



**MPA**

**Metropolitan Police Authority**

# Wandsworth Independent Custody Visiting panel

## Annual Report 2007



# Contents page

1. Introduction
2. Aims & achievements
3. Chairperson's report
4. Recruitment and membership
5. Significant issues arising from visits (including special visits)
6. Panel data
8. Targets and plans for Forthcoming Year

# Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Wandsworth 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 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, 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 Wandsworth Independent Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme. This year's annual report covers the period January 2007 to December 2007; this new reporting arrangement brings Wandsworth 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.

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 good visit performance in excess of 90% with a possible return to twice weekly visits

It is the practice of the panel to make weekly visits to both Wandsworth and Battersea police stations where there are 24/7 custody suites in operation. In the twelve-month period from January 2007 to December 2007, the panel made a total of 81 visits split almost equally between the two stations. This represents an achievement of 78% of visits. The shortfall is partly explained by dips in visiting performance in January and in April; in the latter month the panel lost two experienced visitors. Later in the year there were some failure to achieve a full schedule of visits during the summer holiday period.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects and there are no significant themes appearing. However ICVs remain concerned at the absence of proper washing facilities at Battersea police station. This situation is exacerbated by its use for the majority of immigration detainees, many of whom are detained there for several days at a time.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the majority of the week, however there are significantly fewer conducted on Fridays and at the weekend. About 50% of visits were made between 16:00 and 20:00 and only 4% between 04:00 and 08:00; 12% were conducted between noon and 1600, and 11% were conducted between 20:00 and 04:00. The panel will therefore aim to make more afternoon and late evening visits in 2008.

Panel membership is now at 16, which is the same as at the time of the last annual report. This is sufficient to carry out the schedule of visits. Members have also helped out with visits in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, where there has been some recent difficulty in managing the visiting schedule.

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.

# Chairman's report

The past year has brought a number of changes to the Wandsworth ICV Panel.

The administration of the panel passed officially from Wandsworth Borough Council to the Metropolitan Police Authority in April 2007. There is now a full-time coordinator, 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 have now bedded in. Removal from borough administration has meant moving to a new meeting venue on St John's hill; the new location took some getting used to but is now working well for the panel. Panel members were sad to lose the services of the administrator, Bill McCluskey, and wish him well in his future role.

Two members of the panel retired at the time of the changeover and another retired during the year; however recruitment has kept numbers up to the same level as last year. Thankfully, there seems to be no shortage of volunteers wanting to become Independent Custody Visitors in Wandsworth borough.

Relations with the police have improved since the writing of the previous annual report. Since April there has been a police presence at all panel meetings including a Dedicated Detention Officer (DDO) allowing the panel an opportunity to interact with a person intimately involved with the custody process. Custody arrangements have passed under the control of two Inspectors during the year both of whom have attended the panel meetings. More recently the police have produced a response to panel queries in advance of meetings allowing for more efficient working.

A new computer system, NSPIS, went live in Wandsworth in July 2007. After predictable teething problems, the system seems to be working effectively for the police. However, the system impacts on the ICV scheme. ICVs have no direct access to the system and have to take up custody sergeants' or gaoler's time to look at detainees' records.

It is hoped that the improved working relationships with the police and the more efficient panel working will be maintained during 2008. This should provide more opportunity to include other things on the agenda such as refresher training.

Caroline Roberts  
Chairman

# 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.

The new recruitment guidance has been used in the most recent recruitment panel. There is no diversity information as yet held about existing panel members besides declared ages and gender. Only four of the panel are male, with seven of the panel in their fifties and four older. Only two of the panel are less than forty years old. It is recognised that more male members are required and that attempts should be made to involve more young people.

Having discussed the foregoing it is worth mentioning that two of the recent recruits are in their early twenties.

# Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Wandsworth and Battersea police stations operate full time. Tooting is used for Operation Safeguard and this is expected to continue throughout 2008.

The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Wandsworth and Battersea police stations, but has only visited Tooting when it has been in use because Wandsworth or Battersea have been closed for repair.

The majority of reports have not raised anything significant that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. Most issues have been resolved with the police locally. However, there have been some issues worth mention in this report:

- Battersea is a Victorian building and the condition of the cells is not as good as at Wandsworth, which has an extended custody area.
- 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 at Wandsworth police station. At Battersea there is no shower within the custody area and the basin available for washing is very restricted.
- The new cleaning contract introduced in April 2007 appears to be effective and the cells are generally clean.

On a positive note, the introduction of the smoking ban throughout the custody suites has had less of an impact than feared.

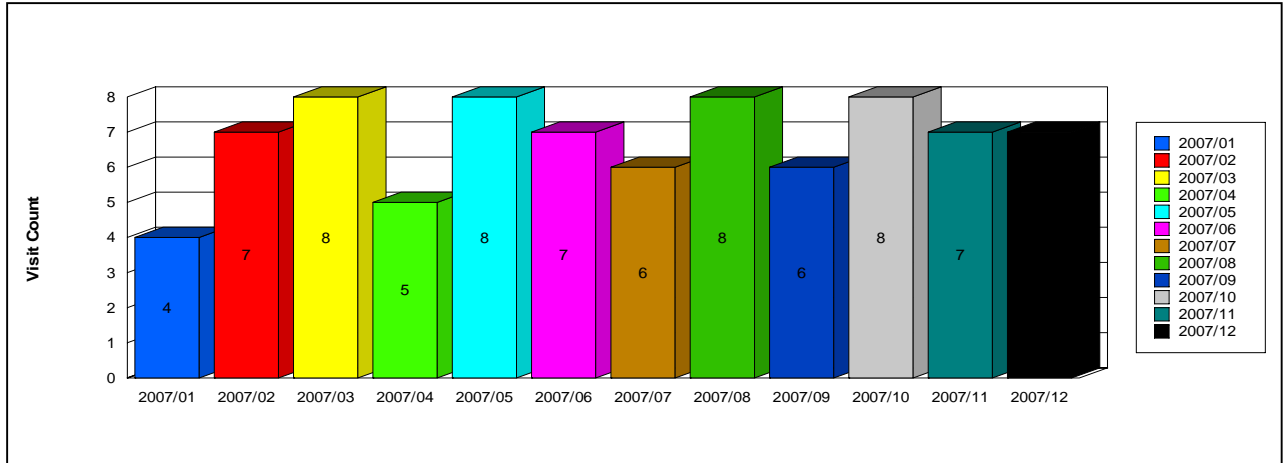
# Data from panel visits

## 1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Wandsworth	38	73
Battersea	39	75
Tooting (Safeguard)	4**	-
Total	81	78

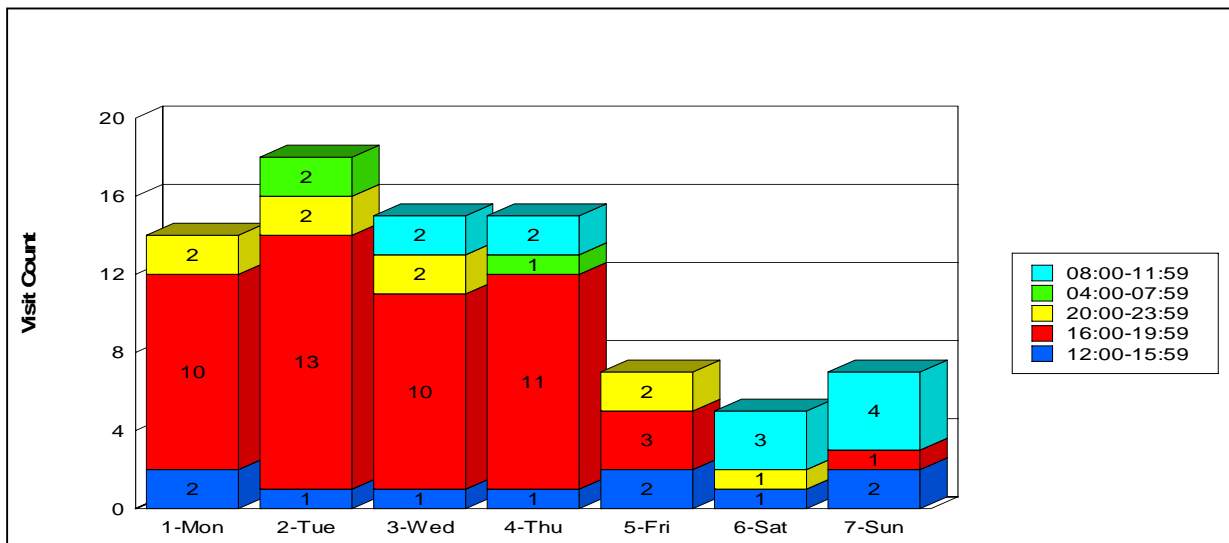
\*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.

\*\* Visits conducted while Wandsworth or Battersea police stations were closed for repair



## 2. Time of Visits

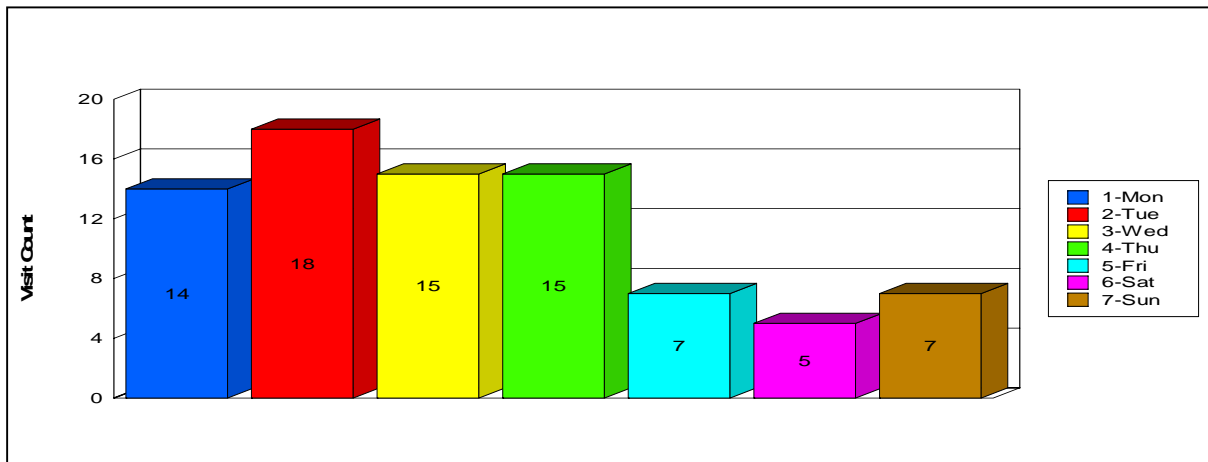
Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	3	4
0800 – 1159 hrs	11	14
1200 – 1559 hrs	10	12
1600 – 1959 hrs	48	59
2000 – 2359 hrs	9	11
Total	81	-





### 3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	14	17
Tuesday	18	21
Wednesday	15	19
Thursday	15	19
Friday	7	9
Saturday	5	6
Sunday	7	9
Total	81	-



### 4. Details of Visits

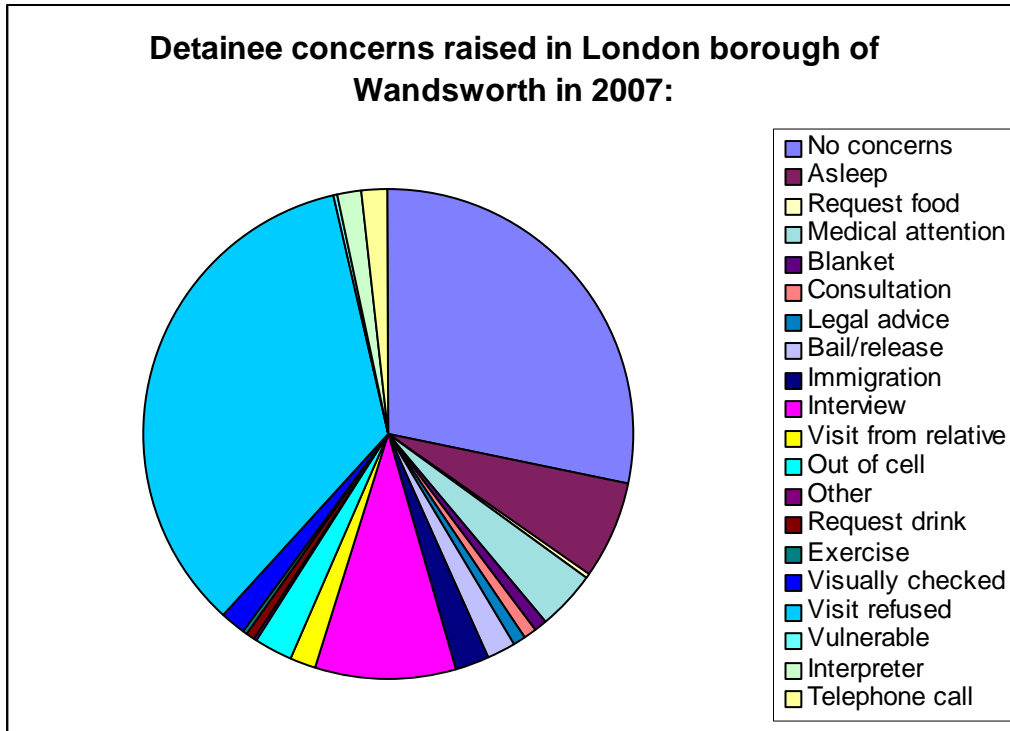
Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	134	39.6
Detainees who refused to be seen	114	33.7
Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc	61	18
Detainees not seen due to other reasons	1	0.1
Other	29	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>100</b>

\*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit

### 5. Numbers of detainees by type:

Category of Detainee	Annual no.	% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2007	8052	-
Immigration Detainees included	140	1.7
Home Office Prisoners included	28	0.3
Total immigration and home office prisoners included	168	2.1

6. Details of detainee concerns:



# Plans for the forthcoming year 2008

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

- To make a total of 52 visits to each of the two custody suites in the borough.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread. In particular to ensure that there are more visits in the early morning (04:00 to 07:59) at the weekend and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and more early evening (16:00 to 19:59) visits on a Saturday.
- 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.
- 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.

Through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to try to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Wandsworth.