



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Croydon Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2008



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Introduction

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

This report covers the period from 1st January 2008 to 31st December 2008. The purpose of the 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 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 Croydon, 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.

Achievements

The primary aim of the panel is to make unannounced visits to police stations in the borough in order to check and report on the treatment of detainees in police cells. The panel aims to ensure that the rights and entitlements of the detainees are being observed.

The panel's target is to visit the two 24/7 operational custody suites in the borough (Croydon and South Norwood) once a week. In 2008 the panel visited Croydon station 44 times and South Norwood 40 times, meaning that overall they completed 81% of their scheduled visits. This is a very good record but one that the panel hopes to improve during 2009.

During those visits the panel spoke to or checked on 222 detainees at Croydon station and 146 in South Norwood. The issues and concerns that the panel has a result of their visits are dealt with under the Station Visit Issues section of this report.

Panel members aim to vary the times and days of the week they visit to ensure that their visits are not predictable and to give them a good overview of the treatment of detainees in custody. The data section of this report shows that the spread of visits to both stations is excellent. A few late night visits to both stations during 2009 would improve the spread even further, though members do feel that in general they can obtain a better picture by visiting when detainees are likely to be awake and able to talk to them.

During 2008 a number of new custody visitors were recruited to the panel. In addition to the training they received from the MPA the chair, vice-chair and other experienced members of the panel have carried out a mentoring role during their first 6 months of visiting. They are a valuable addition to the team and have helped to ensure that the panel is more representative of the local community.

Some members of the panel attended refresher training sessions during 2008. The panel recognises the importance of keeping their knowledge up to date and plans to hold refresher training modules during panel meetings during 2009.

The panel has regular representation on the local Community Police Engagement Group (CPEG). In recognition of the importance of this meeting as a vehicle to raise awareness of the panel's work in the local community, this report will be presented to the July meeting of the CPEG (?).

Chair's report

During the course of the year we have finally acquired our new and hopefully permanent coordinator in the form of Laura del Nevo. Laura replaced Adela Wegrzynski who worked for us after the departure of Cindy McRae.

Since taking over Laura has quickly got to grips with the dynamics of the group and has been invaluable in getting the groups recruitment and training up to speed.

Writing the chairman's report inevitably involves thanking the many people who have worked and helped the Panel in the past year. As ever I wish to pay particular regard to the panel members who give up their time to carry out the work of custody visiting in the borough.

We are also fortunate to have developed a professional and friendly relationship with the police in Croydon and with the civilian staff who support them. Together they make the task of visiting easier and more productive and are able to resolve many of the simpler issues before they develop. The fact that we are usually escorted by the custody sergeant is a testament to the seriousness with which the police themselves view our activity. I should like to place on record my thanks for their help and support through the year.

Finally I wish to express my thanks to the MPA, who at last seem to have custody visiting on a stable and professional footing across London. It has not always been an easy road, but I am confident that there is now the goodwill across the board to ensure that the ICV scheme will go forward and continue to ensure the fair treatment of detainees in police custody on behalf of the people of London.

Richard Billington, Croydon ICV 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:

Richard Billington (Chair), Laura Scott-James (Vice-Chair), Lillian Magero, Hilary Cavagnoli, Alan Froude, Julie Salmon, Mohammed Aslam (currently on sabbatical), Roma Patel (resigned during 2008)

During 2008 the following members joined the panel:

Hassan Danjuma, Paul Berry, Michael Ginsbury, Anthony Ogunnaike, Paulette Heath.

2008 has been a good year for recruitment. The panel has warmly welcomed new panel members who have significantly reduced the work load for the existing visitors. The panel now has a strong mix of longer serving members who bring experience and knowledge and newer members who bring a fresh approach and new ideas.

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. At the end of 2008 the panel had 12 members, 9 of whom have disclosed their diversity information. According to data from the London Development Agency around 38% of the borough is of a non-white background. Of the 9 members of the panel who disclosed their ethnicity, 4 put themselves in a non-white category, suggesting an accurate representation of the local community. However, in the borough 16% of the population is of an Asian background, but none of the members who have disclosed their ethnicity have described themselves as Asian.

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 12 members of the panel are of this age group. Around 33% of the population of Croydon is aged between 26 and 45. 50% of the panel's membership is from this age group. 23% of the borough is aged 46-65, accurately represented by 3 members of the panel. Finally, 13% of the borough is aged over 65 and 25% of the panel is in this age category.

Overall, the panel members make up an accurate representation of the local community. The panel welcomes applications from people of all diversity strands of the local community. If the panel needs to undertake active recruitment during 2009 they will consider ways to increase awareness of the scheme amongst young and Asian people on the borough, in recognition of the data outlined above.

Station Visit Issues

The borough has two 24/7 operational custody suites (Croydon and South Norwood) which are both visited once a week by the panel.

Croydon has 12 cells and saw 6953 detainees pass through the station during 2008, South Norwood has 8 cells and saw 5112 detainees. The panel has a very good working relationship with the police; Inspector Graham Foster, Croydon Custody Support Manager Michael Maynard, South Norwood Custody Support Manager Steve Gollop and Facilities Manager Cindy Ioannidis all regularly attend the panel's meetings to respond to visitors' concerns. Panel members also find that they are generally treated with courtesy and respect from custody staff of all levels during their visits.

Throughout 2008 the panel's principle concern has been the temperature control at South Norwood station, specifically the low temperatures of some of the cells and the frequent uncomfortably high temperatures of the interview rooms. The custody manager, support manager and facilities manager have shown a clear commitment to resolving the problems and have been providing regular updates to the panel on the work that has been carried out to identify and resolve the problem. Work done so far has certainly seen improvements to the temperature of the cells but reports from recent visits still highlight problems with the interview rooms. Custody visitors and the police representatives to the panel share concerns and frustration at the slow progress of improvement on this issue, which seems to be in large part down to the MPS costing and procurement processes.

The panel has some concerns about detainee access to showers and washing facilities, particularly relating to immigration detainees who are often held in police cells for several days. Some detainees do not seem to be aware that they need to ask for a shower if they want one and some who do ask are told staff are not available to facilitate it. Communication with other panels suggests that this problem is not specific to the Croydon borough.

Panel members generally report that custody suites are clean. When report isolated incidents of spills, stains or rubbish are reported to staff on duty they are taken seriously and often dealt with before the visitors have left the building. Overall the panel considers the treatment and conditions of detainees in Croydon and South Norwood to be very good and hopes to see this continued during 2009.

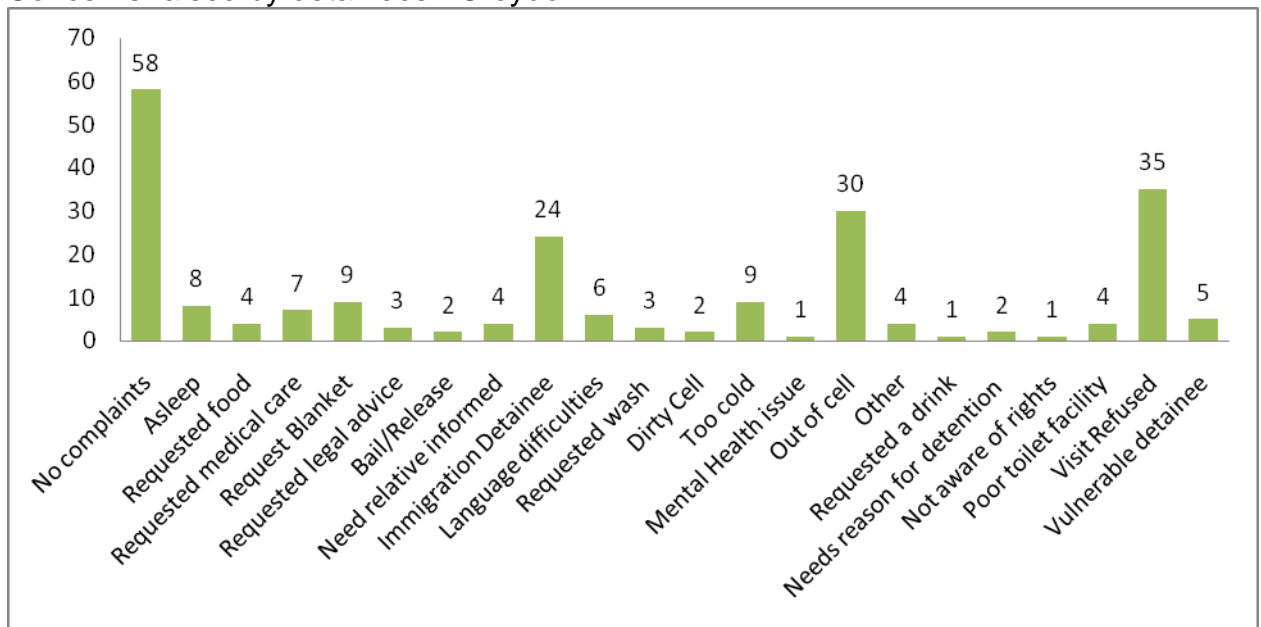
Data from station visits

Visit Concerns

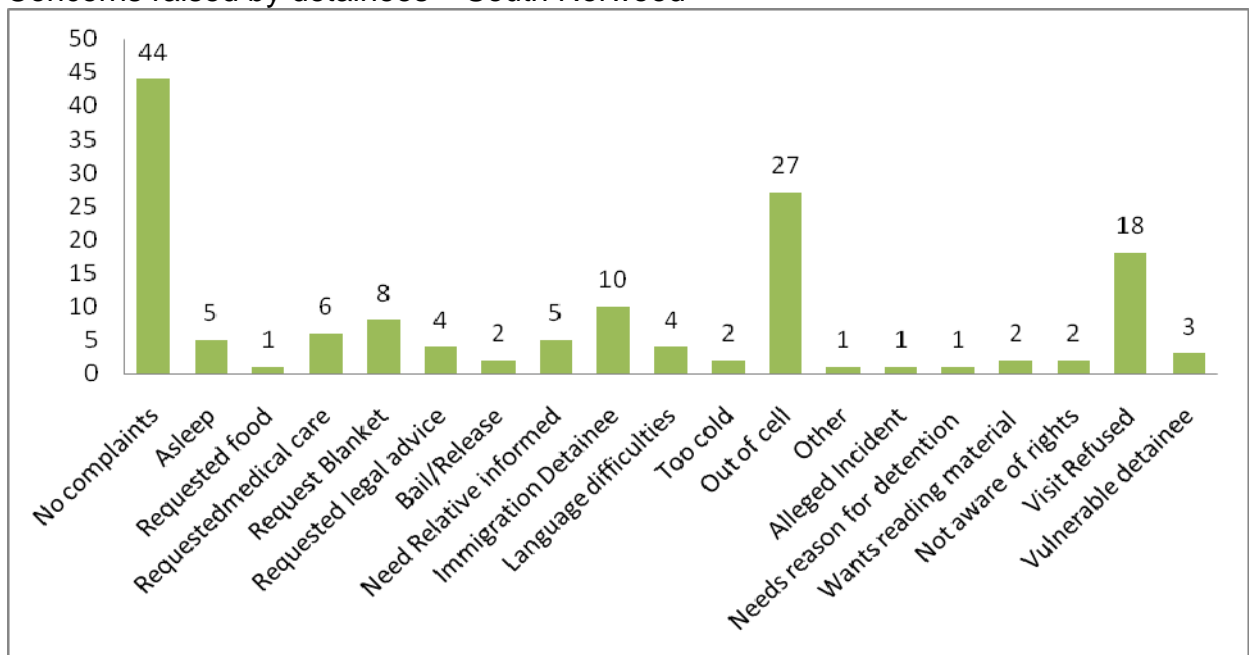
When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them.

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.

Concerns raised by detainees - Croydon



Concerns raised by detainees – South Norwood

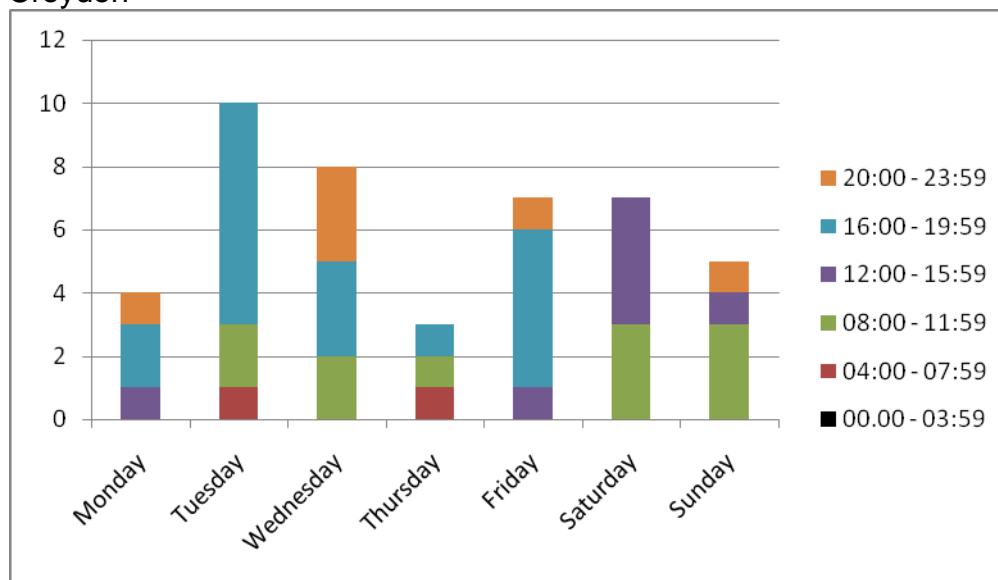


Visits by Day and Time

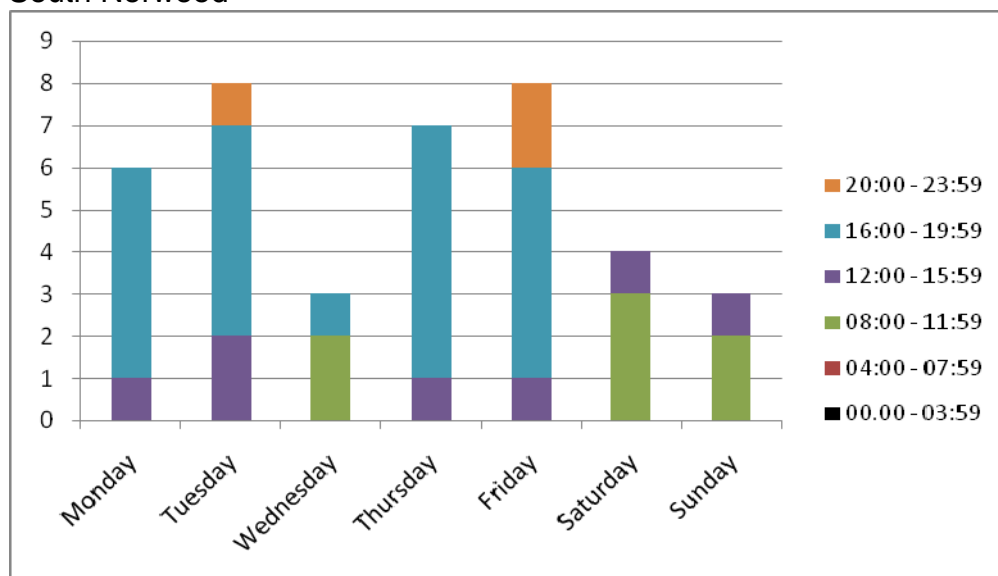
Independent Custody Visits are unannounced and the panel's intention is to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern.

The chart below displays the number of visits carried out at Croydon and South Norwood in 2008, by time period and day of the week. As the chart shows, visits to both stations were fairly evenly spread across the week.

Croydon



South Norwood



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 81% of their scheduled weekly visits. They will aim to improve upon this already good record.
- The panel will monitor the time of visits at regular periods during the year to ensure that visit times and dates are varied. They will aim to carry out a few late night visits to each station during the year.
- The panel will aim to raise awareness of the scheme locally, initially by presenting this report to a meeting of the public Community Police Engagement Group. The panel will aim to raise awareness of the scheme amongst young and Asian people in the borough, particularly if active recruitment is needed.
- In order to keep the panel members' knowledge up to date they will undertake refresher training modules during panel meetings and speakers from other organisations working in the same field will be invited to speak at panel meetings.