



**Merton Independent
Custody Visitors Panel**

**Annual Report Year Ending
31 December 2007**



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Merton Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP), covering the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Inform the community of the work of the Merton ICVP
- Set out the issues and concerns that have arisen during 2007
- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Set out the panel's objectives for 2008.

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and help with the recruitment of volunteers.

Who are Independent Custody Visitors?

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the conditions and treatment of people in police custody.

What do Independent Custody Visitors do?

Once a week two visitors from the Merton ICVP attend Wimbledon police station at a random unannounced time to make an inspection and speak to detainees. On arrival at the police station, visitors are escorted to the custody area where they speak to a number of detainees in their cells and complete a structured report form.

London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) is an independent statutory body, which exists to make sure that London's police are accountable for the services they provide to people in the capital.

The MPA has a legal obligation under the Police Reform Act 2002 to provide a custody visiting scheme in London. From its beginnings in Lambeth in 1984, the scheme now operates across all 32 London boroughs and has around 400 volunteers. Each borough has a custody visiting panel to direct local activity, supported by an MPA staff member who coordinates activities and ensures its efficient management.

To be eligible to join the London ICV Scheme you must be 18 or over and live, work or study in the capital. Visitors must have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system. For more information please see the MPA web site on the ICV Scheme at: <http://www.mpa.gov.uk/partnerships/icv/recruit.htm> or contact: ICV Co-ordinator by freephone: 0808 100 1036, minicom: 020 7202 0173, by e-mail: icvrecruitment@mpa.gov.uk or enquiries by post: ICV Co-ordinator, MPA, FREEPOST, LON17808, LONDON SW1H 0DY.

Chair's Report

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to the 21st Annual Report of the Merton ICVP.

The panel has seen a number of major changes in 2007:

- Retirement of valued panel member Margaret Day
- MPA centralisation of administration
- Introduction of the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) to Wimbledon Custody Suite and
- Retirement of Sergeant Roger Smith.

My sincere thanks to all my colleagues on the panel for their dedicated service and support throughout 2007. I would like to thank Margaret Day for the time and effort she committed as an Independent Custody Visitor, both to the Panel and the local community. The panel wishes her well in her retirement.

There was some concern about the changes that centralisation of the scheme administration might bring and how this might impact on the independence of our role as custody visitors. However, although we lost our much-valued administrator Zoë Pullman, the panel has succeeded in resolving any issues through participation and communication with the MPA. I would like to thank Sarah Walker, who is now our panel co-ordinator, for her professionalism and support.

NSPIS has been used in other parts of the country for some time and was introduced to the MPS in 2007. Merton went live on 29th May 2007. Instead of hand written custody records everything recorded by MPS officers and the Forensic Medical Examiner (FME) is now computer based. The panel experienced some teething problems with the new system but these were resolved when brought to the attention of the police.

Sergeant Roger Smith retired as a police officer in October 2007. My sincere thanks to him for his tireless support, prompt action to panel concerns and regular attendance at panel meetings. The panel wishes him well in his new role.

The panel welcomed Inspector Jon Phillips in December 2007 as the new police representative. My thanks to him for the support provided in our visits and dealing promptly with all enquiries emerging from the visits. The panel looks forward to working with him in the years to come. I would like to thank all the Custody Staff for their patience and understanding of the ICV role.

Heating and ventilation is always a matter of concern in Wimbledon cells owing to the age of the building. The panel welcomes proposed plans for a new custody suite that would meet suitable standards with regard to detainees. However, despite these problems we have found that detainees were treated satisfactorily within the provisions of the law. Many detainees praised the custody staff for the standard of care shown towards them.

The panel will continue to work with the MPS and MPA to ensure that the high standard of care given to detainees will continue in 2008.

Ravi Kurup BSc.

Chair Merton Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Aims and Achievements

The aims and objectives of the panel are laid out in the Home Office Codes of Practice, the National Standards governing Independent Custody Visiting and the MPA ICV Handbook.

The primary objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to Wimbledon police station to check and report on the treatment of detainees and to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed. This is achieved by:

- Making one visit per week
- Holding quarterly panel meetings
- Ensuring members continue to learn from their experiences and contribute to building confidence between the police and the community in line with the aims of the scheme
- Increasing public awareness of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

Visits

Merton ICV panel visits the custody suite at Wimbledon police station. The custody suite at Mitcham is no longer in operation.

During 2007 the panel achieved 79% of its visiting target of one visit per week. 41 visits were undertaken in 2007. However, the custody suite was closed for two weeks in April / May for the installation of NSPIS. During this period detainees were not held in Wimbledon custody suite.

Visits have been well spread throughout the week. However, all visits have been carried out between 08.00 and 20.00. The panel will endeavour to vary the timing of visits more throughout 2008.

In the majority of cases there were no significant issues raised. However, a recurring concern remains the ventilation and heating system. Planning approval was granted for a custody centre at Wimbledon in September 2007 and design of the custody centre has begun (in consultation with custody users). The panel also experienced some minor problems when the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) was installed in the custody suite. NSPIS includes an electronic computerised custody record. All problems were rectified once they were brought to the attention of the police.

The panel continues to be impressed with the very high standards of the Officers in the Division, their helpful, courteous and professional attitude towards visits and the high standard of care shown towards detainees.

Meetings and Events

The panel meets quarterly to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. The panel has a good 79% attendance record.

Sergeant Roger Smith attended the March, June and October meetings. Roger Smith retired in October 2007 since this date Inspector Jon Phillips has attended the panel meetings. Both officers kept the panel advised of developments at Wimbledon custody suite and within borough. The panel would like to thank Sergeant Roger Smith for his many years of hard work with the running of the custody suite.

The Chair has represented the Merton Panel at:

- Meetings of the Merton Community and Police Consultative Group
- Meetings of the London ICV Chairs with the MPA
- The Independent Custody Visiting Association National Conference

Administration

Between 1 January 2007 and 31 March 2007 the London Borough of Merton through the Safer Merton Team provided administrative support to the panel. During this period Zoë Pullman was the designated administrator.

From the 1 April 2007 the MPA centralised the administration of the London ICV panels. The MPA appointed eight Co-ordinators; our Co-ordinator, Sarah Walker, is also responsible for Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Sutton (responsibility for Croydon ceases January 2008).

Membership

The MPA expects all panels to adhere to the MPA's equal opportunities policy, recruit new panel members from all sections of the community and actively foster good relations between people of different races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel. Since April 2007, panels have been asked to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA.

According to London Development Agency figures Merton is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London with 15% of residents belonging to a minority ethnic group. The gender figures show 51% female and 49% male.

The membership of the panel is broadly representative of the borough as a whole and diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.

Members of Merton ICVP during 2007

| Name | | Date of Appointment |
|----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Warren Abraham | | August 2004 |
| Angela Ashmead | | September 2004 |
| Sophie Belcher | | August 2004 |
| Edward Correia | | January 2003 |
| Margaret Day | | August 2004 |
| Wayne Eaves | | August 2004 |
| Ravi Kurup | Chair | June 1999 |
| Cheryl Samuels | Vice Chair | August 2004 |

Margaret Day retired in March 2007. The panel would like to thank Margaret for her committed service to the Panel and the local community as an Independent Custody Visitor.

Recruitment

Like all London ICV panels, Merton ICVP aims to reflect the diversity of the local community. Throughout 2007 we actively promoted Merton ICVP with the aim of recruiting new members. As part of our 2007 recruitment drive we sent posters and leaflets to all Merton libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureau's, free legal advice centres and various doctor's and dentist surgeries and colleges across Merton. The MPA also advertised regularly in the Metro and Evening Standard newspapers. The panel is registered on the national volunteering website <http://www.do-it.org.uk> and with the Merton Volunteer Centre.

Through these efforts we have raised the profile of Merton ICVP. However, our membership reduced to 7 during 2007 and whilst we can operate with this number we continue to seek new members of all ages and from all parts of the community.

Statistical Analysis of 2007 Panel Reports

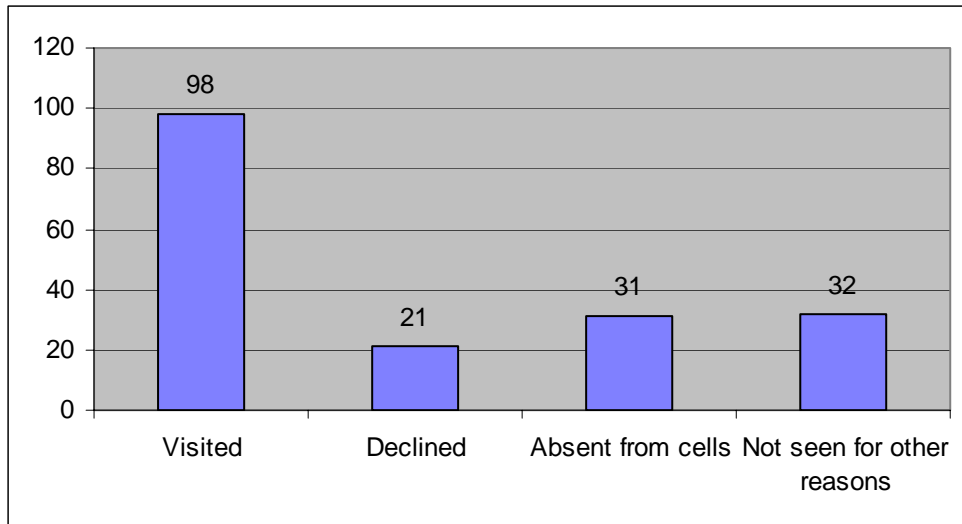
Number of detainees seen by ICVs and total number held at Wimbledon Custody Suite

| Year | Seen | Total | % Seen |
|------|------|-------|--------|
| 2007 | 182 | 5420 | 3.36 |
| 2006 | 162 | 5607 | 3.09 |

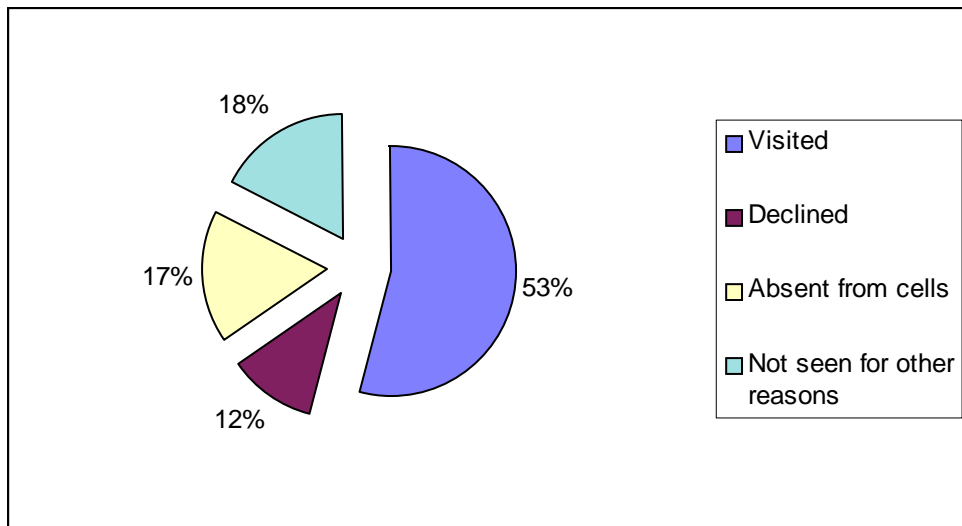
Breakdown of detainees in custody during visits by gender, age and category

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| PACE Adult Male | 127 |
| PACE Juvenile Male | 16 |
| PACE Adult Female | 16 |
| PACE Juvenile Female | 11 |
| Immigration Adult Male | 11 |
| Immigration Juvenile Male | 0 |
| Immigration Adult Female | 0 |
| Immigration Juvenile Female | 0 |
| Other Adult Male | 1 |
| Other Juvenile Male | 0 |
| Other Adult Female | 0 |
| Other Juvenile Female | 0 |
| Total | 182 |

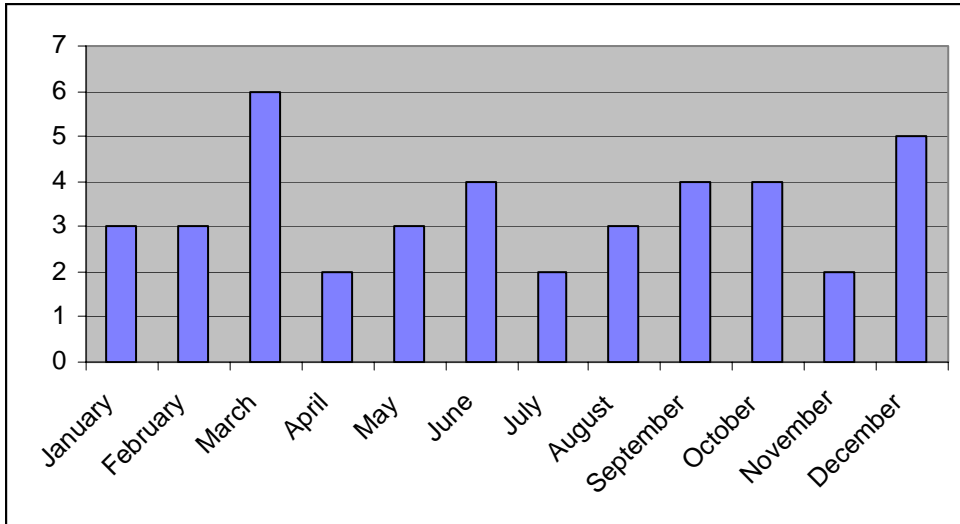
Number of detainees seen by ICVs



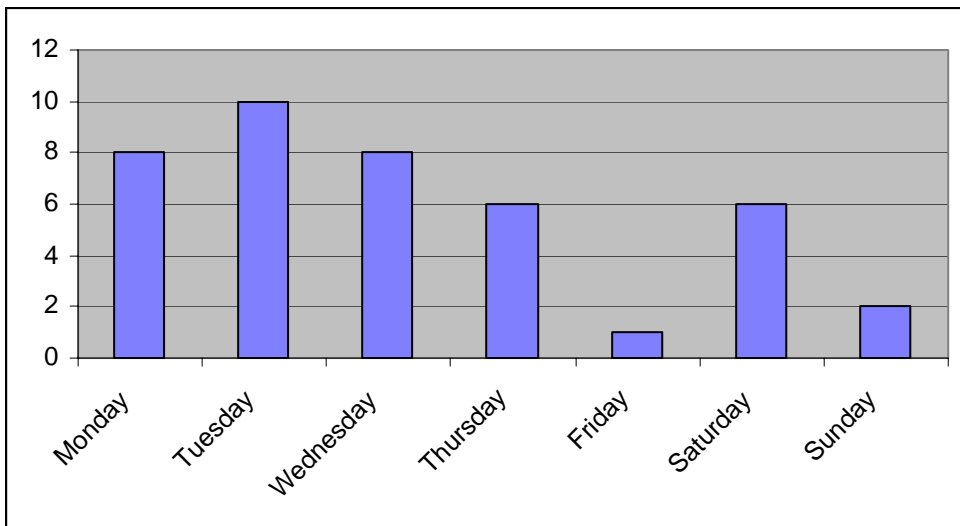
Percentage of detainees seen by ICVs



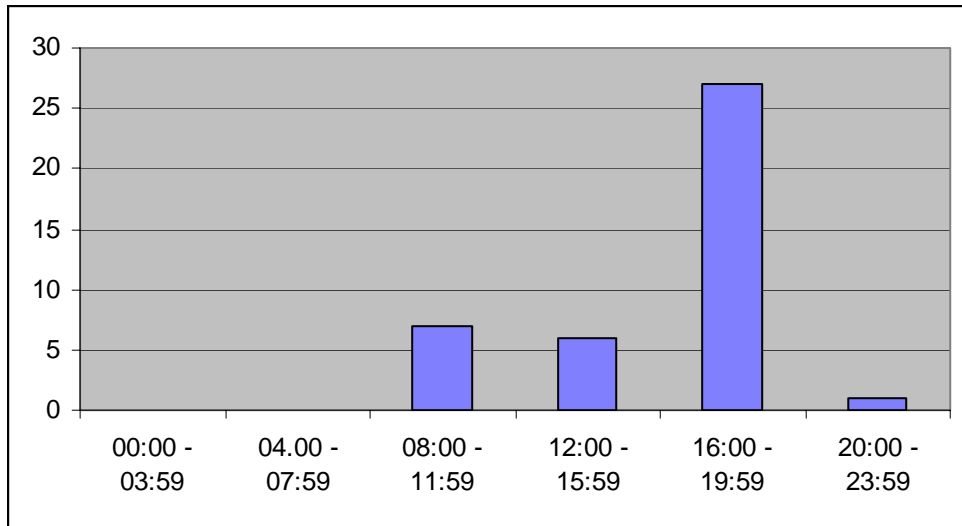
Visits by month



Visits by day



Visits by time



Targets and Plans for 2008

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
2. To make an average of one visit a week; varying the days of the week and times of visits to get an accurate picture of the Custody Suite.
3. To monitor the findings of reports and to discuss concerns with the Police immediately if need be and/or at the next Panel meeting.
4. To endeavour to attend all panel meetings.
5. To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; to ensure that the membership does not fall below current level and ideally reflects the community served by the Panel.
6. To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
7. To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Merton.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil it's statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.

Abbreviations used in the Annual Report

- ICV Independent Custody Visitor
- ICVP Independent Custody Visiting Panel
- MPA Metropolitan Police Authority
- MPS Metropolitan Police Service
- NSPIS National Strategy for Police Information Systems
- PACE Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984