



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

**Newham
Independent Custody
Visiting Panel**

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Newham Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers the period from January 2007 to December 2007

The purpose of the report is to:

- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Provide the local community and the MPA with information about the visits made including the treatment of those held in custody
- Set out issues and concerns that have arisen
- Set out the objectives for 2008

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 23 Members who scrutinize and support the work of the police. The MPA promotes equality and diversity within the police service and is working in partnership to ensure all those who live and work in the capital are treated fairly and with respect.

The MPA has a legal obligation under the Police Reform Act 2002 for a custody visiting scheme to operate in its area. In April 2007 the MPA brought together the custody visiting arrangements managed by the boroughs into one London scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Newham, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration; a member of MPA staff is responsible for supporting the panel.

Prospective custody visitors are volunteers from within the community. The MPA is responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing all custody visitors and tries to ensure a balance of age, gender and ethnicity. Successful applicants to the scheme are given training in all aspects of a custody visitor's role and responsibilities. Custody visiting is governed by a range of legislation and guidance including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 as well as Home Office Codes of Practice and National Standards. This year's annual report covers the period January 2007 to December 2007. This new reporting arrangement brings Newham in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

Chairperson's report

The period covered by this report was exceptionally challenging for the panel as it both adapted to the new administrative arrangements provided directly by the MPA and addressed a coincidental severe decline in membership. I am pleased however to be able to report that on-going recruitment has proved to be successful and the panel's performance has significantly improved as enthusiastic new members have joined.

The Panel currently comprises 13 active members; with a further five on agreed periods of absence. They are all unpaid volunteer members of the local community who collectively accurately reflect the demographic of the London Borough of Newham.

Members of the local Police service and the Panel are constantly working in tandem to try to improve the facilities available to detainees, and also to ensure appropriate awareness of their varied cultural and religious needs. I believe the work of the Panel continues to be highly regarded and has an important role in helping maintain confidence in the Police-Community relationship, which is of paramount importance within the borough.

I have no doubt that the Panel, with the support of the MPA, will continue to improve on its work and maintain its outstanding service in the years to come.

Finally I would like to thank all panel members who have undertaken there visiting during the year for their cooperation and sense of duty, and for the level of support they have provided to me as Chair. Also thanks to all the police staff and officers, whose cooperation, often in difficult circumstances, is much appreciated by the panel.

Finally the panel recognises the important role of the MPA in overseeing the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and for providing the training and support, through their Coordinator, to enable us to perform our community role.

Aijaz Rashid Sheikh
Chair, Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

March 2008

Aims and achievements

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

The primary objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to police stations in the borough to check and report on the treatment of detainees in police cells to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed.

In the previous annual report the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2007:

- To maintain a programme of weekly visits to Forest Gate and Plaistow police stations at variable times including occasional night visits
- To hold monthly panel meetings
- To continue to monitor the standards of cleaning and the temperature of cells and the provision for detainees' hygiene needs
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Newham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To recruit more younger people to the panel
- To ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the borough
- To attend local events such as summer fairs to increase public awareness, publicise the work of the panel and to recruit new members
- To enable panel members to attend refresher training courses and to use the panel meetings as an opportunity to provide training

The panel made a total of 37 visits throughout 2007 to Newham police stations. Against a target of 104 visits to be carried out during the year at a rate of one visit per week to each station, this represents an achievement of 35.6% of the annual target.

Visits have been very well spread out through the week. The weekend has experienced fewer visits than average and is the only exception to this even distribution.

A greater number of visits need to be undertaken during the period of 00.00-07.59 as no visits were carried out during this time. Whilst it is appreciated that these are unsocial hours and detainees are often taking advantage of their continuous rest period, it is still essential that some visits are carried during these quieter periods over the course of the year.

As well as this, the one visit that took place between 12.00-15.59 needs to be improved upon. This could be achieved by decreasing the number of visits (26) that were carried out between 16.00-19.59.

A barrier to achieving this goal has been the perennial challenge to recruit sufficient and committed members and to retain these members. With fewer than sufficient members for much of the year, fulfilling the central objectives has proved difficult.

In particular, it has not been possible to recruit any young people to the panel. It is not possible to yet say how well the panel matches the diversity of the borough in other respects; however there will be an opportunity to monitor the diversity of the panel quite soon.

With an improved marketing and advertising strategy for 2008, and in continually developing partnerships and investigating new avenues to recruit, it is hoped that 2008 will see a more successful recruitment campaign to bring numbers to a satisfactory level.

Relations with the police remain effective with both the custody manager and panel members having invested a lot of effort to ensure lines of communication are kept clear and that matters requiring a response to the panel are dealt with effectively.

The Panel meetings are held monthly at Newham Town Hall. All members are expected to try to attend. The venue continues to be the most satisfactory, and the panel wish to thank the Council for allowing it to meet there.

The Panel is, and has been, excellently supported by the police Custody inspectors for both stations.

The Panel is represented at meetings of the Newham Police and Community Forum. The Chair, or a representative, also attends the MPA London ICV Chairs and Cluster meetings.

Many panel members have busy home and professional lives, and some also maintain other community roles as well as that as an ICV. Unfortunately during much of the period of this report attendance at meetings and visit performance were not consistently good, as membership suffered a decline with some long established members choosing to step aside. However a recruitment campaign successfully began to bring in new members, whose enthusiasm has helped invigorate the whole panel and had significantly improved performance by the end of the year.

Recruitment and membership

Since April 2007, panels have been asked to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA. 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, faiths, races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

Recruiting volunteers to the Newham ICV panel has not proven overly difficult and the panel has maintained a good number of visitors throughout the year. By the end of 2007 the Newham panel had 13 accredited active members, with a further five on periods of accepted absence.

The panel is operating increasingly well with a steadily increasing number of visitor. The optimum number of members is 18 and it is hoped that this quota shall be fulfilled in 2008.

Recent publicity has brought significant expressions of interest, which it is hoped will become applications

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy. It is hoped that future recruitment will result in an increased number younger people. New initiatives will be needed both to target different types of people and to increase the take up of the role. The active panel comprises of 6 men and 7 women with varying diversity in age and ethnicity.

Visits to police stations

There are two custody suites in the borough at Newham; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Forest Gate and Plaistow.

The majority of our reports have not raised any significant issues that required the attention of the MPA. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that are frequently raised:

- The FME room is often unlocked, or the cupboards within the room containing medical supplies are unlocked.
- Panel members continue to be concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities
- The general and chronic poor cleanliness of the custody suite, floor and cells is often raised. A deep clean of the custody unit resolved this issue temporarily but the problem has resurfaced.
- Over the year concerns over the supply of blankets and hand towels have had to be resolved.

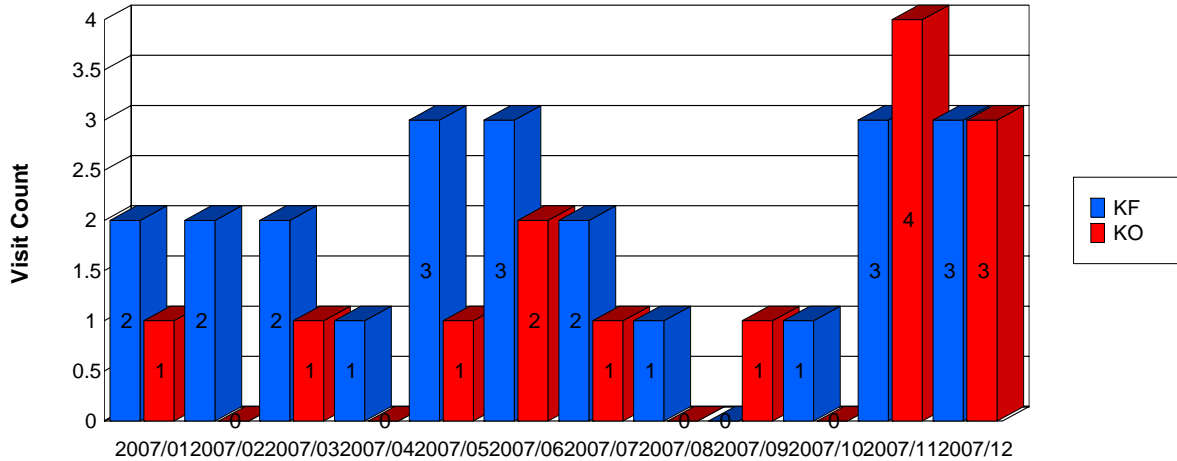
Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2007 that have required intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

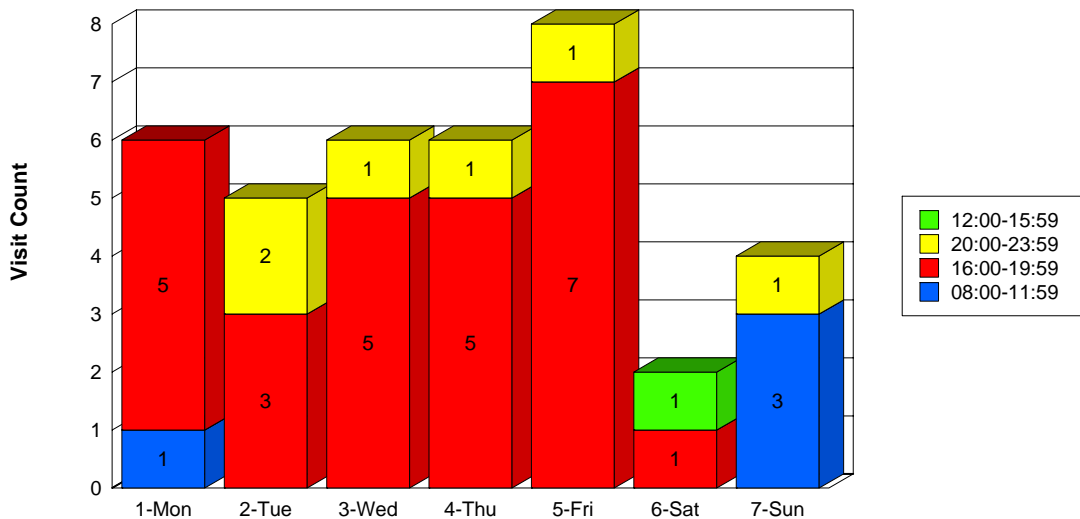
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Forest Gate	23	44.23
Plaistow	14	26.92
Total	37	35.58

*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.



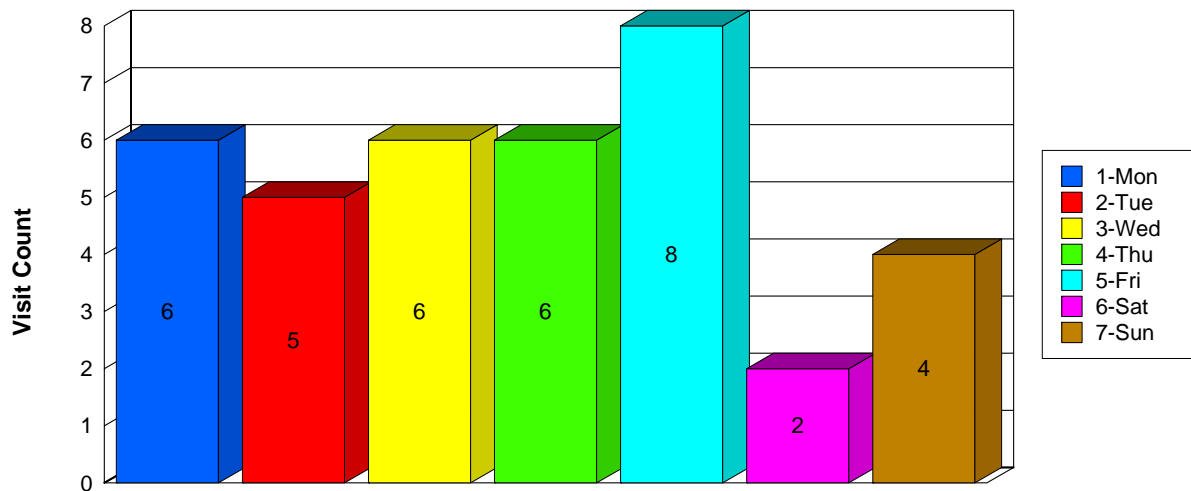
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of Total Visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	4	10.81
1200 – 1559 hrs	1	2.70
1600 – 1959 hrs	26	70.27
2000 – 2359 hrs	6	16.22

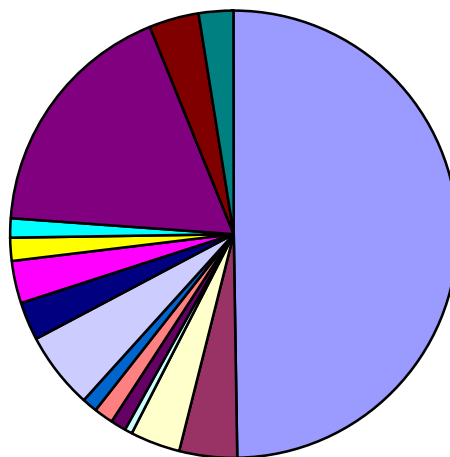


3. Days of Visits

Day	No. of visits	% of total visits
Monday	6	16.22%
Tuesday	5	13.51%
Wednesday	6	16.22%
Thursday	6	16.22%
Friday	8	21.61%
Saturday	2	5.41%
Sunday	4	10.81%
Total	37	100%



4. Details of detainees' concerns:



■ No complaints	■ Asleep
■ Medical Attention	■ Blanket
■ Legal Advice/Consultation	■ Relative informed of detention
■ Immigration	■ In Interview
■ Language Difficulites	■ In Consultation/Out of Cell
■ Request Drink/Food	■ Visually checked
■ Visit Refused	■ Interpreter
■ Telephone Call	

Plans for forthcoming year 2008

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2008 are as follows:

- To make a total of 52 visits over the year at a rate of 1 visit per week to both Forest Gate and Plaistow Police Stations.
- To make a total of 12 visits over the year at a rate of one per month to the BTP West Ham Police Station.
- To maintain the good distribution of visits across the week, but to undertake more visits over the weekend to even out the spread.
- To vary the times of visits in order to provide a better spread over 24 hours, particularly between the hours of 24:00-07:59 and 12:00–15:59 and to reduce the number of visits taking place between the hours of 16:00-19:59.
- To achieve and maintain panel membership at a minimum of 18 volunteers
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Newham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld. To raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate and to challenge where appropriate
- To ensure that all new recruits receive local and MPA training and that existing members of the panel undertake refresher training at least once during their three-year tenure.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.
- To attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Newham across all strands.
- To investigate new initiatives designed to target different types of people and increase the take up of the ICV role.