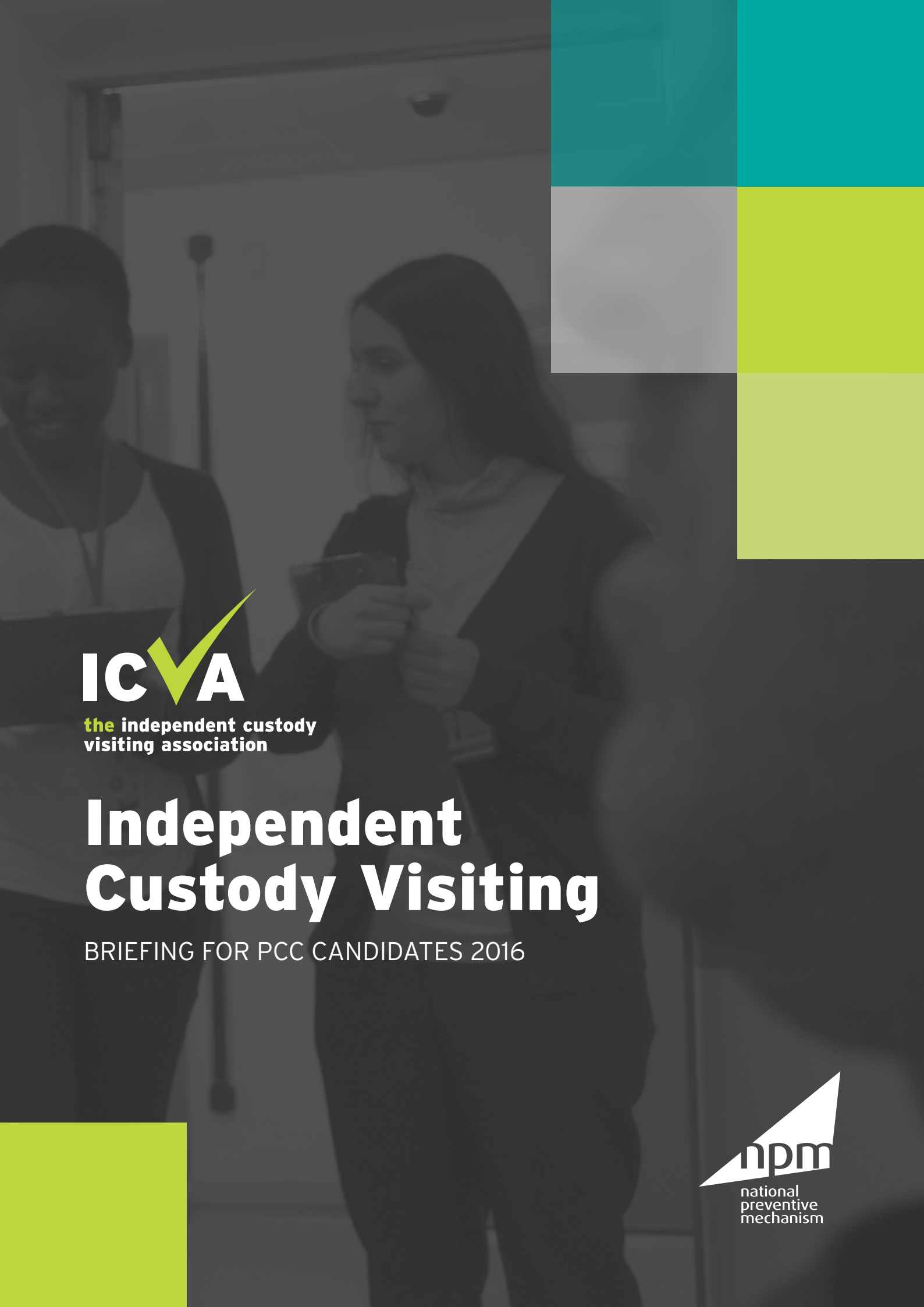

ICVA
the independent custody visiting association

Independent Custody Visiting

BRIEFING FOR PCC CANDIDATES 2016

npm
national preventive mechanism

Independent Custody Visiting

For further information see our website **icva.org.uk** or follow us on Twitter **@CustodyVisiting**

Independent Custody Visiting

Police custody is a high-pressure environment where police interact with vulnerable people and difficult situations. There were 17 deaths in or following police custody and a further 69 apparent suicides after police custody in 2014/15*.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) fulfil a unique role in the oversight of police custody through their statutory duty to run Independent Custody Visiting Schemes.

What is Custody Visiting?

Every PCC has a statutory duty to run an Independent Custody Visiting scheme. The schemes co-ordinate local volunteers, called Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs), to make unannounced visits to police custody to check on the treatment and wellbeing of detainees as well as the conditions they are held in.

ICVs speak to detainees, asking them about their experiences and check that they've been given their legal rights and entitlements. ICVs can access all areas of custody and will check on the conditions of the custody suite.

ICVs will ask custody staff to resolve any immediate concerns or issues. They complete visit reports, alerting the PCC to their findings and raising problems or concerns. Schemes also share findings, themes and learning with the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) to represent at a national level.

PCCs, police forces, ICVA and partners promote their schemes to deliver public reassurance that detainees are treated properly in police custody.

Why does custody visiting take place?

ICV visits help to prevent ill treatment and harm to detainees. The visits provide a spot check to ensure that detainees receive their rights and entitlements and that custody staff are providing the right safeguards and checks for vulnerable detainees. Well-publicised schemes deliver public reassurance and confidence to the community.

ICVs' visits provide oversight of custody in between lengthy gaps between HMIC/P inspections, ensuring that recommendations are implemented. Good schemes will have constructive relationships with the force and be valued for their oversight. Custody Inspectors value the work of the ICVs in contributing to a safe environment and continuous improvement of custody.

Custody visiting originated from the Scarman report, following the Brixton riots in 1981, as a means to deliver oversight and public reassurance. ICVs provide a valuable safeguard for detainees, for police forces and for PCCs and custody visiting is underpinned by a Home Office Code of Practice, agreed by Parliament.

* Independent Police Complaints Commission, Deaths During or Following Police Contact, Statistics for England and Wales 2014/15

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Your responsibilities as a PCC

A Code of Practice, approved by Parliament, governs custody visiting; it outlines PCCs responsibilities to ensure that:

- There is a robust and effective ICV scheme running in your area with appropriate resources and a nominated member of staff responsible for the scheme.
- Regular visits take place in all areas of police custody, including terrorism detention.
- Your volunteers are trained and well managed.
- Your scheme manager gives you regular reports on issues within custody and that you can identify issues and trends.
- You have regular and formal opportunities to raise concerns with the police and that the police and partners deal with ICVs' concerns.
- If you have a terrorism detention facility in your area, ICVs submit their reports to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.

What impact does custody visiting make?

ICVs' reports have instigated improvements throughout custody; recent examples of some of the excellent work of ICVs, small and large, include:

- Monitoring and influencing staffing levels to ensure that custody is safe.
- Influencing and reporting on healthcare in custody to help ensure that detainees have appropriate access to medical care.
- Reporting on conditions of custody. ICVs have provided evidence to close suites that were not fit-for-purpose and improve conditions of custody suites.
- Successfully campaigning for changes to ensure the safety, dignity and comfort of vulnerable detainees such as ensuring safety blankets are available and easy access to toilet roll and drinking water.
- Ensuring that all communities are treated with respect by ensuring that religious books and items are stored appropriately.
- Ensuring that custody processes are being conducted as required.
- Delivering community reassurance of the proper treatment of terrorism detainees.

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ICVA

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) is a national organisation that leads, supports and represents custody visiting schemes. PCCs in every policing region nominate a representative to ICVA's Management Board to represent local schemes and ICVA is currently chaired by the PCC for Dorset. ICVA provides materials, support and representation that equip PCCs and their staff to deliver high-quality schemes. ICVA provides members with:

- National standards to ensure high quality, effective schemes.
- Access to shared resources and templates.
- Policy advice and guidance on national changes to police custody.
- Training and professional development for volunteers, staff and PCCs.
- Access to two national conferences annually with high profile speakers from the Home Office, HMIP, the NPM and other national and international bodies.
- Sharing of good practice and new resources.
- Representation at national groups including Home Office strategic partnerships, the NPM and ministerial boards.
- Promotion of custody schemes.
- A professional support network for your scheme manager.

Your contribution as a PCC candidate

PCCs have a unique role and statutory duty in the oversight of police custody. You can support your local custody visiting scheme by making commitments to:

- Deliver an effective and well-resourced scheme that provides effective oversight of safe custody.
- Invest in your local volunteers to ensure that they are equipped to deliver their crucial role.
- Raise and resolve concerns and problems identified by ICVs with senior police staff and local partners.
- Share learning, practice and findings with ICVA as part of your contribution to the National Preventive Mechanism.

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