



**MPA**

**Metropolitan Police Authority**

# Bromley Independent Custody Visiting panel

## Annual Report 2008



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# Introduction

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

This report covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008. The purpose of this report is to give a general overview of the panel's work and:

- Provide the local community and the MPA with information about the visits made, including the treatment of those held in custody
- Evaluate the panel's performance over the period
- Present any issues and concerns that have arisen
- Set out the objectives for 2009

Independent Custody Visitors are volunteers from the local community who visit police stations to check on the treatment and conditions of people held in police custody. The MPA is responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing all custody visitors and tries to ensure that the panel is as diverse as the community it represents. 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 MPA has a legal obligation under the Police Reform Act 2002 to ensure that a custody visiting scheme operates in its area. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Bromley, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration and a member of MPA staff is responsible for supporting the panel.

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 borough has one 24/7 operational custody suite (Bromley Police Station), which the panel visits once a week. Until the end of September 2008 Orpington Police Station was being used as an overflow for the Prison Service under an arrangement known as Operation Safeguard. During this time the panel visited Orpington Police Station twice a month.

# Aims and achievements

## Achievements in 2008

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 panel's previous report the panel specified their aims for the coming year as being:

- to visit Bromley Police Station once a week
- to visit Orpington Police Station bi-monthly during its use under Operation Safeguard
- to record and compare the diversity of the panel's membership with the local community it represents
- to maintain the panel membership at a minimum of 9 volunteers.

As the statistics in this report show, the panel's visiting record is excellent. 51 visits were made to Bromley police station during 2008 during which panel members spoke to 275 detainees about their treatment and the conditions in which they were being held. In addition the panel made 17 visits to Orpington police station during the 8 months that the station was being used under Operation Safeguard. Only 9 detainees were spoken to there because it was often empty when panel members visited.

Diversity monitoring of the panel's membership has been done and is outlined in section 4 of this report. The panel recruited 3 new members during 2008, taking the panel membership to 10 people.

The Chair and Vice-Chair have continued to represent the panel at meetings of the Bromley Community and Police Consultative Committee (CPCC) and also at the London ICV Chairs meetings.

# Chair's report

Once again, the year covered by this report has been a busy one for the Bromley Independent Custody Visitors Panel. Our weekly visits have been carried out to Bromley police station and, additionally, for part of this period to Orpington police station. We were, however, pleased when Orpington police station was withdrawn from use under Operation Safeguard as it was felt by the Panel that the facilities there were far from satisfactory for housing remand and convicted prisoners, even on an overnight basis, and totally unacceptable for weekend use. Additionally, with the recruitment of new members to our neighbouring panel of Bexley, the Chair and Vice Chair were able to withdraw from visits there.

No major issues have arisen from our visits to the custody suite in Bromley. Any problems have been dealt with promptly during our visits by the Custody Sergeant and his/her staff then followed up and reported back on to the Panel by the Custody Inspector Linda Fitzsimons. The custody suite continues to be run to a very high standard – of particular note is the exceptional standard of cleanliness – and all detainees are treated fairly and receive their rights in accordance with the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. I should also like to place on record the thanks of the Panel for the continuing helpful, courteous and professional attitude of all custody staff during our visits, even when the custody suite is exceptionally busy. It makes the job of the Custody Visitors much easier.

The job of the Bromley Independent Custody Visitors Panel has been greatly assisted by the stability of its membership - although one member resigned this year due to pressure of work. We were able to recruit 3 new members who are proving a valuable asset to the Panel. I congratulate and thank all Panel members for the diligence and enthusiasm with which they carry out their visits and attend Panel meetings. The percentage of missed visits is very low and is a statistic to be proud of.

During the year the Panel have attended Initial and Refresher training and additionally, the Chair and Vice Chair have received training in Chairing a Meeting as well as in Equality and Diversity. Several members attended the London ICV Conference which proved to be informative and enjoyable. The Chair and Vice Chair have also represented the Panel at Cluster Meetings and Chairs' Meetings. All these activities have been organised by Kerry McClelland and her team at the MPA and have been a great success. As a Panel we have also taken part in the Self-Introduction Pilot Scheme which is shortly to be evaluated. Last but not least, we now have membership of the Bromley Community Engagement Forum and plan to take an active part in their meetings.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks and appreciation of Kerry McClelland and her team at the MPA and, in particular, my thanks to Laura del Nevo, our new Co-ordinator. All have made the job of the Chair easy and a pleasure to carry out. I look forward to our continuing good relations with the MPA and to the Panel gaining in experience as we continue to fulfil our role as Independent Custody Visitors.

Margaret Gubbins  
Bromley ICVP Chair

# 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.

At the start of 2008 the panel had the following members:

Margaret Gubbins (Chair)  
Brenda Rayson (Vice-chair)  
James Lewis  
Margaret Walker  
Gillian Johnson  
Swarn Riat  
Tim Griffin

During 2008 the following members joined the panel:

Lorna Prentice  
Russell Bancroft  
Gill Robotham

The MPA conducted an optional diversity monitoring exercise during 2008 which has enabled the panel to consider how well it reflects the community it represents. According to data from the London Development Agency just over 11% of the borough of Bromley is of a non-white background. The panel accurately reflects this mix.

To be eligible to become an Independent Custody Visitor, volunteers must be between the ages of 18 and 85. According to London Development Agency statistics approximately 9% of the borough is aged between 18 and 25. None of the panel's 10 members are from this age group. Around 31% of the population of Bromley is aged between 26 and 45 and the panel accurately reflects this with 3 of their members falling in this category. 24% of the borough is aged between 46 and 65 and 1 panel member falls in this category. Finally, 15% of the borough is aged over 65 but 60% of the panel is in this age category.

The panel comprises of 6 women and 4 men. In the borough nearly 52% of the population are women.

The panel currently has sufficient members to be able to carry out the scheduled visits. Efforts will be made during the year to raise awareness of the scheme amongst the 18-25 age range and target recruitment at this group, if a need to recruit arises in 2009.

# Station Visit Issues

The borough has one 24/7 operational custody suite (Bromley Police Station). In line with the scheme in the rest of London, this station is visited once a week. Until the end of September 2008 Orpington Police Station was being used as an overflow for the Prison Service under an arrangement known as Operation Safeguard. Also in line with the scheme in the rest of London, this station was visited twice a month while open.

Bromley station is a large modern police station with 26 cells and during 2008 8695 detainees passed through the station. Around 140 of those were immigration detainees. The panel has an excellent working relationship with the police representative, Inspector Linda Fitzsimons, and the panel is grateful for her diligent attendance to meetings and prompt responses to the issues they raise. Throughout the year the panel has noted the courteous and helpful attitude of custody staff at Bromley Police Station.

The panel is pleased to report that there have been no major issues or concerns relating to police custody at Bromley Police Station. However, as stated in the Chair's report, the panel did find the facilities and cleanliness at the Operation Safeguard facility in Orpington to be inadequate and unacceptable.

The panel has raised concerns about the access that detainees have to showers and wash facilities. Some detainees do not seem to be aware that they need to ask for a shower if they want one, and when they do ask are sometimes told that there are not the staff available to facilitate it. The panel would like to see all detainees held overnight and taken to court in the morning being offered a shower before they go.

On a very few occasions during the year detainees have raised allegations of assault or maltreatment on arrest. In such cases the custody visitors have always ensured that the detainee is aware of and understands the procedure to make a complaint. In addition they have checked the details of the allegation with the detainee's custody record (when the detainee gives permission for them to do so) and raised the issue with an Inspector if they have any concerns.

Overall the panel finds the conditions and treatment of detainees in Bromley to be very good and the standard of cleanliness to be very high and hopes to see this standard maintained in 2009.

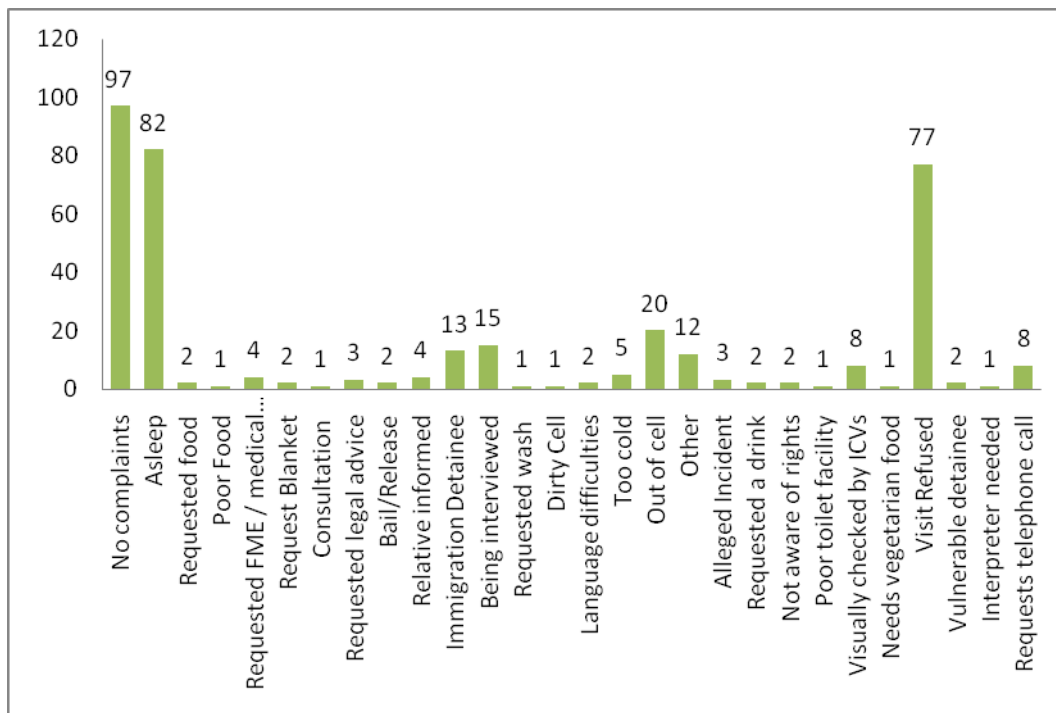
# Data from station visits

## Visit Concerns

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 check through the wicket in the door that all looks well in the cell. 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 major concerns or more complicated issues will be discussed at a meeting of the whole panel.

The chart below shows a summary of all concerns raised by detainees during visits made to Bromley station in 2008.

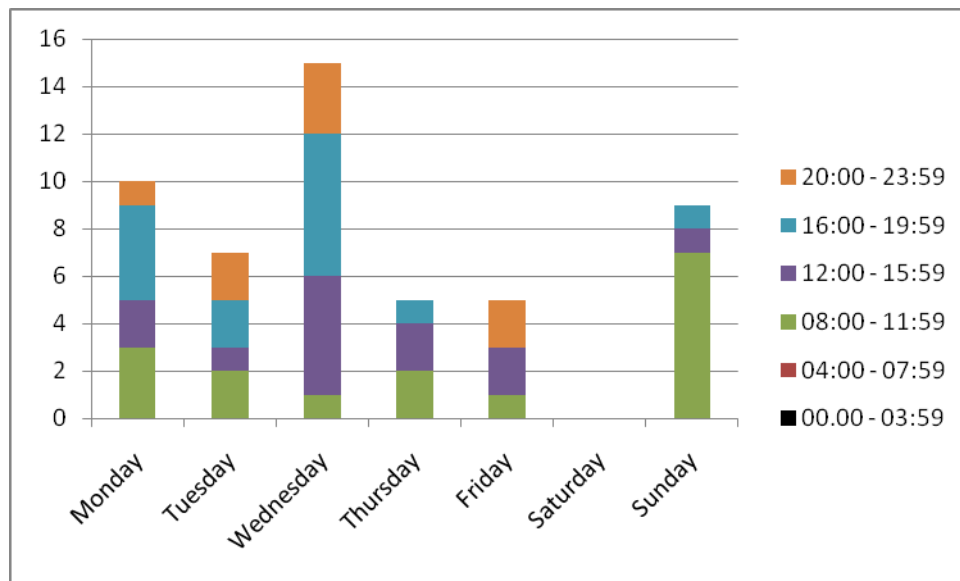




## Visits by Day and Time

Independent Custody Visits are unannounced and the panel's intention is to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern.

The chart below displays the number of visits carried out at Bromley in 2008, by time period and day of the week. As the chart shows, no visits were carried out on a Saturday and no visits took place between midnight and 8.00a.m., though visits were otherwise fairly evenly spread.



# Objectives for the coming year

During 2009 the panel, with the support of their MPA coordinator, will strive to achieve the aims set out below:

- During 2008 the panel completed over 98% of their scheduled weekly visits to Bromley police station. They will aim to maintain this excellent record.
- The panel will aim to ensure that their visits are more evenly spread across every day of the week and undertake a few visits at anti-social times. This will require the coordinator and panel to monitor statistics of visits they have done at several points during the year and the panel to vary the times and days they visits if gaps are identified.
- The Bromley panel will undertake more community engagement work to raise the profile of the scheme locally.
- In order to address the issues raised in the Recruitment and Membership section of this report any recruitment to the panel in Bromley will be targeted at the population of the borough aged between 18 and 25.
- The panel will work with the MPA coordinator to ensure that all members can access refresher training, either in panel meetings or centrally at the MPA offices.