



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Southwark Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Southwark Independent Custody Visitors 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 Southwark 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 new 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 pairs of visitors from the Southwark ICVP attend Southwark, Peckham and Walworth police stations at random unannounced times to make an inspection of the custody suites. On arrival at the police station, visitors are escorted to the custody area. They then speak privately in the cells with each detainee who wishes to see them 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 350 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 at: <http://www.mpa.gov.uk> 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.

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 Peckham, Southwark and Walworth Road police stations 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 custody visit per week to each station
- Holding monthly 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 community awareness of the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme in Southwark

Visits

There are currently three police stations in Southwark Borough that contain custody suites. These are Peckham, Southwark and Walworth. Southwark is used as a holding station for immigration detainees and for overflow situations including serious public disorder or special occasions.

During the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007 Southwark ICVP made a total of 37 visits and visited 273 detainees. Of the 37 visits carried out 12 were made to Southwark, 15 to Peckham and 10 to Walworth.

Low visiting figures are mitigated by the low number of active volunteers for a large part of the year. The panel suspended activities in July 2007 due to lack of active members. The panel would like to thank dedicated custody visitors who continued visiting during this period. Panel activities recommenced in September 2007 and the number of visits improved during the period September 2007 to December 2007.

Visits were reasonably well spread throughout the week. However, all visits have been carried out between 08.00 and 23.59 and none were carried out on a Monday. The panel will endeavour to vary the timing and day of visits more throughout 2008.

Meetings and Events

The panel meets each month to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. During 2007 the panel met 11 times.

The police are invited to the meetings and the panel discuss and resolve matters of concern with them. The panel appreciates the assistance and attendance of the police at these meetings.

Inspector Chris Verney attended meetings until September 2007. From September Inspector Ken Leverett attended panel meetings. Both officers kept the panel advised of developments at the custody suites and within borough.

The Chairs have represented the Southwark Panel at:

- Meetings of the Southwark Police Community 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 Southwark through the Community Safety and Support Unit provided administrative support to the panel. During this period John Page was the designated administrator. The panel would like to thank John for his support and wish him well for the future.

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

Membership and Recruitment

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.

2007 was a challenging year with the panel undergoing a great deal of change and a decline in membership. As a result of declined membership the MPA requested for neighbouring panels to support the Southwark panel with visits until additional members were recruited. An experienced member of the Lewisham panel volunteered to assist the Southwark panel.

At the start of 2007 the Southwark panel had 6 active members. The optimum number of volunteers for a panel that visits 3 custody suites is 24 with at least 2 reserves. Throughout 2007 5 members left the panel and 6 new members were recruited. The panel finished 2007 with 10 active members and 1 member on a sabbatical from custody visiting.

Recruitment

Throughout 2007 we actively promoted Southwark ICVP with the aim of recruiting new members. As part of our 2007 recruitment drive we sent posters and leaflets to all Southwark libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureau's, free legal advice centres and various doctor and dentist surgeries, numerous community groups and colleges across Southwark. The MPA also advertised regularly in the Metro and Evening Standard newspapers and the Southwark Council LGBT email bulletin. The panel is registered on the national volunteering website <http://www.do-it.org.uk> and with the Southwark Volunteer Centre, London Southbank University Volunteer Centre and King's College London Volunteer Centre. The panel coordinator publicised Southwark ICVP at numerous community events throughout 2007. These included King's College London Student Union volunteering fair, Metropolitan Police Volunteering event and a community event in memory of Keib Thomas.

Station Visit Issues

The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to each operational custody suite in Southwark. These are located in Southwark, Peckham and Walworth Road police stations.

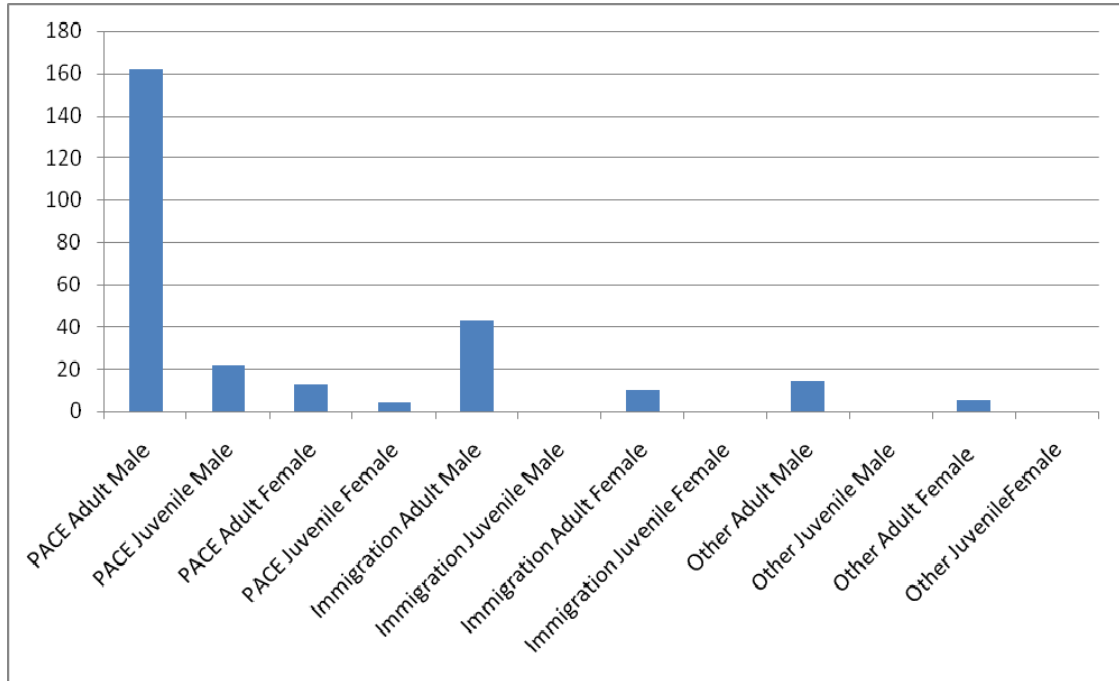
When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them. Visitors do not wake detainees if they are asleep, but they will usually visually check the detainee through the wicket in the door. Visitors check concerns raised by detainees against their custody record (where the detainees give permission for them to do so), and will bring the matter to the attention of the police if they remain concerned about any aspect of the detainee's treatment or welfare. Most minor concerns can be resolved during the course of the visit and only more significant concerns or more complicated issues will be discussed at panel meetings.

Most visit 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. There were recurring problems relating to storage and detainee access to washing facilities, many of these issues were actioned effectively by the officers on duty.

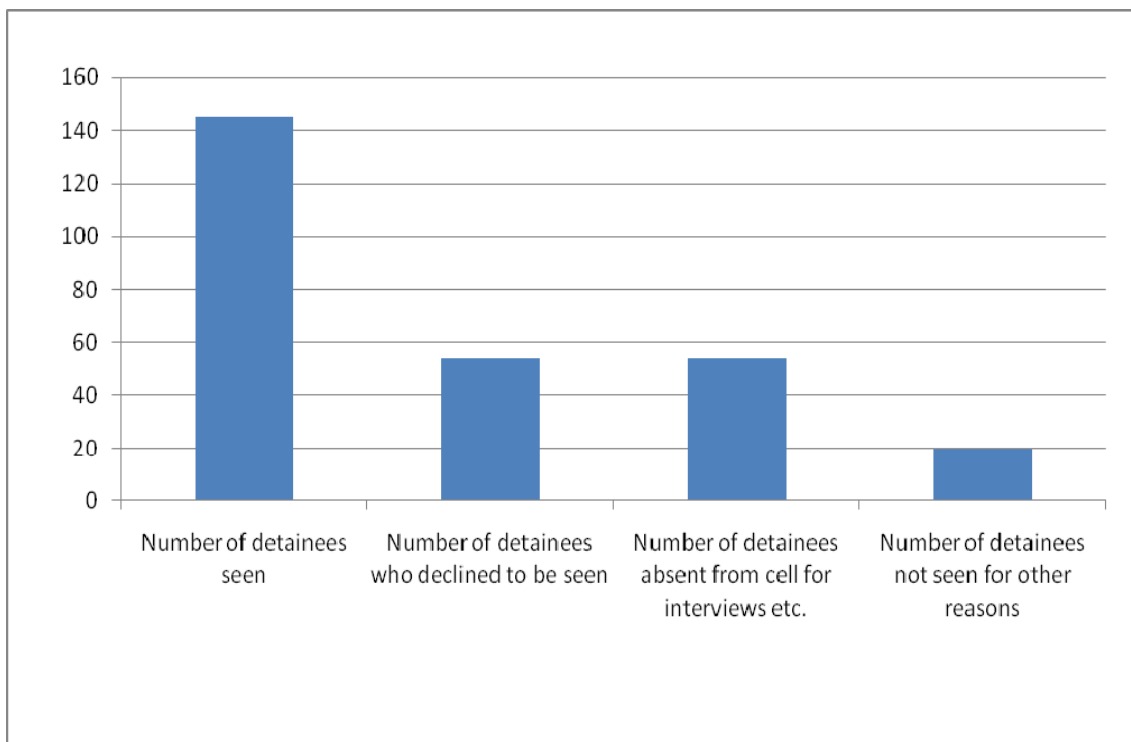
The panel has maintained its positive relationship with Southwark MPS and would like to thank the police representatives, Inspector Leverett and Inspector Verney, who attended the panel meetings. The panel is grateful for their support and prompt responses to any issues raised.

Statistical Analysis of 2007 Panel Reports

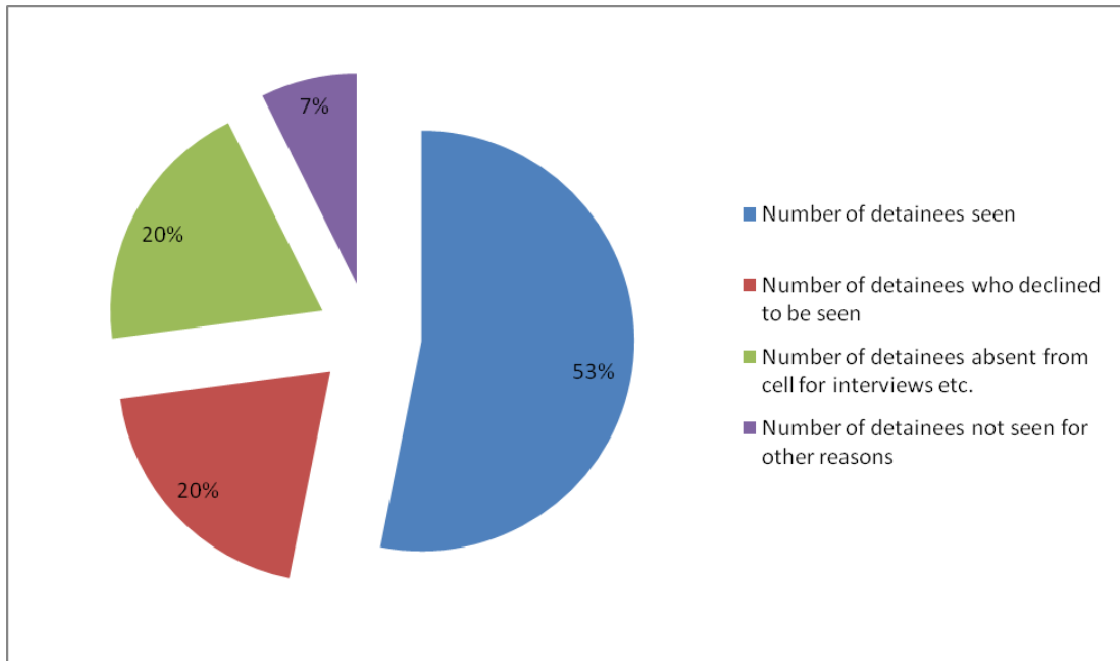
Breakdown of detainees in custody in Southwark Custody Suites during visits by gender, age and category



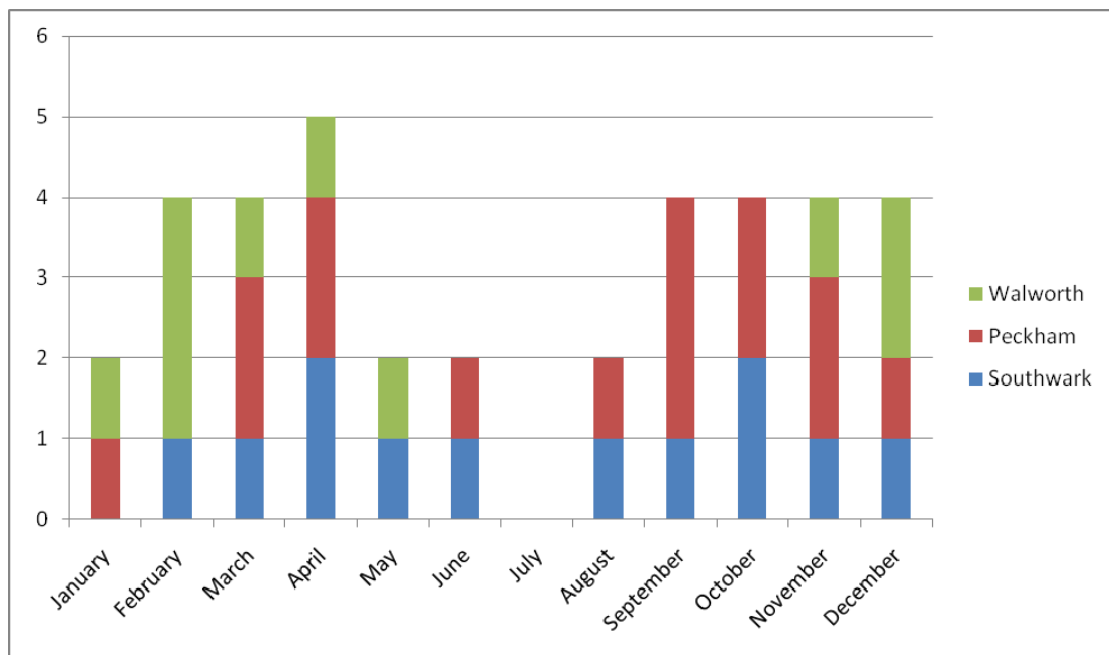
Number of detainees seen by ICVs



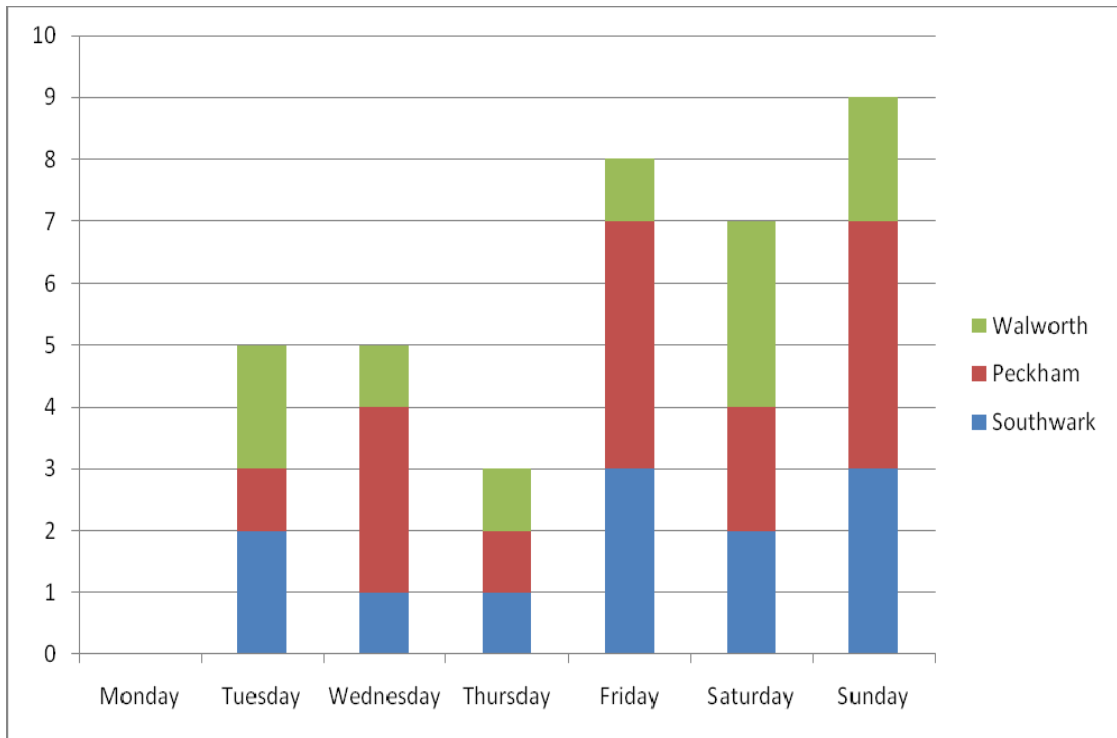
Percentage of detainees seen by ICVs



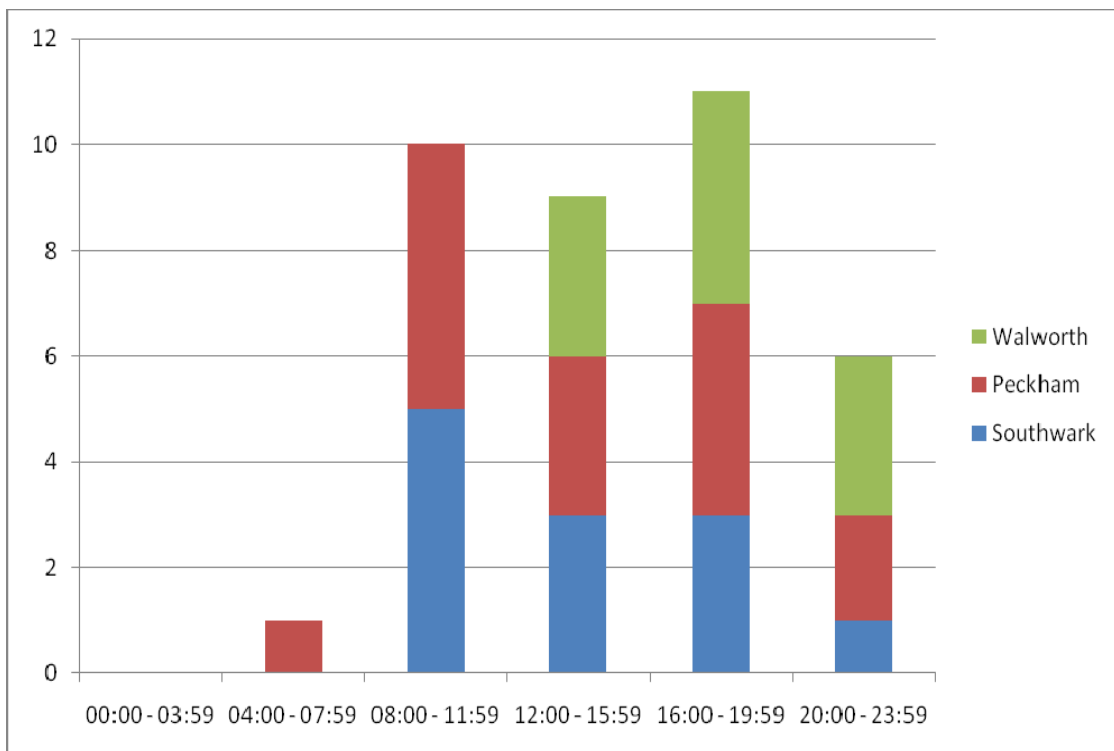
Visits by Month



Visits by Day



Visits by Time Period



Targets and Plans for 2008

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police and the MPA as appropriate.
2. To make one visit a week to each custody suite
3. To vary the days of the week and times of visits to get an accurate picture of the Custody Suite.
4. To endeavour to attend the majority of panel meetings.
5. To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; 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 Southwark.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.