope you enjoy the issue and look forward to hearing from you.

Mike Robinson
editor

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National Networking

A year of unprecedented co-operation

This past year has been one of unprecedented co-operation with the Home Office on lay visiting. NALV has worked very closely with the Home Office on many issues of national importance. Lay Visiting has achieved a high priority in government and has at long last been the subject of some real movement and progress. After a long wait, the Police Foundation research arrived and was well received by all. This formed the basis of Home Office work to review and update the national guidance (Circular 4/1992) under which we all work.

NALV management committee members have worked hard on a Home Office led working party to review this guidance. They were joined by colleagues from ACPO, the Superintendents' Association; the Association of Police Authorities, Probation service and others. The views of all lay visitors as expressed in writing and at the Cardiff conference proved invaluable in helping shape the new guidance. This new guidance has just been released in this edition of our own magazine - "Visiting Times".

NALV and the Working Party were also integral in pressing for lay visiting to become statutory. This has now been agreed in principle by ministers and a suitable piece of legislation is

now awaited to turn this into a reality. NALV has worked hard to put lay visiting on a proper footing and a statutory basis and new guidance will only help in achieving this.

Perhaps reflecting the excellent partnership between NALV and the Home Office, additional funding has been secured for NALV for the forthcoming year of £100,000. This will assist NALV in continuing its programme of developing guidance and providing real assistance to Police Authorities, Panels and Lay Visitors.

What's in a name?

charting the way forward - the new draft Home Office guidance for lay visitors

At long last, and after a great deal of work by colleagues and partners on a Home Office Working Party, the new guidance is here in draft form. It's copied in full below so take the opportunity to read it and have your views known - write to the Home Office with your input as soon as possible. In accordance with the civil service way, the formal deadline is tight but feel free to send in your views up to the end of January. The sooner they are in, the more chance they have of being incorporated.

Lay visitors will perhaps be pleased to note that the Home office is particularly looking for views on a new name for Lay Visiting. The guidance is written as if the name has already been changed, but this is not so! 'Custody Visiting' is the preferred choice but as with all of this, it is not too late to influence. John Woodcock of the Home Office now introduces the guidance...

Over the last six months, a Home Office Working Group has been reviewing the existing Home Office guidance to police authorities and forces on lay visiting and that process will soon bear fruit. Key groups including the Association of Police Authorities, the Association of Chief Police Officers and NALV have contributed to the review and there has been no shying away from difficult issues! Tenure, age limits and combining lay visiting with work as an appropriate adult have been some of the topics generating most debate.

The new draft guidelines are currently out for comment and are copied in full in this VT. You can also download a copy from the Home Office Website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/pcrg/visiting.htm. They are also available from Ann Carter, Police Leadership & Powers Unit, Room 535, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT. A conference for lay visiting administrators and their police colleagues to discuss the new guidelines was held in Preston on 23/24 November. Subject to approval by Home Office Ministers, the guidelines should be in force by 1 April 2001.

From a Home Office point of view, the review is a chance to bring the basic framework of rules on lay visiting right up to date, remove some uncertainties and make the most of best practice. Organisation, training and performance review get much more coverage and we hope that can help to give a further boost to the ever-increasing quality of lay visiting arrangements nationwide. But there's only so much the Home Office can do and that is why it is continuing to

build a partnership with NALV and reflecting that joint working in the new guidelines.

Finally, the Home Office wants your ideas about a new name for lay visiting! A number of people have suggested that might help the public at large to get a better grip on the whole process. "Custody visiting" is one option, but all other suggestions will be gratefully received!

DRAFT REVISED HOME OFFICE GUIDANCE ON LAY/CUSTODY VISITING

Introducing custody visiting

1. Custody visiting is the new name for lay visiting, the well-established system where volunteers attend police stations to check on the treatment of detainees and the conditions in which they are held.

2. This guidance replaces Home Office Circular 4/1992. It draws from both the developing experience of operating visiting arrangements and the research into custody visiting undertaken by the Police Foundation and published as Home Office Research Study 188. It has been produced following detailed discussions in a working group including members from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities, the Association of Police Authority Clerks, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police Authority, the National Association for Custody Visiting, the Police Complaints Authority, the Police Federation and the Police Superintendents' Association.

3. While the Home Office provides central guidance on how custody visiting should be organised and carried out, responsibility for delivery lies with police authorities in consultation with forces. There is also an important role for the National Association for Custody Visiting which supports and promotes the visiting process. The Home Office is committed to working in partnership with the NACV as a repository of experience, advice and best practice. At several points this guidance

cross-refers to material produced by the NACV - for example in relation to recruitment, training and the conduct of visits - and all those involved in custody visiting are strongly encouraged to make full use of the support that organisation can provide.

4. Custody visiting has developed into an essential aspect of the independent scrutiny of police practice and procedures. As well as the protection it offers to detainees, it draws on the commitment of volunteers and helps to build partnerships between the police and the communities they serve. It is strongly supported by the police and officers contributing to the Police Foundation research were virtually unanimous in welcoming custody visiting as a necessary and unexceptional part of the patchwork of arrangements for securing the accountability of the police.

5. 2 October 2000 saw the implementation of the Human Rights Act and the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into our domestic law. The treatment of those in police custody is one key indicator of the extent to which we are embracing the culture of rights which these legal changes are intended to reinforce. Custody visiting provides an independent check on that treatment and police authorities are strongly encouraged to ensure that the visiting arrangements they apply are as effective as possible. This guidance is intended to help in achieving that.

The process

6. Volunteers from the community are recruited and accredited by the police authority and organised into groups responsible for visiting a particular police station or stations. Unannounced visits are made at varying times of the day and night, with volunteers having immediate access to the custody area. The conditions of detention and the treatment of individual detainees are checked. As part of that process there will usually be discussion with custody staff and detainees who are required to give their consent before being spoken to.

Visitors may raise issues needing immediate attention by the police. After every visit they will produce a written report of their findings. Arrangements will be in place for output from visits to be discussed by groups of visitors and communicated to the police at local, area and force level. There will also be regular feedback to the police authority and a commitment to publicising the work and, where appropriate, the findings of custody visitors.

The purpose

7. Custody visiting has a number of connected purposes. First, and most obviously, it offers an extra level of protection to detainees by providing independent scrutiny of their treatment and the conditions in which they are held. By giving members of the community an opportunity to observe, comment and report on these matters, it can improve citizens' understanding of procedures at police stations and strengthen their confidence that these are properly applied. From a police perspective, it is a clear demonstration of their commitment to transparency and openness in relation to this critical aspect of their duties. Furthermore, it can improve police management of their own performance by pointing out areas where problems have occurred and which may have implications for policy, training, communications or the daily work of officers responsible for custody at police stations.

8. For police authorities, custody visiting is an extremely important aid in fulfilling their responsibility to ensure that policing in their areas is carried out fairly, in accordance with statutory and other rules and with respect for the human rights of all those coming into contact with the police.

Evolution of custody visiting

9. The original impetus for the introduction of custody visiting came from Lord Scarman's inquiry into the Brixton disorders in 1981. He favoured random checks and inspections of detention procedures as part of the process of opening up police activity to scrutiny and enhancing public confidence in their work. Pilot custody visiting schemes were successfully established in 1983 and subsequent Home Office guidance encouraged their wider application. Home Office Circular 4/1992 emphasised that the then Home Secretary was strongly in favour of custody visiting being established in all force areas and fairly comprehensive coverage had been achieved by 1993. However, some gaps were still being plugged as late as 1999.

10. The process of custody visiting has improved significantly over the last decade. The key contribution made by volunteers from the community has been channelled through improved organisational structures and police

support has grown as the system has proved its worth. However, research has consistently revealed problems in areas such as administration, recruitment, frequency of visits and training and there is still considerable scope to apply best practice more generally.

11. One important development was the reconstitution of police authorities as independent corporate bodies in 1995. That tended to focus authorities on their responsibility for custody visiting and led to many schemes being reviewed and improved. More recently, the introduction of the Metropolitan Police Authority from July 2000 has prompted a review of the organisation of custody visiting within London. Also highly significant was the establishment of the National Association for Lay Visiting (now the National Association for Custody Visiting) in 1993. It has been a strong force in support of custody visiting and has done much to formulate and disseminate good practice.

12. Despite the efforts of individual police authorities, the NACV and the Home Office, custody visiting remains relatively little known to the public at large and does not have a high profile even within the criminal justice system. That is disappointing and there is an opportunity to use the introduction of this updated guidance to boost the visibility of the procedures both locally and nationally.

Organisation and infrastructure

13. The responsibility for organising and overseeing the delivery of custody visiting lies with police authorities, in consultation with chief constables. The central administration of visiting on behalf of the authority should be allocated to a suitably knowledgeable and experienced officer or officers on the authority's staff. Such persons must be adequately resourced, both in terms of the time they have to carry out their duties and the staff and other support available to them. The central administrator should act as a source of advice and support for those organising custody visiting at a local level. He or she will have a key role in developing policy, ensuring the maintenance of appropriate organisational arrangements and visiting patterns and overseeing the recruitment and accreditation of visitors. They will also be crucial to establishing and facilitating systems both for feeding back the output from custody visiting to the police and enabling custody visitors to meet together to discuss their work and issues arising from it.

14. Experience has shown that the most effective arrangements are normally based on groups (or "panels") of volunteers responsible for visiting a particular police station or stations. It may be useful to link these local groups to police organisational structures covering divisions or areas, but the most

important connection is to specify the stations to be covered by each group.

15. Every local group should have its own coordinator responsible for organising the work of its members. Key elements of the coordinator's duties will be establishing visiting rosters and ensuring these are applied, acting as a conduit for feedback to the police, facilitating meetings and discussions between group members and forming the interface between individual visitors and those with central responsibility for the system at police authority level. Local coordinators may face a considerable burden of administration (for example, in relation to developing rosters, writing reports and arranging meetings). Police authorities should consider the provision of access to funded clerical or secretarial support.

16. There is no ideal size for local groups in terms of the number of police stations they cover or the number of individual visitors they involve. However, coverage should not be so extensive as to detract from the essentially local nature of the arrangements. Allowing for that, groups must include sufficient numbers of volunteers to ensure the agreed programme of visits can be maintained.

17. Effective organisation and administration is very important to retaining and boosting the commitment of those involved in custody visiting on a voluntary basis. Visitors who feel properly supported and valued are more likely to continue with the work and to carry out their duties in a positive and enthusiastic manner. Custody visiting is essentially a community based initiative and local groups should have some degree of autonomy to fit their approach and procedures to local conditions and needs. However, that should be within a clear organisational framework established by the police authority and taking account of the guidance set out in this circular.

Recruitment and conditions of service Organising recruitment

18. Police authorities are responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing custody visitors. They need to establish clear policies and procedures covering these processes.

19. One key policy objective must be to ensure that adequate numbers of suitably accredited and trained custody visitors are available at all times and throughout the police authority area to carry out the required programme of visits. This priority must be integrated with the equally important objective of ensuring that custody visitors are representative of the local community and provide a suitable balance in terms of factors such as age, gender and ethnic origin.

20. Managing recruitment to balance these priorities requires forward planning which

focuses on factors such as the size of local groups, the number of visitors required and the level of custody visitor retention. Such planning is much more likely to be successful where it is based on a rolling programme of recruitment rather than on recruitment only when vacancies arise. A rolling programme can also help in linking recruitment to training and ensuring a flow of new visitors who are fully aware of their duties and equipped to carry them out.

21. Experience suggests that the recruitment process may best be overseen by a small group comprising the central custody visiting administrator, local group coordinators and police authority and community representatives. It is essential that the work of such a group is adequately resourced so that functions such as publicising opportunities for volunteers, processing applications and conducting interviews can be carried out effectively.

The recruitment process

22. The first essential step in recruitment is to draw up a clear custody visitor job description. It should list the relevant duties and emphasise the need to provide reports and feedback as well as the basic process of attending at police stations. The next requirement is for a person specification which sets out the qualities custody visitors require to carry out their role effectively. That specification can inform recruitment and interviewing and act as a defence against any possible discrimination in the selection process.

23. Once the basis for recruitment is established, consideration must be given to how to publicise the opportunities and attract applicants. Advertising in the local media is recommended as the most obvious and open way to contact a broad section of the local community. However, the need to ensure custody visitors are representative of the community as a whole may argue for some targeting of recruitment at specific groups, perhaps through local community organisations or police/community consultative groups. Word of mouth recommendations remain a legitimate source of potential custody visitors, but care must be taken to ensure this does not lead to an imbalance through existing visitors recommending people from similar backgrounds to themselves.

24. All selection should be on the basis of a standard application form. The precise format is a matter for local discretion, but information on age and ethnic origin will be useful in ensuring a balanced recruitment. Details of all criminal convictions should be sought and authorities may wish to include questions about the applicant's occupation and their health. Asking applicants to state why they are seeking to become custody visitors can help in assessing

motivation and relevant background knowledge. That can be linked to questions about involvement in other voluntary or community work and their relevant skills. Seeking information about how they were alerted to custody visiting can assist in reviewing recruitment strategy. It is good practice to ask for referees, who can then provide an insight into character and commitment. All application forms should include a statement that recruitment will be informed by equal opportunities principles.

25. When people enquire about appointments they should be sent basic information covering the purpose of the system, the role of the custody visitor, the commitment required and the terms and conditions applicable to the local scheme. This material should accompany the basic job description and the application form.

26. Those responsible for recruitment may wish to sift applications on the basis of the agreed person specification. In addition, a police vetting check should be carried out to verify information provided about criminal convictions. Application forms should request consent to such checks being carried out.

27. Suitable applicants should be asked to attend an interview and no-one should be appointed as a custody visitor without an interview taking place. The main purpose of the interview will be to test suitability against the person specification referred to above and to maintain consistency and objectivity in selecting from the field of potential custody visitors. The selection panel should record the reasons for decisions about appointment. This helps to demonstrate fairness and in providing any necessary feedback to those who have been unsuccessful.

28. Similar recruitment principles will generally be applicable to selecting central administrators and local co-ordinators. Certainly there is a need for clear job descriptions and person specifications. Consideration should also be given to active succession planning for these key posts. Having recognised deputies in place who can acquire relevant skills and experience will often be helpful.

29. The NACV has produced detailed practical guidance on recruitment procedures and is a good source of general advice in this area.

Who should be selected?

30. The key priority is for custody visitors to be recruited from and representative of the local community. Local groups should aim for a balance in terms of age range, gender and ethnic background. The scheme is likely to lack effectiveness and credibility if those participating are drawn from too narrow a section of the local community. This inclusive approach should extend to those with handicaps and those who do not have English as their first

language. All reasonable efforts should be made to accommodate applicants in these categories as custody visitors where they are considered suitable candidates. However, it is important that custody visits are always conducted in English, with translation support where necessary.

31. Visitors should be independent persons of good character who are able to make informed judgements in which the community can have confidence and which the police will accept as fair criticism when it is justified.

32. Where applicants have previously been convicted of criminal offences, those responsible for selection will wish to consider what bearing such past convictions have on their suitability to become custody visitors. Relevant factors will include the nature and number of any offences and how long ago they were committed. However, past offending should not be an automatic barrier to acceptance as a custody visitor and each case needs to be considered individually.

33. In appointing custody visitors care must be taken to avoid any potential conflict of interest. Serving and ex-police officers will be unsuitable for that reason, as will special constables. Consideration may be given to appointing ex-special constables depending on where they served and the length of time which has elapsed since their appointment ended. The established principle that justices of the peace should not participate in custody visiting arrangements to avoid any possibility of their impartiality being called into question should be maintained.

34. Applications from others involved with the criminal justice system should be considered individually. For example, solicitors and members of the probation service may find the duties of a custody visitor conflicting with their professional responsibilities. However, there is no hard and fast rule in such cases and each application should be looked at on its individual merits.

35. Members of police authorities should not serve as custody visitors themselves. Direct involvement by police authority members has been an indication of their commitment to the custody visiting system and they have previously contributed much in that role. However, the essential feature of custody visiting is that it draws its volunteers from the community at large and there is an obvious difficulty with police authority members carrying out visits which should be conducted independently and form the basis of reports to them in their formal role.

36. There is no longer any barrier to custody visitors also acting as appropriate adults in certain circumstances. Individuals should not switch between the role of custody visitor and appropriate adult during the course of a visit to a police station. That can blur responsibilities

and create confusion for all concerned. However, those fulfilling the role of custody visitors should not be prevented from acting as appropriate adults on separate and distinct occasions. There is no compelling evidence that this kind of dual role causes significant conflicts of interest and individuals who choose to do so should be free to act in both capacities.

37. Neither do we see any reason why custody visitors should not also be able to act as custody observers who are appointed under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to inspect the conditions under which prisoners are transported and held.

Basis of service

38. It is vital that those recruited as custody visitors have a clear understanding of the expectations on them and of the support which the police authority should provide. Including such information in a formal contract may be considered inappropriate in the context of what is essentially a voluntary arrangement between the custody visitor and the police authority. However, there is strong value in providing each visitor with a written memorandum of understanding which summarises their agreed responsibilities and legitimate expectations. The content is a matter for individual authorities, but will need to include many of the issues covered elsewhere in this guidance.

39. The police authority will need to provide each custody visitor with a suitable pass which functions as their accreditation to visit any police station or other facility in the force area holding prisoners on a regular or temporary basis.

Tenure

40. Custody visitors should be at least 18 years of age, but the Home Office does not seek to recommend any upper age limit. Appointments should be reviewed on a regular basis and the key factor in maintaining them should be the continuing ability and willingness of the individual involved to do the job effectively.

41. Having said that, it is important that the set of custody visitors in a particular area should be refreshed and renewed on a regular basis and there can be a danger of visitors becoming stale or over-familiar with their local police stations. With that in mind, it is recommended that appointments are initially made for three years (and confirmed following completion of a satisfactory probationary period), with a full review of continuing suitability at the end of that time. Subject to that review, a further period of service could be agreed. However, it is recommended that there should be a limit on the overall length of service and that visitors should be required to stand down after two terms of three years. Re-appointment could then be considered after a three year break from the work. We are conscious that effective

and committed custody visitors are a precious resource and experience can be very valuable. However, that does have to be balanced against the need to avoid staleness and bring in fresh perspectives from time to time.

Removal

42. There may be occasions when the authority has to consider the removal of a custody visitor from its accredited list, either because of misconduct or poor performance. Misconduct may include such matters as a conviction for a criminal offence or abusing the position of a custody visitor by failing to act in accordance with agreed guidance and expectations. Poor performance can relate, for example, to a failure to attend for visits or to complete adequate reports.

43. Procedures for considering possible removal should follow the principles of natural justice. The central custody visiting administrator for the police authority area should notify the visitor concerned of the grounds on which removal is being considered and advise them that they can make verbal or written representations or both. There should also be an avenue of appeal to the police authority itself. No-one who heard the initial case for removal should be party to the appeal process.

Complaints procedures

44. Procedures should be in place to consider complaints which may be made against individual custody visitors by detainees, police personnel or others who may come into contact with them in the course of their duties. Depending on their seriousness, these will often be appropriately dealt with at local panel level, with scope to refer matters to the central administrator or the police authority where appropriate.

Clear feedback relating to the resolution of any complaint should be available to both the visitor concerned and the complainant. Authorities will also wish to consider arrangements for dealing with complaints from visitors about their treatment by police personnel, their general role and conditions or any other matters relevant to their work.

Payment

45. Custody visitors may be reimbursed for their legitimate expenses incurred in carrying out visits. However, they should not receive any other form of payment or retainer

Insurance

46. Police authorities generally self-insure and it is their responsibility to make provision for any claims relating to personal injuries or other matters which might arise in the course of custody visitors' work.

Training Responsibility for training

47. The fundamental responsibility for training lies with the police authority and a structured plan with clear objectives should be developed in consultation with the force and the custody visiting community. Central administrators and local co-ordinators are likely to have a substantial role in delivery. However, police personnel, particularly those involved in the custody environment and who understand the issues and procedures custody visitors will be addressing, can also make a significant input to training. The same is true of medical and other specialist staff who contribute to custody care.

48. The NACV is a very useful source of training support and documentation. They may be in a position to contribute directly to meeting specific training needs and can provide advice on best practice derived from their extensive experience in training custody visitors across the whole range of knowledge and skills.

Structure and contents

49. The necessary training can helpfully be divided into three broad areas.

Initial training

50. This should cover the basic knowledge and skills required to carry out custody visits effectively. It is likely to require a minimum of one whole day, supported by appropriate pre-reading. Key contents should include:

- The purpose of and background to custody visiting.
- The relevant aspects of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and of its associated Code C covering Detention, Treatment and Questioning.
- Current Home Office guidance, such as this circular.
- Local guidance, conditions of service and working practices.
- The basic practicalities of conducting custody visits.
- Communication skills to assist effective contact with detainees and custody staff.
- Health and Safety issues.

Induction training

51. It will be useful for the statement of mutual expectations agreed between the police authority and new custody visitors to include references to training arrangements and to a probationary period during which experience will be acquired in a supportive environment. Only once that initial period has been successfully completed should full custody visitor status be granted.

52. The key feature of the probationary period should be induction training based around carrying out visits in tandem with experienced

colleagues. This will involve developing and consolidating skills at the police station, as well as discussing practical issues and difficulties after visits have been completed. Again, there should be some focus on the Health and Safety aspects of the visiting process.

Continuous training

53. There is always scope to refresh and enhance training and there may be specific issues to address in relation to changing legal, procedural and Health and Safety requirements, developing best practice or practical issues emerging from the visiting process. Regular meetings between groups of custody visitors provide an opportunity to share information and experience. Conferences and other gatherings organised by the NACV are a further opportunity to benefit from others' knowledge and experience.

Evaluating training

54. Improving training and ensuring its effectiveness depend on systematic evaluation. Those responsible for training should seek feedback from both recipients and those delivering it. More broadly, the extent to which overall training objectives are being achieved should be tested by examining its impact on the visiting process at police stations.

Frequency and coverage

55. Establishing and maintaining a programme of frequent visits is fundamental to the effectiveness of the system. Infrequent visiting is unsatisfactory in terms of community reassurance, building appropriate relationships with police staff and developing custody visitors' relevant skills.

56. It is unlikely that visits less frequent than once a month can ever be justified where stations designated for detention purposes under section 35 of PACE are concerned. Busy stations with a steady throughput of detainees will generally warrant visits at least once a week. In the busiest areas or where there are special considerations in terms of police/community relations or other factors, there may be a case to visit more than weekly.

57. The police should always be consulted in establishing visiting programmes and frequencies. Visits must be sufficiently regular to support the effectiveness of the system, but not so frequent as to unreasonably interfere with the work of the police or the efficient running of police stations.

58. Local co-ordinators and central administrators should monitor the frequency of visits against expectations and report to the police authority at regular intervals. Where insufficient visits are taking place the causes should be investigated and corrective action taken.

59. Consideration should be given to making visits to all police facilities where detainees are held, including non-designated stations which only accommodate them for relatively short periods of time. Visits will generally be less frequent in such cases, but that will depend on local circumstances. Visits should also be considered and allowed where, following mass arrests, detainees are held for some time, possibly in transport within the police station yard or temporarily in a holding centre, prior to being booked into a station and formally detained there.

60. There may be occasions when a special visit in agreement with the police is justified. For example, when there is particular tension within the local community about the treatment or well-being of someone in detention. Local groups should be ready to consider and respond to such requests from the police.

61. One particular circumstance which may justify a special visit is where there has been a death in police custody.

The officer in charge of the relevant police station must always inform the local custody visiting co-ordinator when a death occurs. They will then need to consider together whether a visit would be helpful in terms of informing and reassuring the local community. If it is agreed that a visit should be made it should be on the basis of a clear understanding as to how that feedback to the community will be achieved.

Working arrangements

62. This section covers a series of issues linked to the process of carrying out visits at police stations. It focuses on general principles and more detailed practical guidance is available from the NACV.

Conducting visits

63. Visits must be undertaken by pairs of custody visitors working together. That allows for mutual support and corroboration, a shared understanding of issues and problems they may encounter and can also contribute to safety in the custody environment. If one member of the team should not be able to attend for any reason the standard procedure should be to abort and re-arrange the visit. No more than two visitors should normally attend at any one time as that may place an excessive burden on custody staff.

64. Local co-ordinators should roster pairs of visitors to make an agreed number of visits to an allocated station or stations within a fixed time period. Visits should be unannounced and should not develop a regular pattern. They should take place at a variety of times of the day and night.

Visiting procedures at stations

65. Visitors should normally be admitted immediately to the custody area. If access is delayed this will affect the credibility of the custody visiting scheme. It is inappropriate for access to be delayed because the custody officer is busy. In such circumstances the visitors should be admitted to the custody area but invited to wait until the custody officer or another officer is available to escort them on the visit. Access should be delayed only when the visitors may be placed in danger, for example if there is a disturbance in progress in the custody area. A full explanation should be given to the custody visitors as to why access is being delayed, which should be recorded by the visitors in their report.

66. Visitors should have access to all parts of the custody area including cells, detention rooms, charging areas, washing facilities and medical room (but not the drugs cabinet). Visitors will wish to satisfy themselves that these areas are clean, tidy and in a reasonable state of repair and decoration, and that bedding in cells is clean and adequate. Relevant storage areas may also be seen and visitors should check that there are adequate stocks of blankets, pillowcases and other necessary items. They should also verify that arrangements are established for the cleaning of blankets etc and for any necessary replacement of furnishings and equipment. They should check that any CCTV systems installed to observe the custody area or individual cells are operating properly. They may inspect empty cells and detention rooms to check heating/ventilation systems and that cell bells and toilet flushing mechanisms are working properly. They may visit interview rooms in the custody area if unoccupied, but it is not part of their role to attend police interviews with detainees. Visitors may not visit CID rooms or other operational parts of the station.

67. In addition to the risk of violence from detainees (see paragraph 73) police staff should also be alert to any specific health or safety risks visitors might face and should advise them as appropriate. For example, visitors should always be told if there is a possibility of them coming into contact with detainees or cells exposed to CS spray.

68. In the interests of security and the safety of visitors, the custody officer or a member of the custody staff will accompany them during visits. However, the escorting officer should normally remain out of hearing during discussions between visitors and detainees.

Access to detainees

69. Subject to the exceptions referred to below, custody visitors may have access to any person

detained at a police station. Detainees will fall into the following categories:

PACE prisoners

These will constitute the vast majority and are held under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Home Office prisoners

These are remanded or sentenced prisoners who would normally be held in prison.

Immigration detainees

These are persons held under the Immigration Act 1971 who are subject to deportation proceedings or who are waiting to be removed from the UK as illegal entrants.

People at risk

These may be persons held under the Mental Health Act 1983 for their own protection or children taken into police protection under the Children Act 1989.

70. Persons detained under the provisions of PACE who need for whatever reason to be held in hospital may be visited there with the agreement of the hospital authorities.

71. Persons detained by non-Home Office police forces such as the British Transport Police are not covered by these arrangements. However, they may be visited with the consent of the force concerned and the spirit of these guidelines should be applied to any such visits.

72. Detainees can only be visited with their consent and the escorting officer is responsible for establishing whether or not they wish to see the visitors. This should be done within the hearing of the visitors but, as far as practicable and in order to preserve the privacy of detainees, out of their sight. The escorting officer's introduction is a very important factor bearing on the effectiveness of the whole system of custody visiting and he or she should introduce the visitors in a positive way which will encourage the detainee to see them. Whether or not the detainee agrees to see the visitors the escorting officer should seek permission for them to have access to the detainee's custody record.

73. If a detainee is not in a position to give consent, perhaps because of the effects of drink or drugs or by virtue of a mental illness, the escorting officer should allow access unless it is considered that the visitors' safety would be at risk. In such circumstances the visitors may wish to speak to the detainee through the cell hatch. That may also apply where consent is given, but the escorting officer judges the visitors would be in danger from a violent or potentially violent detainee if they entered the cell. If the detainee is in a comatose state the escorting officer should allow access if the visitors wish to satisfy themselves of the detainee's well-being.

74. Sleeping detainees can be woken at the discretion of the escorting officer to seek consent to a visit. However, where that would involve interrupting the continuous period of eight hours rest provided for under PACE, the normal procedure should be not to wake the person but to observe them through the cell hatch.

75. Police interviews with detainees should not be interrupted to facilitate visits. However, visitors may await the completion of the interview if they wish to see the person concerned.

76. The additional consent of a parent or guardian should be sought for a visit to a juvenile. However, where it is not practicable to contact a parent or guardian the juvenile may be visited with their own consent.

77. In exceptional circumstances the police may judge that it is necessary for a detained person not to be seen by visitors in order to avoid any possible risk of prejudicing an important investigation. Any decision to deny visitors access to a detained person should be taken by the duty officer or some other senior officer at the station and should be recorded in the custody record. The decision to deny access should be taken in each case in the light of all the relevant circumstances. There should be no presumption that access should be denied to any particular category of detainee or because a decision has been made that a person should be held incommunicado.

Conversations with the detainee

78. Conversations between detainees and custody visitors should normally take place in sight but out of hearing of the escorting officer. If for some reason the police decide that the escorting officer should remain within hearing, this decision must be taken by the duty officer or some other senior officer at the station. Visitors should bear in mind, however, that some detained persons may be violent or under the influence of drink or drugs and that the presence of a police officer may deter or frustrate assaults on the visitor.

79. Conversations should focus on checking whether or not detainees have been offered their rights and entitlements under PACE (including receipt of the necessary paperwork) and on confirming whether the conditions of detention are adequate. Custody visitors should do all they can to encourage an open exchange with the detainee and may wish to use a checklist to ensure that they cover all the relevant issues.

80. Visitors must remain impartial and should not seek to involve themselves in any way in the process of investigation. If detainees press them for advice about co-operating with the police, making a statement or anything in relation to their defence, they should explain that it is not

part of their role. If the detainee's concerns are linked to not yet having received legal advice, that is something the visitors may wish to take up with the escorting or custody officer.

81. If a visitor realises they know or are known by a detainee, they should consider whether to withdraw from the visit. The decision will depend on the nature of the relationship and its likely effect on the visitor's impartiality.

82. It is inappropriate for visitors to pass messages for detainees or perform other tasks on their behalf which might compromise impartiality or the interests of justice.

83. Visitors should reassure detainees that their conversations with them are private, although immediate concerns about their treatment at the police station will be passed on, with their consent, to those in a position to take corrective action. In certain circumstances, for example if a confession is made, the visitor may need to tell the detainee that the content of the visit may be disclosed in legal proceedings.

Custody records

84. Subject to obtaining the detainee's consent to view their custody record, the visitors should check its contents against what they have been told by the detainee. In particular, visitors will wish to verify:

- whether entitlements under PACE have been given and signed for
- that medication, injuries, medical examinations, meals/diet are recorded
- that procedures to assess special risks/vulnerabilities presented by the detainee have been properly recorded
- the timing and frequency of cell inspections of inebriated or otherwise vulnerable detainees
- the timing of reviews of the continuing need for detention

85. If a detainee is for any reason incapable of deciding whether to allow access to their custody record, the presumption should be in favour of allowing the visitors to examine the record.

CCTV footage

86. The introduction of CCTV into custody suites has raised the question of whether custody visitors should have access to footage. This is ultimately a matter for local discretion, but the Home Office view is that custody visitors should carry out their functions in person and not by viewing either live CCTV pictures or recorded footage. Their role is fundamentally interactive with both detainees and police staff and cannot be discharged remotely. There may also be issues about infringing the privacy of detainees who have not

consented to visitors observing them using CCTV. However, where specific incidents or circumstances arise as issues and have been captured on CCTV, visitors might reasonably be allowed access where both the police and the detainee(s) concerned consent.

Medical issues

87. Visitors have no right to see the detainee's medical records, even where these are attached to the custody record. However, key points relevant to medical treatment should be recorded in the custody record itself. Visitors will wish to pay particular attention to detained persons who are suffering from any form of illness, injury or disability. They should satisfy themselves that, if appropriate, a medical examiner has been called and establish from the custody officer what instructions for medical treatment have been given and confirm by consulting the custody record that these instructions have been carried out.

Dealing with issues and complaints

88. Where a detainee makes a complaint or raises an issue about their general treatment or conditions at the police station, visitors should (subject to the detainee's consent) take this up as soon as possible with custody staff or other staff at the police station in order to seek a resolution. The same applies to similar issues identified by visitors in the course of their attendance.

89. If a detainee makes a complaint of misconduct by a police officer, he or she should be advised to address it to the duty officer in charge of the police station. With the detainee's consent, it may be appropriate for visitors to notify the duty officer that the detainee wishes to make a complaint. In addition visitors may suggest to the detainee that they seek legal advice in relation to the complaint or that they ask to see a doctor if an alleged assault is involved. However, such complaints must be dealt with through the formal procedures which are laid down and there is no broader role for custody visitors. They should not involve themselves in individual cases or make representations on detainees' behalf.

90. Remand or sentenced prisoners held in police stations who seek to complain about their conditions or treatment in prison should be advised that custody visitors cannot involve themselves in such matters and that there are recognised procedures open to them such as writing to or petitioning the Home Secretary or writing to their solicitor or Member of Parliament.

Effective working relationships

91. For custody visiting to be effective it is essential that visitors and police staff develop

and maintain professional working relationships based on mutual respect and understanding of each others' legitimate roles. Such relationships can only exist where there is politeness and consideration on both sides. On the other hand, there is a range of behaviour which has the potential to create tension and conflict and some examples are given below. Custody visitors may cause difficulties by:

- failing to appreciate police priorities
- engaging in excessive petty criticism
- criticising officers in reports without bringing that criticism directly to their notice
- adopting an overly adversarial approach
- concentrating on finding fault and trying to catch the police out
- becoming involved in an investigation or advising the detainee on that investigation
- criticising police action or questioning their judgement in areas outside the visitor's remit
- telling or suggesting to the police what they should do
- making promises to a detainee on behalf of the police
- breaching confidentiality

92. On the police side, problems may arise from:

- failing to accept visitors' status and recognise their responsibilities
- demeaning or belittling visitors
- treating visitors with indifference or disrespect
- unreasonably delaying or limiting access to custody areas
- being insufficiently positive when introducing visitors to detainees

93. All these issues must be seen against the background of the need to strike the right balance between establishing effective working arrangements and developing a relationship that is too close and cosy. Where the latter occurs it becomes increasingly difficult for custody visitors to provide the objective and constructive review of procedures and conditions which is a key part of their role.

94. Allowing for the factors covered in this section and for other issues emerging locally, the police authority may wish to consider developing its own code of conduct for custody visiting.

Reporting on a visit

95. Recording the contents of a visit is one of the most important aspects of the system. Visitors may wish to make notes in the course of the visit, but should explain to the detainee why they are doing so.

96. At the end of each visit, and while they are still at the police station, visitors should compile a report of their findings. Custody staff should not be present while visitors discuss and complete reports and wherever possible they should be able to use a private area for this purpose. Reports should include both specific matters (which may already have been brought to the attention of police staff) and more general issues relating to custody conditions or procedures.

97. One copy of the report should remain at the station for the attention of the officer in charge and one should go to the co-ordinator of the local custody visiting group. There may be additional local requirements for copies to be passed to others involved in the custody visiting process.

Confidentiality and disclosure

98. Report forms should include an undertaking not to reveal the identity of persons visited or other confidential information obtained in the course of a visit. Breach of this undertaking may make a visitor liable to civil proceedings by the detained person concerned. Visitors also need to be aware that the unauthorised disclosure of facts concerning police operations or the security of police stations may constitute an offence under section 5 of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

99. Conversations between custody visitors and detainees are not privileged and it would be open to a court to issue a witness summons requiring the attendance of a custody visitor to give oral evidence or to produce documents such as a report of a particular visit. Custody visitors are under no obligation to give evidence or produce documents otherwise than in response to a court order, but would be obliged to respond to such an order.

Feedback and making a difference

100. If custody visiting is to be effective, systems must be in place to ensure that the output from visits is drawn to the attention of those who are in a position to respond. This reporting occurs at various levels and a quick and positive reaction from those receiving it is one of the surest ways to strengthen and consolidate the custody visiting system.

101. The first key relationship is between visitors and the custody staff who will be the immediate recipients of practical issues and observations emerging from visits. Second, there is the interface with the officer in charge of the police station. Effective dialogue and responsiveness at these levels is the foundation of the whole system.

Continues on p15

PLANNER 2001

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AUGUST

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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KEY NALV CONTACTS

IAN SMITH Secretary



Ian has been the secretary of NALV since its formation in March 1993. In the early days he combined this role with his duties as the Senior Community Liaison Officer for Greater Manchester Police Authority. From November 1997 the National Lotteries Charity Board grant allowed Ian to work for NALV full time for 3 years (the length of his grant).

The grant has allowed the development of publicity and awareness raising publications, structured training programmes and supporting videos and the introduction of lay visiting to Scotland.

ANNA JARRATT Administrator, Manchester Office



Anna is the person who provides administrative support in the NALV headquarters. She works in a part-time capacity for NALV and is the scheme administrator for Greater Manchester Police Authority's Lay visiting scheme. Anna takes the minutes of the Management and sub-committees and helps with the organisation of the Annual Conference.

FAYTHE ROWE Administrator, London Office



Faythe has responsibility for providing NALV's services to the lay visitors in London and deals with enquiries nationally.

We share our offices with Camden Community & Police Consultative Group who make Faythe available to us 2 days per week. Faythe takes the minutes of the London Regional Committees, helps with the London Regional Conference and the 6 London training sessions for lay visitors in the capital.

YOUR NALV REPRESENTATIVE

The NALV network is divided into regions, each with a representative selected locally who sits on the management committee. Make contact with them and use them - your scheme administrator has details.

1 GREATER MANCHESTER CHRISTINE FLANIGAN

2 LONDON AVRIL JONES AND GUY FITZMAURICE

3 MERSEYSIDE NO NALV REPRESENTATIVE

4 NORTHUMBRIA NO NALV REPRESENTATIVE

5 SOUTH YORKSHIRE NO NALV REPRESENTATIVE

6 WEST MIDLANDS PAUL NORTON

7 WEST YORKSHIRE NO NALV REPRESENTATIVE

CENTRAL 1
Police Authority Areas
Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire,
Norfolk, Suffolk
Dr. FORSYTH
Central 1 Regional Representative

CENTRAL 2
Police Authority Areas
Derbyshire, Leicestershire,
Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire,
KM TRUMAN
Central 2 Regional Representative

CENTRAL 3
Police Authority Areas
Gloucestershire, Staffordshire,
Warwickshire, West Mercia,
Gloucestershire
ANDREW STEADMAN
Vice Chairman and Central 3
Regional Representative

NORTH EAST
Police Authority Areas
Cleveland, Durham,
Humberside, North Yorkshire
BILL MILLER
North East Regional Representative.

NORTHERN IRELAND
Police Authority Area
Northern Ireland
LINDA ANDERSON
Northern Ireland Regional Representative

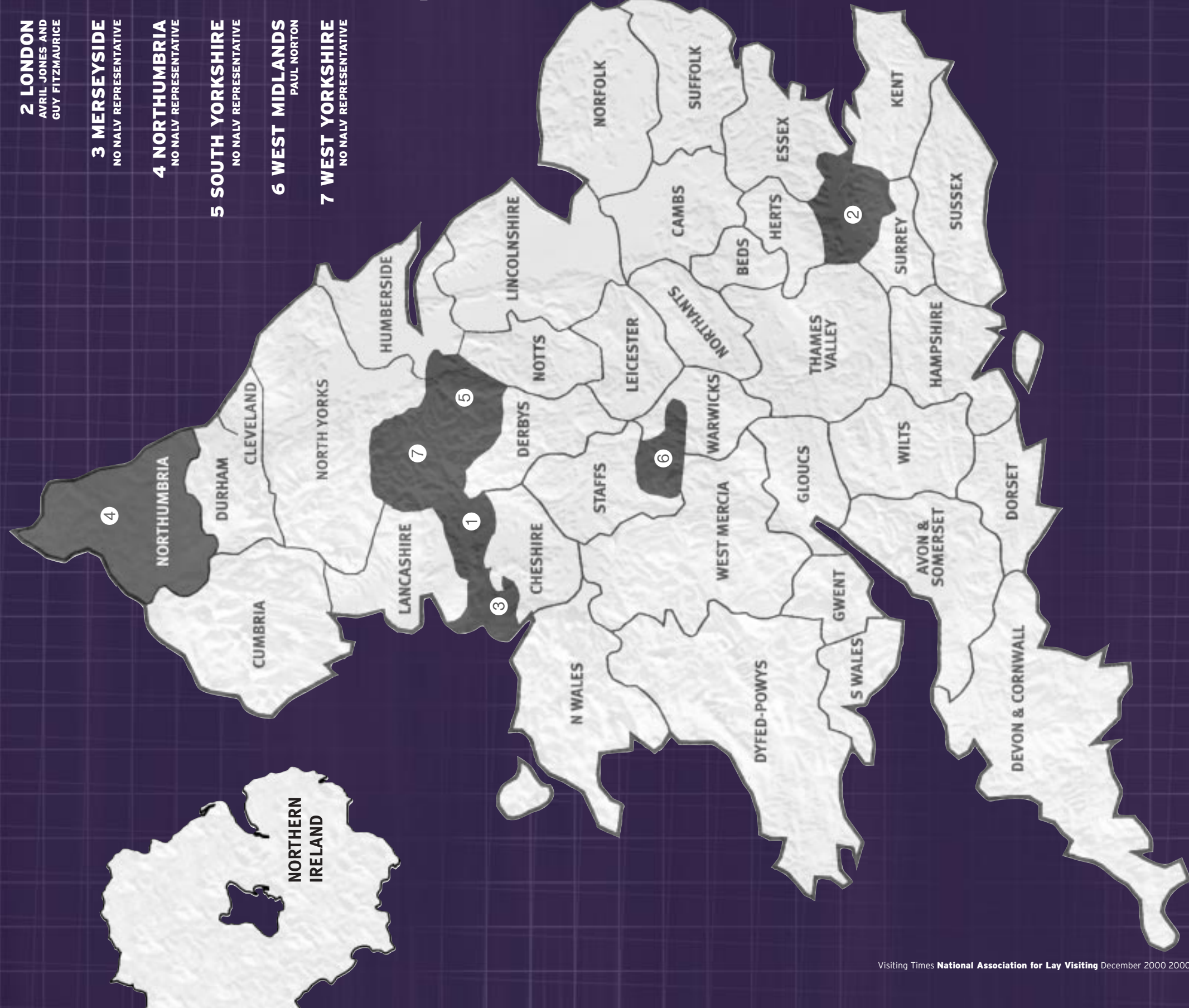
NORTH WEST
Police Authority Areas
Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire
DAMON TAYLOR
North West Representative

SOUTH WEST
Police Authority Areas
Avon & Somerset, Devon and
Cornwall, Dorset, Wiltshire
ROSEMARY PARKER
South West Regional Representative

WALES
Police Authority Areas
Dyfed Powys, Gwent, North Wales,
South Wales
**JOHN LITTLECHILD AND
WARREN WARD**
Wales Regional Representatives

SOUTH EAST 1
MARGARET HICKS
Police Authority Areas
Hampshire, Kent, Surrey, Sussex

SOUTH EAST 2
M QURESHI
Police Authority Areas
Bedfordshire,
Essex, Hertfordshire, Thames Valley



NALV APPOINTED TRAINERS



BETH GLENDENNING
Northern Ireland



TONY HUBY
East Yorkshire



SHEENA CHANDLER
North Yorkshire



DAVID LIDDELL
Cleveland



HELEN SCHOFIELD
London



CHRISTINE MIDDLETON
Cumbria



NALV YEAR

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New draft Home Office guidance for lay visitors - continued from p10

102. The co-ordinator of the local custody visiting group is responsible for drawing together issues and identifying trends emerging from visits in their area and addressing these with relevant police supervisors. They should also collate regular reports for submission to the central custody visiting administrator.

103. That central administrator should have a regular and formal opportunity to raise concerns and issues with a designated senior officer with force-wide responsibilities. It will usually be appropriate for that officer to be of Assistant Chief Constable rank. The central administrator should also produce regular reports for the police authority summarising the output from custody visiting and the way in which concerns have or have not been addressed. These reports should be discussed at police authority meetings as appropriate and reflected in an entry about custody visiting in the police authority's own annual report.

104. It cannot be emphasised strongly enough that the key to the effectiveness of these feedback arrangements at every level is a rapid and appropriate response by the police to concerns raised by the custody visitors. If that response is delayed or grudging, working relationships will deteriorate rapidly and the whole system may start to slip into disrepute.

Sharing experience and concerns

105. The practice of custody visiting and the output from it will be greatly strengthened by providing regular opportunities for custody visitors to meet together to discuss their work. Such meetings can cover the practicalities of carrying out visits as well as issues emerging from them. In addition, they can alleviate the feeling of isolation which can frequently accompany an activity that is often carried out with just a single colleague, often at unsociable hours.

106. Central administrators and local co-ordinators should take the lead responsibilities for arranging such meetings at the appropriate levels. Members of each local group should have the opportunity to meet together, as should the set of local co-ordinators working within the police authority area. An annual conference open to all custody visitors in the area can be a very positive way to strengthen bonds with colleagues and build a sense of common purpose.

107. The NACV provides a number of opportunities for visitors to meet at regional and national level. These can be an excellent way to stay in touch with developments in custody visiting and to learn from practice in other police authority areas.

Reviewing performance

108. It is important that police authorities take steps to assess how effectively their custody visiting arrangements are working. Some significant indications will emerge from the quality and coverage of reports they receive. However, there are some more specific measures which can usefully be taken account of.

109. All authorities should collect and regularly review the visiting statistics for the groups in their area. This will indicate whether expectations as to frequency are being met and highlight any locations or groups where corrective action is necessary.

110. Authorities should also consider collecting information on the proportion of occasions on which detainees refuse to see custody visitors. This can indicate something about the detainees' perception of the visiting system, as well as reflecting the effectiveness with which visitors are introduced at police stations.

111. Authorities may wish to review performance in relation to specific aspects of custody visiting practice, for example report writing and training. The NACV may be able to assist with such reviews, taking advantage of its broad experience in supporting custody visiting in a wide variety of areas. HMIC will also retain a significant role by monitoring custody visiting arrangements as part of the standard inspection of forces.

112. Very helpful information on the effectiveness with which visits are carried out can be obtained by inviting informal feedback from custody staff. This can be an important developmental resource for custody visitors and there is scope for it to be used more widely.

113. The section covering custody visiting in the police authority's annual report should include material about performance review, an explanation of the reasons for any shortfalls and an indication of the remedial action taken.

Raising awareness

114. An essential purpose of custody visiting is to strengthen public confidence in procedures at police stations and that implies the need for publicity. Raising awareness is also vital to supporting effective recruitment. Internally, it is important to ensure that relevant police staff have a knowledge and understanding of custody visiting and that suitable information is provided to detainees.

115. Explanatory notices should be available for detainees, while posters and other publicity material at the police station and other public buildings will help to advertise the custody visiting system.

116. The regular newsletters produced by many administrators and co-ordinators can be

circulated more widely both within and outside the force. In addition, there is often scope for those involved in custody visiting to give talks or presentations to local institutions and community groups. Sometimes, there may be opportunities to discuss or refer to custody visiting in contributions to the local press or other media.

117. These are just some suggestions and further advice can be obtained from the Home Office or from the NACV which has its own regular national newsletter, "Visiting Times".

118. It is important that those responsible for the administration of the custody visiting system at force and local level should understand that publicity is an important aspect of their role and that they should develop an appropriate strategy. That should include making best use of entries in the police authority's annual report and other material produced by the authority.

119. Finally, systems should be in place to monitor the impact and effectiveness of publicity, for example in attracting new applicants to become custody visitors.

Contact points

Questions about the contents of this guidance or any aspect of custody visiting can be directed to:

John Woodcock

Police Leadership and Powers Unit
Room 533
Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
tel 020 7273 4124
fax 020 7273 2703
email john.woodcock@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Ann Carter

Police Leadership and Powers Unit
Room 535
Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
tel 020 7273 2698
fax 020 7273 2703
email ann.carter@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

The guidance refers at a number of points to the advice and support available from the NALV and the contact point there is:

Ian Smith

Secretary
National Association for Custody Visiting
155 Chorley Road
Swinton
Salford M27 4AE
tel 0161 793 3137
fax 0161 794 4795

Lay Visiting to be statutory?

Phil Woodford argues in favour of Lay Visiting being made statutory. It seems the Home Secretary has agreed with Phil! See elsewhere in this VT for details from the Home Office on guidance, funding and making visiting statutory.

In the last issue of Visiting Times, John Woodcock provided a commendably even-handed account of the pros and cons of placing Lay Visiting on a statutory footing. The arguments for statutory regulation, however, are now so compelling that it's surely time for a more concerted campaign to change the status of the scheme.

I admit that I've always been a convert to the idea of formal legal recognition, but didn't feel particularly strongly about the issue until I attended the 1999 Lay Visitors' Conference in Cardiff. The lack of uniformity of practice across the UK was immediately apparent and is a cause of grave concern, particularly when you look at some of the more extreme examples. I came across Panels that felt it unnecessary to conduct regular meetings with the police to discuss their visits, as well as individual panel members who thought it quite acceptable to be permanently paired with the same partner on every visit they made.

In some areas, people seemed to carry on visiting for as long as they liked, whilst in others there were strict rules about when they should retire. It was also clear that a significant minority of Panels were made up almost entirely of

pensioners - a worrying state of affairs when such a large proportion of detainees are often very young.

By far the strongest argument in favour of statutory regulation for lay visiting is therefore the introduction of uniform practice guidelines. The scheme should be exactly the same in one police authority as it is in another, allowing all police officers and detainees to know exactly what they can expect. NALV has no doubt been doing what it can to promote greater consistency, but an activity of such civic importance should not be self-regulating. Only a statutory framework can produce the changes that are required for real credibility.

If lay visiting were to be given a firmer legal basis, relationships with the police would immediately become more formal, which in my view would be no bad thing. All Panel meetings would, I suspect, be graced by officers of senior rank and there would be more of a safeguard against the possibility of 'cosy' relationships that can potentially build up at a local level between lay visitors and police. Don't get me wrong. I'm not arguing for an unnecessarily bureaucratic or confrontational relationship with the police. Just one that is business-like and utterly professional.

Legislation needs to be clear enough to avoid any confusion. Certainly it must be tighter than the statute which led to the creation of the Lay Observers - the volunteers responsible for monitoring the private contractors that move prisoners to and from court. The extent of Lay Observers' influence and jurisdiction is still apparently a matter of considerable negotiation and debate on a regional basis, despite the fact that their existence is enshrined in law. Parliamentarians must therefore ensure that any future legislation does more than just confirm the existence of Lay Visiting. It must set out clear parameters for the running of the scheme.

A statutory service would not result in the 'voluntary' nature of lay visiting disappearing. Visitors would still be performing the service as a civic duty, free of charge. It's just that a Visitor in Southampton would take on the job on exactly the same terms as a Visitor in Sunderland. What's more, both would know that they had a confirmed status within the criminal justice system, which would be a recognition of their value to police and community relations.

■ **Phil Woodford is currently a Lay Visitor in Richmond-upon-Thames and previously served on the Panel in the London Borough of Camden.**

Then & Now...

Colin Hodgson, has returned after a period off the Management Committee. He outlines the changes he has seen...

It's said that, amongst others, football managers should never go back and try to regain the former glory days as they are rarely as good the second time around. If this adage applies to the NALV Management Committee I do not yet know. Nevertheless here I am again as a member of the Management Committee (because no-one else wanted it) and foolishly I volunteered to write a 'Then & Now' comparison. Probably premature after just one meeting but here goes.

Some of the faces were the same, some new. Some of the structures have changed, some seem the same, the building is most certainly different as we met in the Civic Centre in Salford rather than Lloyd House or The Council House in Birmingham as we used to do. Probably the best, most reassuring thing though was that the issues for discussion were not all the same as at the last one I went to. Undoubtedly NALV has moved on, having received a Lottery Grant of the size it did it would have been disappointing to report "no change". (My suggestion of what to do with the money, "Party", was obviously not

taken up). However, it has to be spent or returned so sadly no opportunity to put some aside for the proverbial rainy day.

So funding does remain an important issue, the need for a separate Sub-Committee reflects the importance of accounting properly for the Public money we receive. The need for training still remains, the discussion over whether we should become a Statutory activity appears to be over, with only Parliamentary workings now dictating the time-scale.

NALV is, and continues to be, a constantly evolving organisation. When I first sat, nervously, at my first Management Committee meeting it was because I wanted to be involved rather than be a passive spectator. If you, as readers, want VT to help you in your various roles within the world that Visiting touches (Police Officers, Scheme Administrators, Home Office Officials to name but a few), then write and share your aspirations, difficulties, frustrations and solutions with your fellow visitors. VT is the only publication which can help you do this.

My first visit to a Police Station outside of

Northampton was Barnet in London. Being from the sticks I assumed that all forces did things the same in terms of paperwork, introduction of detainees etc and that all Visitors would have the same or similar training etc. We did not then and we do not now, although it is closer and better. Why?, Because we shared our experiences and mostly in VT, don't ignore the best route you have for making a plea for help or sharing that bright idea which, in a few years time might become UK wide practice.

With the spread of Lay Visiting in to Scotland, with the ongoing recruitment of Police Officers and Visitors I find it difficult to believe that there are no problems within the UK Lay Visiting fraternity. As an example has the arrival of Human Rights Legislation made any difference in your Force area, how are Scots Police Forces dealing with you strange people who have to be let in to 'their' Custody Suites, (North of the Border are they called Custody Suites?), do write and tell.

Colin G. Hodgson
Co-opted member,
NALV Management Committee

Staying Connected

John I White, NALV's own webmaster, explains the importance of Lay Visiting and open access to information on it. NALV's website is there for you so log on and check it out...

There are, without doubt, shortcomings in the British policing system. It is even claimed that, in the absence of funds to cover all criminal investigations, some suspects are investigated with more enthusiasm than others depending on the public hysteria of the day. However, accusations such as this can seldom be directed at the custody areas of British police forces.

To us in the present day it seems incredible that there are still police forces in the world, and even in the EU states, that have scant regard for the welfare of suspects who, in view of the circumstances, cannot help themselves - filthy cells without the most basic of amenities, no rights, poor treatment. Our own laws ensure that detainees are treated humanely but, to the amazement of many foreigners, we go further than that. We have a system in place that allows ordinary members of the public to interview detainees held in police cells, to make absolutely sure that they are not being mistreated - our own Lay Visiting scheme.

We, as British citizens, have a right to be proud of this and we should proclaim to the world our

commitment to Human Rights in the hope that our methods might spread around the world into countries whose populations are less fortunate than ours. And proclaim we do - in the shape of the NALV website.

The NALV site is useful to our Lay Visitors who need the latest information about conferences, training and archive newsletters. But it is often forgotten that most websites can be accessed by anyone in the world who is connected to the internet. Many people find our website either by browsing or as a result of searching and are fascinated by its content. To people in other countries, counties that are not known for their liberal attitudes on Human Rights, we are pioneers and a source of inspiration. In the privacy of their own homes these people can see what we do and how we do it. They see that despite the negative rhetoric of their politicians suspects should be treated humanely and it is possible for society to make sure that it is being done. And they want to do the same themselves - all it needs is sufficient pressure, and a role model. Will we eventually see NALV websites in French, Spanish, German or even Chinese and Russian? Time will tell.

But of course our own NALV website is

primarily for the use of British NALV members and we are anxious to keep it as useful as possible. There is a section on Forthcoming Events and we want your event to be featured so if you are planning a conference, a training session, a panel meeting or any other event, put the Website on your mailing list. We will show only the details you want to be shown and, if you wish, any requests for further details can be forwarded to you, the organiser, without the world knowing who you are. If you are connected to the Internet then send details to this email address; jiwhite@cwcom.net. If you are not yet connected then speak to John on 01746 761996.

The site also keeps a copy of all issues of Visiting Times from Spring 1999 onwards and the latest Annual Reports so if you have destroyed (or put to some good use) your own paper copy simply go to the website.

We also would like to have your ideas for inclusion on the website and your comments about it. Email or telephone as above. To see the website, enter this address in your browser's address box: www.nalv.org.uk

John I. White
NALV website designer

Visit our website: www.nalv.org.uk or email NALV at: NALV@mcr1.poptel.org.uk

A Warm Welcome

Eileen Sandford outlines a recent visit held in Shrewsbury. A very long and interesting one too it seems...

At ten o'clock David and I arrived at the Police Station. It was closed but the bell soon brought action. The Custody Suite was quiet and the Sergeant warmly welcomed us. He told us that due to leave, sickness and injury there were no relief Custody Sergeants available if things got too busy. But this was a Saturday night!

One man was sleeping off 'the effects' so we did not see him. We toured the cells which, except for a few minor points like graffiti on the window and vents, were very clean.

A juvenile was about to leave the Station escorted by the Police. He could not go home as

his mother and her boyfriend were out and he had fought with his elder sister at home. A friend had agreed to have him. David and I like to find out if possible something about the younger detainees - but only if they agree. This lad had not seen his father for 8 years and did not want to do so. He 'worked' for his mother's boy friend to finance his cannabis habit. School was not for him. Yes, he thought cannabis "should be legalised. There would be no fighting as all you want to do is go to sleep". So what would happen if you were driving under the influence of cannabis? "Simply pull into a lay-by and sleep it off!" We discussed the cost of the

drug. A nice enough lad, he seemed to be getting a few hours 'education' per week. But what of his future?

Then things got very busy. Suddenly there was a queue of detainees, each escorted by two Police officers - and only one Custody Sergeant. The station seemed very full - and so many Police were tied up doing nothing. One officer had 'lost track' of someone they wanted whilst arresting another offender.

Another detainee, detained on suspicion of being over the limit, refused the services of a solicitor. Then he decided he did want one. A wait followed, then a long conversation with his

Continues on following page

solicitor. Everyone was restless, particularly the Sergeant unable to attend to the other detainees.

The highlight of the visit was a powerful stocky woman who was brought in handcuffed as a result of an affray (her husband in bloodstained clothes was also detained) She refused to have the handcuffs taken off and turned round belligerently to shake them at the cameras. She shouted and raved at the Sergeant and was totally uncooperative. Put into a cell, she had to be continuously observed. She banged on the cell door with her fists and

then sat on the floor banging her head on the door - a terrifying noise, especially for another detainee.

This other detainee was an unfortunate victim of an empty stomach after consuming a quantity of alcohol. Having purchased a burger she was breathalysed and brought into custody, still clutching her burger. She was cheerful and friendly, and full of gratitude for the way she had been treated by the Police. When we explained our role she was full of thanks. Before we could stop her she kissed me on the cheek

and shook David's hand warmly - the first time it has happened to us. It did not seem inappropriate in the circumstances and there seems to be no rules in the book about being kissed by detainees!

We left at 2.00 am. "It seemed longer than four hours" remarked David. And indeed it had been. During our visit the clocks, unnoticed by us, had been put back one hour - for us a dramatic ending of British Summer Time.

**Cllr. Mrs Eileen Sandford
Shrewsbury**



It's nearly 20 years since the Brixton riots of the 1981. As any self respecting Lay Visitor will tell you, it is these riots which led to the Scarman report and the introduction of a whole range of measures intended to improve trust, co-operation and understanding between the police and the community. These included the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, PCCG consultation mechanisms, and of course, Lay Visiting. However, it is only partly true to blame (or thank, depending on how you look at it) Brixton and London. Brixton was the most notable and most remembered of the riots but there were a whole series of inner city 'disturbances' as they are some times euphemistically called. I hail from the Bristol

area and remember only too well the St Paul's riots and the disorder there. Many of Britain's urban areas suffered the same fate and it was all these troubles that the Scarman report was aimed at preventing.

Next May 2001 is the 20th anniversary of the Brixton riot, undoubtedly the most important and remembered of all the riots. Whilst I doubt anyone will want to actually celebrate the riot itself, it is certainly a fitting opportunity to take stock of where we are and see exactly how far community policing and Lay Visiting have come. VT will aim to be out before then with a host of articles on what it was like then and where we are now. How far have we come? A long way let's hope.

Consequently, I need your help. Please let me know your views on community policing now. Is zero tolerance the answer to urban crime or just tempting fate and asking for more trouble? Has the police service improved? What else needs to be done? Has Lay Visiting really made a difference? How can it be improved again? What will you do in your area to mark the anniversary? Where you there during any of the inner city disturbances of 20 years ago? What do you remember? Please contribute with your memories, views and ideas to make the next VT an extra special edition. Thanks.

**Mike Robinson
Editor, Visiting Times**

Conferences Conferences Conferences!

Yes, regional conferences have been taking place across the UK on Lay Visiting. Details of just two are below - don't forget to let VT know what happened at yours!

above: Delegates at the Welsh Annual Conference, 10 November 2000

North West Regional Conference Saturday 4th November 2000

The North West Regional Conference was hosted by Greater Manchester Police Authority. Cllr Stephen Murphy; Chairman of GMPA welcomed approximately 90 lay visitors from Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and North Wales to the conference. The morning was given over to a number of presentations:

Health and Safety Risk Assessment, which was presented by Jeanne Penn from North Wales Police Authority. This topic sparked a number of questions from lay visitors regarding insurance and disabilities.

Immigration Detainees in Police Custody presented by Inspector Cliff Bacon, from Greater Manchester Police. This was one area which some lay visitors present had not encountered during lay visits in their area. However, a number of questions were asked in particular, regarding language and communication difficulties and solutions.

Home Office Guidance, presented by Mr Ian Smith, Secretary, NALV. Ian Smith outlined the main elements of the new draft guidance resulting from the Home Office working party. This item was obviously of great interest to everyone at the conference, and some of the issues highlighted in the presentation were discussed further in the afternoon. During the afternoon lay visitors attended their selected workshops from the three available:

- **Home Office Guidance**
Ian Smith NALV
- **Police Authority Support for Lay Visiting and Lay Visitors**
Peter Hodges Assistant Clerk, GMPA
- **Police Operations Affecting Lay Visiting**
CI John Martin, GMP
Sgt Trevor Pile, GMP

All the workshops were well attended and sparked a good level of debate, and in some cases arguments! Those lay visitors present

indicated that they had found the presentations and workshops both enjoyable and informative. All those present responsible for overseeing lay visiting, went back to their areas with much to consider for the forthcoming year.

**Anna Jarratt
Greater Manchester Police Authority**

Welsh Regional Conference 10 November 2000

Originally organised for 16th September, the Seminar was postponed due to the fuel crisis and was held on Friday 10th November 2000 at the Baverstock Hotel, Merthyr. Nearly 70 Delegates attended from South Wales, Dyfed Powys and Gwent with representatives of the police service also in attendance. Speakers included Ms Layla Hoque, South Wales Police Authority Member on Raising Awareness of Race Hate Crime.

Also, from Inspector Phil Davies who bravely stood in at the last minute to speak on the Best Value review of prisoner handling. There was active and enthusiastic participation in the workshop sessions resulting in many policy issues being developed. This was particularly so in establishing an Appeals/Grievance procedure. All present felt the session had been extremely useful and interesting.

**Gaynor Howell
South Wales Police Authority**

Scheme Administrators Conference 23-24 November 2000

Held with the assistance of Lancashire Police Authority in Preston, the Home Office organised a conference this year for scheme administrators. This took place after the print deadline for this VT (we have to work so far ahead you know) but will have taken place by the time you get this edition. However, we do know that the seminar covered issues such as the draft new Home Office guidance, NALV's

structured training programme and implications arising from the Human Rights and Health and Safety Acts. Ask your scheme administrator what happened!

South East 1 Roundup

The SE1 region held their first regional conference at Surrey Police HQ on Saturday 29th October. LVs, Police Authority and Police Officers from all four schemes attended. The agenda ranged from the current human Rights issues, good practice, new initiatives and discussions around future appointments to the scheme. This included the nursing scheme piloted by Kent.

The 80 delegates agreed that this should be seen as the first of future joint regional conferences for the regional participants from Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and Surrey. The final thoughts were around whether we could arrange lay visits across our County boundaries.

On a local note from the Surrey Lay Visitor scheme, the recent boundary changes from the Met. area has been highly successful and new recruits are being sought.

**Margaret Hicks
SE1 Regional Representative**



PANI Honours

What more? Yes, indeed - those Lay Visitors for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland just keep getting awards. As well as those listed in the last edition, congratulations go to Dr Derek Carson for his contribution to pathology. He was awarded the OBE and has been a member of the Antrim panel since 1993.

Also, congratulations to Mrs Ethel Gregg for her MBE awarded for services to Lay Visiting. Many Visitors will remember Ethel when she was conference director at the 1998 NALV conference in Belfast. She was a pioneer for Visiting in Northern Ireland, joining the scheme when it was set up in 1991.

Warmest congratulations from NALV to both Dr Carson OBE and Mrs Gregg MBE.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? What would you do?

Melvyn Butcher provides another excellent situational training scenario for VT. Again, there is a £10 book token for the winner.

What would you do and what would your advice be to Mrs Simpson in particular?

Two Lay Visitors meet to make an early morning visit. Mrs Simpson is on only her second visit and still in awe of police officers. She has been paired with Mr Windsor, a visitor for the past four years. He tends to be somewhat overbearing and, according to some visitors, a little lax about proper procedure. Before they enter the police station, Mr Windsor advises Mrs Simpson to take the notes and learn from him, never let the custody officer tell a detainee your name, and get a hepatitis jab at an early opportunity.

They are dealt with courteously by reception and immediately led to the custody suite where the sergeant and Mr Windsor greet each other warmly on first name terms. The sergeant explains that 'this visit is rather inconvenient' and asks for time to prepare the paperwork and free himself from other duties. The sergeant leaves the visitors sitting on a bench in the custody area drinking tea. They wait 45 minutes before the custody officer is ready to conduct them through the suite. On the way round, the sergeant and Mr Windsor engage in much friendly chat largely ignoring Mrs Simpson who walks behind them with her clipboard writing down any notes she is given.

On approaching some of the cells, the custody officer addresses Mr Windsor with such comments as, 'Do you really want to see this one? He's one of our regulars, always in for TWOC.' Or, 'I wouldn't advise talking to this one, he could even be on a serious charge later today.' Without reference to Mrs Simpson, Mr Windsor seems happy enough to be persuaded by the affable and helpful sergeant. When the officer enters a cell it is always with the correct form of words but supported by 'You don't have to see these people, you know.' Of nineteen detainees, the visitors see three. The sergeant points out that the occupant of one cell is an illegal

immigrant with little English and who is anyway not the concern of lay visitors.

They talk to detainee 3435/00 who has bruising on his forehead and around his left eye. He has neither seen nor been offered a doctor and will not say how he got the injuries. The custody record makes no mention of the bruises but the sergeant explains how this detainee throws himself against the walls and the door.

Another detainee, 3442/00, is not approached on two grounds: firstly, that he has not yet had his eight hours sleep and cannot be woken up and, secondly, a visit may well prejudice the current investigation. Mr Windsor is satisfied. Mrs Simpson completes the visit record form under Mr Windsor's direction and tells her put her signature above his own. 'Not seen' is recorded against most of the cell and detainee numbers but there are two entries of interest:

- 3435/00 in male cell 5: detainee comfortable, no complaints
- 3442/00 in male cell 11: detainee sleeping, did not attempt to wake him

The visitors report favourably on the cooperation of the custody staff and the usual various matters like the cleanliness of the suite, provision of reading materials, and so on.

Postscript:

Detainee 3435/00, with the facial bruising, came before the magistrates and complained that he was assaulted by the police at the time of his arrest.

Detainee 3442/00, whilst still in custody, was rushed to hospital. He died shortly after arrival but not before shouting out 'They kicked me!'

The Police Authority wish to see Mrs Simpson and Mr Windsor.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? Last Edition's Winner

Congratulations to Janet Evans of Oxfordshire for her answers to the last edition's scenarios. A highly commended to the runner up as well - Derek Walker of Tewkesbury. However, it's winner takes all here at VT and the £10 book token wings its way to Janet. Her answers are below...

Situation 1

Two lay visitors begin their visit in the female cells where the sole occupant there is prepared to be seen. The visitors meet a detainee who appears distressed and refuses to acknowledge the male addressing her remarks only to the female visitor. The detainee pours out her problems but speaks so softly that the male visitor cannot hear what she has to say. Outside the cell the female visitor briefly explains to her partner that the detainee looks after her elderly father who has Parkinson's Disease. He cannot cope with people he doesn't know and is in a very confused state. The detainee has attempted to phone both her sister and a neighbour but has been unable to contact either of them.

The woman also alleges that she is frequently physically abused by her husband who, having come home drunk and injured about the face the night before, complained to the police that she had attacked him (which is why she is in the cell).

Progressing through the male area the custody officer tells the lay visitors that the next detainee is wanted by another police force for various offences (including .ABH) and, further, that he is the husband of the female detainee. The female visitor informs her partner that she is not prepared to enter the cell and talk to a 'wife beater' but the custody officer, having explained the purpose of the visit to the detainee, is waiting for the visitors to enter the cell.

Answer

The woman is unlikely to flee to Brazil if she is allowed out of the police cell and all she wants to do is go to her father. Although the father is of no direct concern to the LVs, he is a human being whose health and maybe even life may be at risk. The LVs should raise this with the most senior officer present immediately and explain the situation. Perhaps there is a possibility the woman can be released to see her father as soon as possible with an agreed time when she can report back to the station. Alternatively, she could be escorted home with a police officer to check on her father's needs - it may be urgent.

The woman LV is a much bigger problem. Someone will have to explain that it is not her function to decide the guilt or innocence of any detainee, man or woman; that it is for the court to do so. Her own function is to merely check that detainees are treated properly and in accordance with their rights.

Situation 2

Lay visitors arrive at a police station which has a good reputation among the panel members for courtesy and a well run custody suite. The sergeant explains she is under some pressure to complete a task and passes the conduct of the visit to her constable. The constable has a truculent attitude and on the way to the cells he says to the visitors 'We've a load of scumbags in tonight! Why do you people bother?'

The third detainee agrees to be seen and there is an awkward moment when the officer refuses to move out of the cell. He is politely asked to leave and then stands moodily against the corridor wall opposite in full view of detainee and visitors.

The next detainee is given short shrift by the constable who says 'You have no reason to see the visitors, have you?' This detainee demands the visit and claims he has been refused use of the phone and his evening meal was cold and congealed. The constable storms back into the cell and remonstrates with the detainee calling him 'liar' and 'troublemaker'. The detainee gives permission for the visitors to read his custody sheet which the constable refuses to make available.

The visitors have never met this situation before and are unsure of their authority. The rest of the visit does not go well and when the visitors read out their report to the custody sergeant, who is now free she explains that the constable has never dealt with lay visitors before and any complaint might prejudice the outcome of his forthcoming appraisal.

Answer

LVs are there to check that detainees are being properly treated and in accordance with their rights. Here, that is clearly not the case and their report must say so, or what is the point in their visit? The detainees do not appear to have been in immediate physical danger, so it is probably not necessary for the LVs to call in a senior officer. However, the LVs must report with this problem with urgency and clarity.

LVs do not have a duty to protect the reputation or careers of police officers who are behaving inappropriately. The outcome of his coming appraisal is no concern of ours unless we need to suggest that he requires further training and may not be a suitable person to be a police officer! We shouldn't cover for anyone; we are impartial and report what we see as accurately and fairly as we can.

Stationed on Wheels!

Staffordshire's Mobile Detention unit

Chase Panel of Lay Visitors' David Hudson, let us know about Staffordshire's successful use of a mobile detention centre for this year's V2000 music festival. This is one of the large festivals - not in your Glastonbury league but big nevertheless. Staffordshire Police therefore decided to develop a mobile detention centre - a completely transportable police station. The following is the report of the Chase LVs on the unit and the event.

The Chase LVs found the site for the unit at the festival perfect - close enough to be practical but discreet enough to be concealed and unobtrusive. The unit consisted of two vehicles parked back to back with a console cabin for the custody sergeant and housing a communication system, a laptop computer, a screen and printer. Either side were storage cupboards containing all the necessary paperwork, finger printing equipment, camera etc. In the other end was a fitted microwave oven, the essential kettle and all necessary drinks. Next came the small but adequately fitted

interview room with bench seating and a three deck tape recorder. Sergeant Russ Cartlidge is to be congratulated for the time and effort he has put into the unit.

Passing down the unit are the cells - 18 in all each with a small integrated toilet. By the very nature of the exercise the cells are confined single units heated and air conditioned, they are designed to hold detainees for a short period only.

With the festival organisers claiming attendance of approx. 60,000 visitors and overall success, there were 116 reported thefts, 200+ cautions for drug offences and twenty eight arrests.

Complements must go to the Staffordshire Police Force for their efforts to reduce on site crime, contributing to what must have been a difficult and unusual operation. From conditions observed initiative, and the actual visits, both proved informative and interesting.

The unit can be badged in any local logo and is available for hire to any police force, complete with staff. For further information, contact Sgt. Russ Cartlidge on 01785 257717.

Over to you...

Your letters and thoughts

Correspondence has trickled in rather than flooded since the last edition. Some good letters have come in though and there are three below. Please, please, send you news and views to VT. New contact details are on the back cover.

What's in a name?

"It's 6.15pm on the second Tuesday of the month so the Lay Visitors will be here in half an hour Fred. There's just enough time to tidy up and mop up the worst of the blood." I don't think this is quite how we expect custody officers to await our visits as they take place at any time - 25 hours a day, seven days a week. We all try (or should!) to spread out visits evenly and make them random. So, I'm curious to know how our excellent newsletter came to be called Visiting Times. 'Times in bold type as well! It is the essence of our function that there are no special times for visits; is it a joke?

Janet Evans, Oxon

Well, if it is a joke Janet I think it's on me too! I have no idea why we have the title we do as it predates me. Perhaps the Visiting Guardian would be more appropriate - not just because of our role but because of my tendency for bad proof reading and typos! Whilst I'm on the subject, apologies to Dee Scarland, the South East 2 regional representative who unfortunately came out in the last edition as Dee Scalent. Woops.

First aid training for custody staff

At our police forums AGM I raised the subject of training of custody officers in first aid and am sending you the local newspaper article on what was discussed at the meeting. You'll see I raised the issue of custody staff not having received training for between 7 and 10 years and that I felt this was unacceptable - particularly given the focus on health and safety matters now and what can happen in a custody suite. The Chief Constable of Lancashire Police was there and agreed this was unacceptable. She gave assurances that this training was now in hand. Perhaps this is something that could be done in other areas to promote safety?

Brian Twist, Southern Division Co-ordinator, Lancashire

Thanks indeed for the article Brian. Something I'm sure other Authorities and Panels will want to ask their local police about.

Moving on

I guesstimate that about 100 of the 3000 or so Lay Visitors move to a new home in a different region each year. Is there any central system for informing the new region that a trained and experienced LV has moved into their area so the services of that volunteer are not lost? Or is it left for the individual to make themselves known? Whilst waiting for the removal man to appear I do not think it would be top of my list of things to do!

Janet Evans, Oxon

I think the latter is the case Janet - no central system. However, when the LV has moved and unpacked they can of course ring NALV for help. The office has a list of all scheme administrators and local contact points.



Why Not Check?

Designed for Custody Officers, this Acronym is also of use to LVs

Who are you receiving into your custody?

Before you place a detained person in a cell it is your duty to find out who you are dealing with and to ensure that they are fit to be detained.

History: What can you find out about the detained person?

- Do a PNC/Phoenix check. Are there any information markers?
- What further information can you find out? Do you know the detained person?
- Does the arresting officer know them?
- If there is no known history, ask: 'Have you ever deliberately harmed yourself whilst in custody?'

You are responsible for the care of the detained person

- PACE and Codes of Practice specify your statutory responsibilities and the circumstances when you must immediately call the police surgeon or, in urgent cases, send the person to hospital.

Note changes in conduct, mood and what they say

- Persons with suicidal tendencies may change their conduct - were they loud but now quiet? Were they subdued but now exuberant? Why?

- Has their mood changed? Are they now happy, relaxed, at peace with themselves?
- What are they saying? 'Nobody cares about me anymore!', 'I've nothing to live for'.

Observe - visit them at frequent but irregular intervals

- The Codes of Practice state 'people detained shall be visited every hour', 'those who are drunk, at least every half hour, and shall be roused and spoken to on each visit'.
- You can decide to visit those 'at risk' more frequently; this usually means leaving no longer than 15 minutes between visits or considering a constant watch.
- Make visits irregular; it stops detainees planning 'the right moment' and reduces their opportunities.

Tell someone else

- A Prisoner Escort Record (PER) replacing the old POL1 form, will be completed by police, prisons and escort services for all people in custody.
- Make sure PER is part of the custody record and given to other agencies accepting responsibility for the detainee. Voice your concerns - don't keep them to yourself.
- Inform PNC/Phoenix to record and update an information marker.

Cell - safety and condition

- Is the cell safe for a detainee to be left alone in? Ensure there are no 'fixing points' for ligatures. Is the cell damaged? Damaged areas can provide the means for DSH.

Hatch or wicket to remain shut

- The cell hatch (or wicket) is used by most detainees who DSH.
- If the cell is occupied, shut the hatch wherever and whenever possible.
- Make sure the inside of the door is safe and that the hatch fits properly.

Enquire into detainees' welfare

- If you are concerned about a detainee, talk to them; make them feel you care.

Custody record accuracy

- The custody record must fully reflect all that happens. Record all visits and time them accurately. Make full records of police surgeon visits and instructions.

Knowledge helps all

- Know who it is you are dealing with. Tell PNC/Phoenix for your colleagues' benefit.
- Complete the PER form; the information your record protects the detainee and you.

Election Results

The AGM received the notification of the recent elections. For the forthcoming year, NALV members appointed the following:

Chairman: Stephen Murphy, Greater Manchester

Vice Chairman: Rosemary Parker, South West

Vice Chairman: Andrew Steadman, Central 3

NALV would publicly like to express its appreciation for the significant effort put into the work of NALV by Bill Miller, an immediate past vice-Chairman. Bill is the NE Regional Representative and Management Committee member.



Yes, your poor editor needs help! There are some amongst you who know me who would probably say that's been the case for years but then that's a different story. No, what I mean is I need help with Visiting Times.

The magazine can only flourish with ideas, contributions and articles. I do want to thank those who have put in copy for this and other editions very much indeed - you have kept us going and don't give up!

To everyone else I would also say, don't be the stereotyped apathetic British person! You are volunteers already who give so selflessly of your time to visit and help the community. Please, continue in that vein and contribute to VT. There are so many willing helpers out there I hope that I will be flooded with post! I need your assistance please to make the magazine even better and be of real help and interest to visitors.

What is a Lay Visitor?

Lay visitors are independent members of the local community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the welfare of people who are in police custody.

They come from a variety of backgrounds and sections of the community. They must be over 18 but the upper age limit varies in local areas. They must have no direct or indirect involvement in the criminal justice system for example, magistrates and serving or former police officers or special constables.

Other people may also be excluded if they have direct involvement in the criminal justice system, such as solicitors or probation officers. This is to prevent possible conflicts of interest for the individual, and to maintain the independence of the scheme as a whole.

HOW ARE THEY SELECTED AND TRAINED?

Volunteers wishing to become lay visitors will need to complete an application form. Then they will be asked to attend an interview. Since lay visitors need to have sound knowledge and thorough understanding of detainees' rights and police responsibility, successful applicants will be invited to attend a one day information and training day.

These are organised by the local scheme administrator and usually delivered by the National Association for Lay Visiting (NALV).

This is a training programme made up of practical and theoretical exercises covering all aspects of lay visiting and is complemented by a set of guidelines and the basic principles of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). Those appointed are issued with an official identity card, which allows them to be admitted to the custody area of the police station.

Further training sessions will be arranged locally as a means of informing lay visitors on new developments and, most importantly, sharing experiences. Newly appointed lay visitors will normally complete a probationary period. Appointments are then made for a set period which may be renewable.

WHEN AND WHERE ARE VISITS MADE?

Police stations are normally visited once a week by pairs of lay visitors. The actual timing of visits is entirely a matter for lay visitors. Lay visitors will normally only visit designated police stations within their local area.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A VISIT IS MADE?

Lay visitors must maintain their independence and impartiality. They do not take sides but merely look, listen and report on what is said to them. On arrival at the police station, lay visitors will be escorted to the custody area.

The detainees will be identified by their custody numbers and strict rules of confidentiality exist.

Lay visitors may occasionally be denied immediate access for safety reasons and be asked to wait or to return later to complete their visit. Interviews with detainees are for lay visitors' protection normally carried out within sight but out of hearing of a police officer.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

A report is completed for each visit made. It records that a visit has taken place and provides an insight into the running of the custody area at the time of the visit. Copies of the reports are provided for the police, police authorities, local panels and the Home Office. They provide a vital source of information on the environmental and welfare conditions of detainees. This information in the report form is analysed and the key action areas are recorded in addition to the issues which require attention.

OTHER DUTIES

Whilst lay visitors must treat as confidential the details of what is seen and heard, they are expected to report their findings in general terms to their local police and community consultative group at an appropriate time of the year (e.g. the annual general meeting)



THIS IS YOUR VT - USE IT!

Visiting Times is NALV's magazine for you. Please contribute - a proper exchange of views and debate is essential for us all to develop and progress Lay Visiting together. Send me your views, articles, ideas, suggestions and criticisms.

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DO WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

Visiting Times wants to make sure we have your correct details and that you get the correct number of copies. If you want to change any details write to the normal address and we will pass the information on.

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NALV SUBSCRIPTIONS UPDATE

NALV has set the subscription rates for the forthcoming year. The following will apply for 2000/2001 and have been pegged at the previous year's rates.

Metropolitan Police Authorities:	£750
Shire Police Authorities:	£500
London Panels:	£50
Individual Members:	£50