

News story: Home Office plans to strengthen safeguards for women in custody

The [consultation on revising PACE Codes C and H](#) follows the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) writing to the Home Office in January, saying police were failing to meet required standards in relation to female detainees.

College of Policing guidance states that women must be automatically offered access to a female officer and hygiene pack. But the ICVA found poor practice among forces, with women being left without basic sanitary protection in police cells. Examples included a force not providing tampons for safety reasons, female detainees being stripped of all clothing including underwear and placed in paper suits with no menstrual products being offered, a lack of access to hand-washing facilities and concerns about the use of CCTV in cells.

The Home Office has been working with ICVA and today publishes proposals to make clear the police's responsibilities towards women in custody. The draft revisions to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) codes of practice will ensure that:

- arrangements are in place for all female detainees to speak to a female member of staff if requested
- female detainees are asked at the earliest opportunity if they are likely to require any menstrual products while in police custody and made aware that these will be provided free of charge
- the dignity of menstruating detainees in police custody is considered

Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, Nick Hurd, said:

Everyone who is held in custody should be treated with dignity and have their needs respected.

Our proposals should leave forces across the country in no doubt of their responsibilities towards women in custody.

After receiving the letter from ICVA, the then Home Secretary wrote to all chief constables asking them to review relevant policies and procedures in their forces.

The 6-week consultation launched today comes as the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and College of Policing produces new operational guidance for police regarding the treatment of female detainees in police custody.

Katie Kempen, Chief Executive of the Independent Custody Visiting

Association, said:

Independent custody visitors invest their time visiting police custody to monitor detainee wellbeing; the Home Office has acted quickly and decisively in response to our reports of shocking conditions for menstruating detainees.

The proposed changes to PACE are a significant step forward in ensuring that the dignity of female detainees is upheld in police cells.