



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

South Westminster Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2007



Contents page

1. Introduction
2. Aims & achievements
3. Chair's report
4. Membership, Recruitment and Training
5. Visits to police Stations
6. Data from panel visits to police stations
7. Targets and plans for Forthcoming Year

Introduction

Welcome to the Annual Report of the South Westminster Independent Custody Visiting Panel. The report covers a period from 1st January 2007 to 31st 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

Independent Custody Visitors

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from within the community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the rights, entitlements and conditions of detention of people held in police custody. Independent 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.

History of Independent Custody Visiting

The Independent Custody Visitors scheme, formally known as the Lay Visitors' scheme was introduced in the mid-1980s following a recommendation into Lord Scarman's report into the 1981 Brixton riots. Since then panels have evolved throughout the United Kingdom as an important means of securing accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, bringing police and communities closer together and enhancing public perception of police procedures and practices. It is now mandatory for each Police Authority in the country to have a Custody Visiting Scheme in place.

Visits to police stations

Visits are always made in pairs. A rota is drawn up to ensure that pairs of ICVs are allocated to visit the operational custody suites in their local borough. Visits can be made at any time of the day or night, and on any day of the week. All detainees are offered the opportunity to speak to the ICVs but may choose not to. ICVs do not take sides but look, listen and report on what they find in the custody unit. Before leaving the custody area ICVs compile a report on their findings that will draw attention to any matters that may need addressing. A copy is also provided to the Police. Minor issues can usually be dealt with before ICVs leave the station by speaking with Custody Staff.

Panel Meetings

The South Westminster panel has monthly meetings that are held at the MPA offices in Westminster. At the meeting ICVs discuss issues that have been raised on the visit report and a response is provided by the police representative of the station visited. Some issues may need persistence by the panel in monitoring and calling for action. The meeting also provides an opportunity for members to share their experiences on visits and be updated on criminal justice issues.

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 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. Prior to this panels have been administered at borough level.

One of the first things that the MPA did was to provide all ICVs with a London ICV Handbook; this document contains information about the new governance arrangements together with guidance on custody visiting and copies of relevant MPA policies.

The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Westminster, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration, providing a team of MPA staff to support the panels. There are 32 ICV Panels, one in each borough, except for Westminster which has two.

How To Apply

To be eligible to become an Independent Custody Visitor in the Westminster Borough you must:

- Either live, work or study in Westminster
- Be aged over 18
- Have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system, for example, serving police officers or special constables.
- For vetting purposes you must have resided in the UK for the last 3 years.

Your appointment as an independent custody visitor is subject to successful security vetting clearance by the MPS Vetting Department.

For more information about the London ICV scheme please contact:

ICV Coordinator
Metropolitan Police Authority
FREEPOST
LON17808
LONDON
SW1H 0DY

Freephone: 0808 100 1036 Minicom: 020 7202 0173

Email: icvrecruitment@mpa.gov.uk

Aims and achievements

Aims and Achievements

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

The primary objective of the panel is to check and report on the treatment of detainees in custody and to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed. This is achieved by:

- Making one visit per week
- Holding monthly panel meetings and
- Increasing public awareness of the London ICV Visiting Scheme.

Visiting targets

As a result of declined membership in 2007 the panel was unable to achieve its visiting target of one visit per week, but have carried out as many visits as possible. Rolling statistics of visit days and times were maintained in 2007, which has enabled members to spread visits evenly throughout the week. The panel achieved its aim of undertaking one visit between 00:00 and 03:59.

Presentations/events attended

Pami Preller, Chair of the panel and panel member Steven Mitchell attended the 'Deaths in Custody Conference' in April 2007. Pami Preller also represented the South Westminster panel at the meetings of the London ICV Chairs with the MPA.

Recruitment/Publicity

Panel members and MPA staff undertook various recruitment initiatives; Leaflets and posters were placed at the reception area of the police stations, libraries, doctor's surgeries and community centres. Staff from the MPA ICV team attended A recruitment fair at Kings College London which generated a lot of interest in the scheme

Increase in the diversity of the panel

The panel was able to increase the diversity of the panel with the recruitment of two additional members.

Chair's report

2007 was a challenging year with the panel undergoing a great deal of change and a decline in membership.

Management of the Scheme

On 2nd April 2007 the MPA implemented a centralised management of the scheme, replacing the Westminster council administrators, Julie Etheridge & Roz Breckell, with an MPA employed Coordinator, Jennifer Ankrah.

Membership & Recruitment

Several members left the panel towards the end of the year for a number of reasons including concerns over the new administration arrangements as well as changes in their personal circumstances. At the latter part of 2007, the panel rota was amended to ensure that the visitors left on the panel did not feel overburdened with carrying out too many visits. This led to a reduction in the number of visits that took place. The MPA requested support from other ICVs across London to assist the panel with visits in the short term.

In October 2007, I took on the role as Acting Chair.

Comments on the data

As a result of the changes to the panel this year we were unable to achieve the optimum number of visits to the stations we hoped for, but have carried out as many visits as possible

Belgravia Terrorist Suite

Belgravia custody was upgraded to a level one terrorist suite. CTC (counter terrorism checks) clearance was obtained for four members of the panel to enable visits to suspect terrorist detainees. When a High Security Suite comes into use the Senior Management Team of the MET inform the panel Chair, this is in the interest of public reassurance. Visits are carried out by the Chair accompanied by the Vice Chair or a very experienced panel member.

BTPA (British Transport Police Authority) Contract

The MPA entered into a formal agreement with BTPA to formalise visits to their stations once a month. The panel requested to continue with existing arrangements to visit Ebury Bridge on a weekly basis.

No Smoking Policy

On 1st July 2007, the law on no smoking came into place. Custody suites including the exercise yards and cages were also covered under the legislation and became no smoking zones. Before the legislation smoking was not allowed in most custody suites, but there were a few exceptions where detainees were taken outside to smoke. Concerns were raised by ICVs on the impact this would have on detainees. The police reported that there were fewer problems than envisaged. Nicotine lozenges can be offered to detainees if the FME (Forensic Medical Examiner) deems it appropriate.

Acknowledgements

Despite the shortfall in membership towards the end of the year, the panel continued to carry out excellent work. On behalf of the panel I would like to thank the following people:

- Pami Preller, the former Chair, for her hard work, dedication and contribution to Independent Custody Visiting and her local community.
- All members of the South Westminster panel, past and present, for their hard work, diligence and commitment.
- Julie Etheridge & Roz Breckell for their efficient & professional service.
- Thanks also to the police representatives at the three stations we visit; Charing Cross, Belgravia & Ebury Bridge for their help, support and assistance even with their busy schedules.

Edward Wilson,

Vice Chair, Westminster South Independent Custody Visitors Panel, 2007

Membership, Recruitment & Training

The MPA is responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing all custody visitors and tries to ensure a balance of age, gender and ethnicity.

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.

Training

Successful applicants to the scheme are given training in all aspects of a custody visitor's role and responsibilities. During the year, new panel members attended the initial training sessions organised by the MPA. Refresher training was also organised for experienced panel members and attended by Edward Wilson.

Diversity of the Panel

The City of Westminster is home to an enormously diverse population, although a significant number of its residents are from minority communities, they are widely varied in origins, with comparatively few cohesive community groups. The membership of the South Westminster panel is diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, though is not precisely representative of the borough. Application packs sent to potential new ICVs contain a diversity monitoring form but, as in all public bodies, disclosure of such information is voluntary.

Panel Members 2007

Pami Preller	appointed 2003
Edward Wilson (Chair)	re-appointed 2004
Steven Mitchell	appointed 2005
Stephen Parkinson	appointed 2006
Karen Townsend	appointed 2006
Robert Pettigrew	appointed 2004
Rosemary Gibson	appointed 2005
Christine Castledine	appointed 2007
Andrew Adegbile	appointed 2007
Caroline Shorey	appointed 2007

Resignations 2007

Pami Preller
Stephen Parkinson
Caroline Shorey
Karen Townsend
Robert Pettigrew
Rosemary Gibson

The Chair of the panel for the period 1st January 2007 to October 2007 was Pami Preller. The Vice Chair of the panel for the period 1st January 2007 to October 2007 was Edward Wilson. Edward Wilson took on the role of acting Chair from October 2007

Visits to police stations

The Panel visits three custody suites in the South Westminster area; Charing Cross and Belgravia for the Metropolitan Police Service, and Ebury Bridge, for the British Transport Police. The visits to Belgravia and Ebury Bridge usually follow each other because of their close proximity. Ebury Bridge has been visited historically (as a courtesy), but this arrangement was formalised in June 2007.

Conditions at the Stations/Suites

Conditions in all the suites are good. The panel has found the introduction of Designated Detention Officer's at Belgravia and Charing Cross has made visits more efficient and have noticed an improvement in communications with the detainees.

Charing Cross

This is an extremely busy and efficiently run station with a total of 45 cells. A refurbishment programme carried out a few years ago has significantly improved and modernised the custody suite, along with the interview rooms, shower and storage areas. The station is used as one of the charge suites during the Notting Hill Carnival weekend in August.

Belgravia

Belgravia station is also a very busy and efficiently run station with 14 cells. There were no major problems noted by ICVs.

Ebury Bridge (British Transport Police)

This station has four cells. Again, panel members found the station well run. The panel notes that Ebury Bridge is in need of major refurbishment to bring it to the standard of the other two stations. The panel will be making representations to the BTP about this matter. Ebury Bridge staff members are to be commended for keeping the station as clean and as tidy as they do under the circumstances.

Detainee treatment and entitlements

No significant matters have arisen and conditions in all the stations remain good. Panel members have noted that in all stations, despite constant busy times, staff are professional, courteous and extremely helpful to panel members.

The main issues raised by ICVs following their visits were the collection of immigration detainees held over 24 hours, the response times of solicitors, interpreters and in several cases the mental health team.

Data from panel visits to police stations

Figures have been validated where possible but are subject to anomalies in report forms.

1. Number of Visits

Station	No. of visits conducted	% annual target
Charing Cross	34	65.4
Belgravia	31	59.6
Ebury Bridge	31	59.6
Total	94	Average: 60%

2. Visit times

Time slots	Belgravia	Charing Cross	Ebury Bridge
0000 – 0359 hrs		1	
0400 – 0759 hrs			
0800 – 1159 hrs	5	2	4
1200 – 1559 hrs	4	6	9
1600 – 1959 hrs	18	24	12
2000 – 2359 hrs	4	1	6
Total	31	34	31

3. Visits Days

	Belgravia	Charing Cross	Ebury Bridge
Monday	4	2	3
Tuesday	6	4	8
Wednesday	7	5	5
Thursday	8	8	6
Friday	3	4	5
Saturday	2	6	2
Sunday	1	5	2

4. Visit duration

	Belgravia	Charing Cross	Ebury Bridge
Less than 30 mins	11	13	27
30 – 60 mins	22	21	4
60 – 90 mins			
90-120 mins			
More than 120 mins			

5. Visits and categories of detainees

	Belgravia	Charing Cross	Ebury Bridge	Total
Total No. of detainees at time of visits	149	203	78	399
Detainees seen	97	105	40	217
PACE detainees in custody	127	161	59	
Immigration detainees in custody	26	15	3	
Other	6	5	1	

Targets & Plans for Forthcoming Year 2008

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

- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate.
- To increase the membership of the panel to a minimum of 12 members.
- To undertake weekly visits to each of the 24/7 custody suites
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors in Westminster
- To invite various speakers from the Criminal Justice system to attend future meeting