



**MPA**

**Metropolitan Police Authority**

# Richmond Upon Thames Independent Custody Visiting Panel

## Annual Report 2007



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# Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Richmond Upon Thames Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers a 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 scrutinise 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 Richmond Upon Thames, 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. The Richmond Upon Thames Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme and has adopted a new constitution to reflect this. This year's annual report covers the period January 2007 to December 2007. This new reporting arrangement brings Richmond Upon Thames in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

# 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. These are supplemented by a Constitution, which was formally adopted by the panel at the November 2007 AGM.

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 2006/2007:

- To make a total of 104 visits (assuming two custody suites) continuing to vary the time of visits.
- To continue to recruit new members to ensure full capacity of 20 to 24 (assuming two custody suites)
- To ensure new members undertake local and MPA training

Plans for the number of visits and for recruitment were both revised early in 2007 when it became clear that there would be only one full time custody suite (Richmond).

It was agreed that the panel would make weekly visits to Richmond and occasional visits to Teddington. In the twelve month period from January 2007 to December 2007, this target was met: the panel made a total of 63 visits, 51 of which were to Richmond Police Station.

In the majority of cases, there were no significant issues raised. However, there are some recurring concerns. One of these is the provision of washing facilities for detainees held for longer periods of time.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the week, however over 50% of them were made between 16:00 and 20:00 and only 6% between 04:00 and 08:00 and none between 20:00 and 04:00. The panel will therefore aim to make more late evening visits in 2008.

Panel membership has reduced to twelve, but this has been sufficient to carry out scheduled visits. Members have also helped out with visits in the neighbouring borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, which has been valuable extra experience. New recruits all attended both MPA and local training.

Those who applied to join the panel during the year have in a large part responded to advertisements run in both the Metro and the Evening Standard. Some have been referred by the borough or have responded to information on the MPA website.

# Chairperson's report

The past year has brought a number of changes to the Richmond upon Thames ICV Panel.

The administration of the panel passed officially from Richmond Borough Council to the Metropolitan Police Authority in March 2007. We now have a full-time administrator, employed by the MPA, who also looks after another 4 panels in the West London area. Changes inevitably bring problems to start with, but the new organisation is now bedding in and as Chairman, I welcome the new initiative of Cluster meetings, which are an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with Chairmen of other West London panels.

On the downside, the MPA's requirement for all Independent Custody Visitors to sign a Memorandum of Understanding led directly to the resignation of three of our Panel including our Chairman and Vice-Chairman. However, the remainder of the Panel have signed the MoU and in practice the new requirements do not appear to have had any negative impact on our ability to act with independence.

Last year's annual report mentioned plans for a new purpose-built, 30 cell custody suite in Teddington. In the end, planning application was refused after public protest at its proposed location. This means that Richmond's Edwardian custody suite, which is neither a suitable place for detainees nor a practical or pleasant place for the police to work in, will have to remain for the foreseeable future. Under new plans, Richmond will probably share a custom-built facility with Kingston on Thames. It will not be easy to find a suitable site, and we do not imagine that this will happen for a few more years.

The failure of these plans has had a knock-on effect on the Panel's work-load. Richmond is the only custody suite in use on a regular basis. Teddington is used for bail returns and for occasional overflow. As a result, compared with other West London boroughs, we are well-staffed. We are still creating a pipe-line of potential visitors, but need to be aware that, if we have too large a panel, individual visitors will not be able to do enough visits in a year to maintain experience and job satisfaction.

In December, the Twickenham custody suite was used for the first time for Operation Safeguard (prison overflow) and one visit was scheduled. There are clearly issues that the Police and the Home Office need to look at, including the welfare of prisoners (who are not allowed free association and are unable to have regular exercise). We will be scheduling regular visits to Twickenham in 2008 if it continues to be used for Operation Safeguard.

A new computer system, NSPIS, went live in Richmond in May 2007 and is being rolled out across other boroughs in London. After predictable teething problems, the system seems to be working effectively for the police. However, the system impacts on the ICV scheme. We have no direct access to the system and have to take up custody sergeants' time to look at detainees' records, and there are unresolved Data Protection issues that we hope to address in 2008.

Plans for 2008 include more refresher training for existing Panel members (to be arranged together with the MPA). We will continue to provide assistance to Hammersmith & Fulham, and possibly extend our offers of help to other London boroughs. We will aim to carry out more late evening visits to ensure a better spread of visits throughout the day and also increase the number of detainees that we speak to.

# 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 races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

The membership of the panel is broadly representative of the borough as a whole, which, according to London Development Agency figures, is one of the least ethnically diverse in London. We recognise however that there is considerable ethnic diversity among the detainees that we visit, and that our membership does not reflect this.

While the population of the borough as a whole is 48% male, the majority of panel members, including the chairman, are female.

We do operate an equal opportunities policy as far as recruitment is concerned and welcome applications from all sections of the community. We have been successful in the past year in recruiting younger members to the panel. We would hope to be successful in the future in recruiting from ethnic minorities as well as increasing the number of men.

In the previous annual report it was stated as an objective that the Panel should have a full complement of 20 to 22 members. This was based on an assumption that there would be two full-time custody suites in the borough. In fact there is only one, and it has been agreed with the MPA that a lower number (between 12 and 14) is adequate. At the start of the year the Panel had 15 members, including three newly appointed. During the year it had 4 resignations, one new recruit, and one member on long term sabbatical. The number of active visitors at the end of the year was eleven. This has been enough to handle the planned number of visits as well as to provide resources to the neighbouring ICV Panel of Hammersmith & Fulham.

The MPA requires visitors to make at least 12 visits a year and it would not be possible to achieve this target and maintain a larger panel. It is therefore our intention to maintain a pipeline of potential candidates, but to maintain our panel membership at roughly the current level.

# Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Richmond Police Station operates full time. Teddington is used primarily for bail to return and for occasional overflow. Twickenham had been decommissioned as a custody suite but has been in use for Operation Safeguard since December and is expected to be used on an occasional basis throughout 2008.

As well as weekly unannounced visits to Richmond, we schedule monthly visits to Teddington. Unfortunately, because Teddington is used on only an occasional basis, it is often the case that there are no detainees there when we visit. We have been working with the local police to develop a better understanding of when Teddington is used, so that we can target our visits more effectively.

The majority of our reports have not raised any significant issues that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. However, there have been some issues:

- Richmond is a Victorian building and the condition of the cells is not good. However, the new cleaning contract introduced in April 2007 appears to be effective and the cells are generally clean.
- Detainees who have been in custody for longer periods of time are not routinely offered a shower despite the fact that there is one available – in practice it is usually blocked with used blankets etc. and custody staff appear reluctant to use it.
- One visit was made to Twickenham while it was being used for Operation Safeguard. We raised concerns that prisoners are not allowed free association and cannot take exercise, and therefore have fewer rights than they do when in prison.
- During one visit, access to a juvenile detainee was denied. Although this incident resulted in a local resolution, the matter was of sufficient seriousness to be forwarded to the Scheme Manager to note.

On a positive note, the introduction of the smoking ban throughout the custody suites has had less of an impact than feared; nicotine lozenges are available for detainees if necessary.

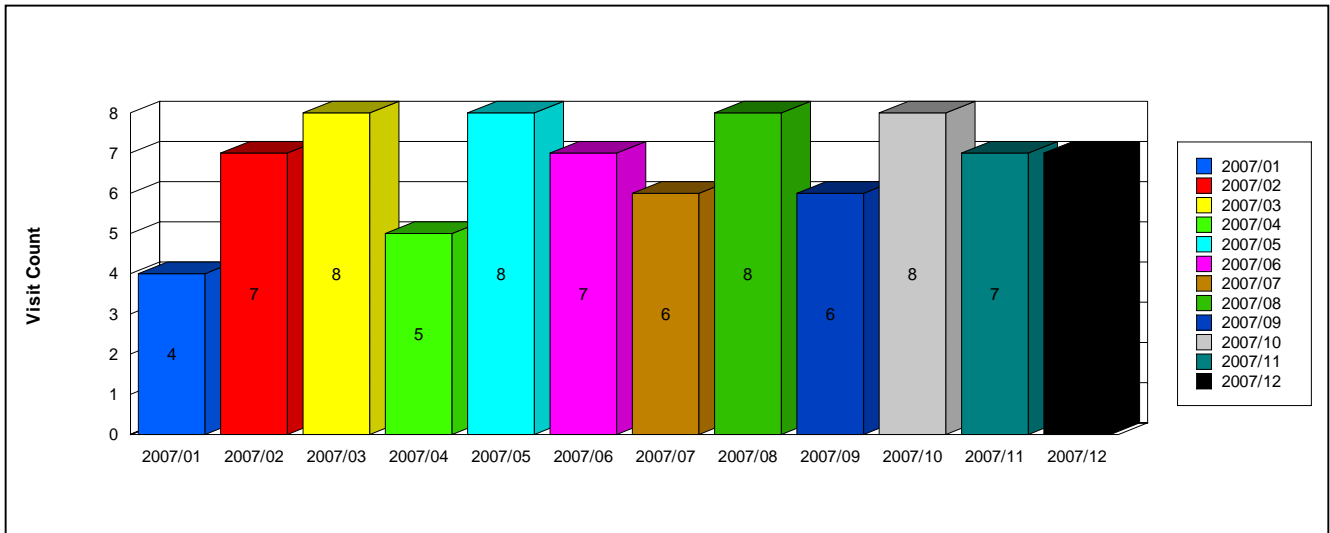


# Data from panel visits

## 1. Number of Visits:

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of annual target
Richmond	51	98
Teddington (overflow)	11	-
Twickenham (Safeguard)	1	-
Total	63	-

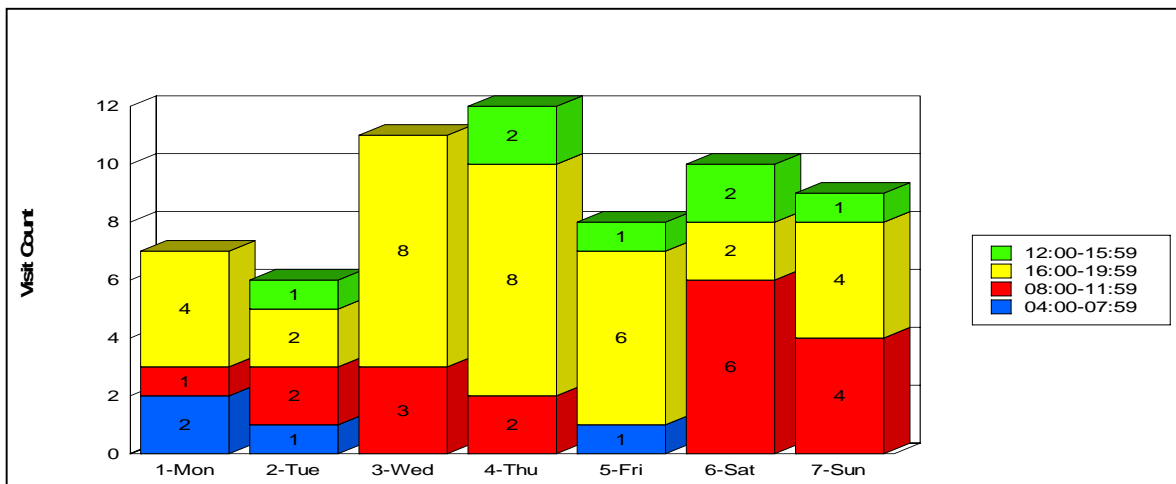
Visits undertaken in London borough of Richmond Upon Thames during 2007:



## 2. Time of Visits

	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	4	6
0800 – 1159 hrs	18	29
1200 – 1559 hrs	7	11
1600 – 1959 hrs	34	54
2000 – 2359 hrs	0	0
Total	63	-

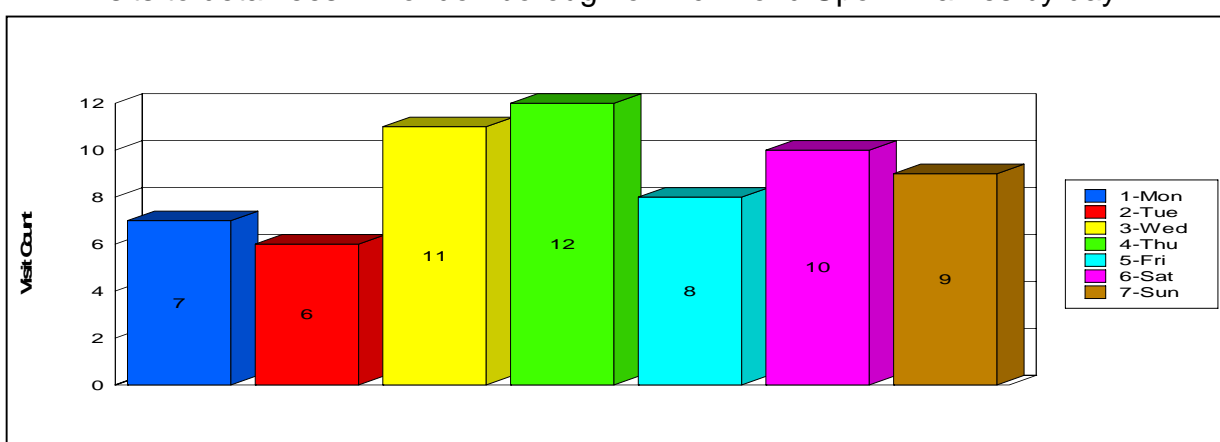
Visits to detainees in London borough of Richmond Upon Thames by time:



### 3. Days of Visits

	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	7	11
Tuesday	6	10
Wednesday	11	17
Thursday	12	19
Friday	8	13
Saturday	10	16
Sunday	9	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>-</b>

Visits to detainees in London borough of Richmond Upon Thames by day:



### 4. Details of Visits

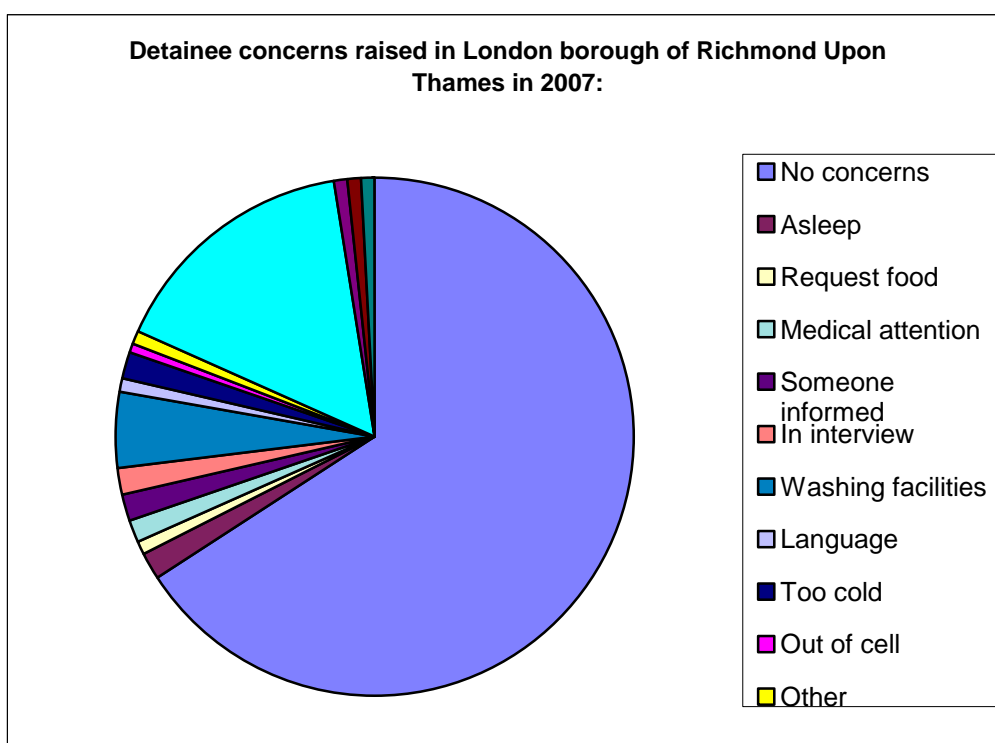
	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
<b>Total Number of people detained in custody</b>	3905	100
<b>Detainees seen</b>	86	2.2
<b>Detainees who refused to be seen</b>	44	1.1
<b>Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc</b>	11	0.3
<b>Detainees not seen due to language or communication difficulties</b>	2	0.03

\* % of those in custody at time of visit (DP = detained person)

## 5. Numbers of detainees by type:

		% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2007	3905	-
Immigration detainees included	43	1.1
Home Office prisoners included	24	0.6
Total immigration and Home Office prisoners included	67	1.7

## 6. Details of detainees concerns:



# Plans for forthcoming year 2008

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

- To make a total of 76 visits to the three custody suites in the borough, of which 52 to Richmond, with additional monthly visits to Teddington and to Twickenham while it is being used for Operation Safeguard.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread and in particular to ensure that a minimum of 10% of visits are carried out between 20:00 and 04:00.
- To continue to work with the local police to develop a better understanding of when Teddington and Twickenham are used, so that we can target our visits more effectively.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA as 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.
- To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, shared training and providing resources if appropriate.
- 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 age, gender and ethnic diversity of the Borough of Richmond.