



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

**Tower Hamlets
Independent Custody
Visiting Panel**

Annual Report 2008



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Tower Hamlets Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers the period from January 2008 to December 2008

The purpose of this 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 2009.

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. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commanders, 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.

Chairperson's Report

The year 2008 was a momentous one for custody visiting in London but particularly in Tower Hamlets.

In June 2008 the panel co-ordinator, Mike Dodsworth who had been in post for several years employed by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and more recently by the Metropolitan Police Authority retired. Mike had worked hard and tirelessly for many years and helped in no small measure to build the Panel to the strength it is today, and to enjoy the reputation that the panel has for carrying out its role and task efficiently and well.

Fortunately for the Panel Edward Bird was recruited to replace Mike and in the second half of 2008 has proved himself a worthy successor. Ed works hard and consistently and I am sure will continue to make a big contribution to the work of and ongoing success of the Tower Hamlets Panel.

As always during the year we were sad to see some of our long-standing, established panel member's leave, mostly for personal reasons as they had moved, changed jobs or otherwise felt that they were no longer able to commit to the time required to be an independent custody visitor. We thank them all for their work whilst a member of our Panel.

As always we were also able to recruit new panel members and Tower Hamlets' Panel continue to operate at full strength. We also try hard to reflect in the panel the diversity within the borough and I am pleased to say that the independent custody visitors represent a good cross-section of the borough's population. We have also been fortunate in recruiting new visitors who are young, and as the average age of volunteers is general high this is a welcome development. Indeed we are about to recruit some new panel members by interviewing prospective visitors who have been on a waiting list for some time.

There has been ongoing training and all new visitors have undergone training and followed procedures around probation periods, accreditation etc.

During 2008 we said goodbye to our Custody Manager who suffered ill-health and upon his return moved to another post. We welcomed Inspector Paul Boyle as the new Custody Manager after a short period of having an Acting Custody Manager. The Chief Inspector in charge of The Criminal Justice Unit also changed during the year.

This was the first full year of The Tower Hamlet's Panel being administered by the Metropolitan Police Authority. Many of the original teething problems have been ironed out and the relationship between the Tower Hamlets Panel and the MPA has been a productive and fruitful one.

In summary it has been a successful year for the Tower Hamlets Independent Custody Visitors Panel.

Peter Tihanyi

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.

The Tower Hamlets panel are required to make weekly unannounced visits to Bethnal Green and Limehouse.

In the previous annual report the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2008:

- To make a total of 52 visits over the year at a rate of 1 visit per week to both Bethnal Green and Limehouse Police Stations.
- To maintain the excellent distribution of visits across the week.
- To maintain the excellent distribution of the times of visits
- To achieve and maintain panel membership at a minimum of 17 volunteers
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Tower Hamlets police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld. To raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate and to challenge where 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.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.
- To attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets across all strands.
- To investigate new initiatives designed to target different types of people and increase the take up of the ICV role.

The panel made a total of 81 visits throughout 2008 to Tower Hamlets police stations. Against a target of 104 visits to be carried out during the year at a rate of one visit per week to each station, this represents an achievement of 77.88% of the annual target.

Visits have been extremely well spread out through the week, only Saturday and Sunday receiving notably fewer visits than other days of the week.

Visits have been spread out well throughout the day; although no visits were carried out during the period between 00:00 and 07:59.

Whilst it is beneficial to carry out visits covering all 24 hours and visits at unsocial hours are encouraged, detainees are often taking advantage of their 8 hours of continuous rest during this time.

Monthly panel meetings are held at the Idea Store Bow and all members are expected to try to attend. The panel wish to thank the Council's Library service for allowing it to meet there.

The Panel is, and has been, excellently supported by the police Custody inspectors for both stations.

The Tower Hamlets Panel is represented at meetings of the Tower Hamlets Borough Policing Forum. The Chair, or a representative, also attends the MPA London ICV Chairs and Cluster meetings.

Many panel members have busy home and professional lives, and some also maintain other community roles as well as that as an ICV. Despite this, attendance at panel meetings and visit performance has been consistently good throughout the year.

As part of the MPAs commitment to providing ongoing support and training to ICVs, refresher training has been introduced to panel meetings covering a range of themes. Rather than have an additional evening for training, the Panel Coordinator thought it more appropriate to deliver these training modules, of which there are 8, within the monthly meetings and these have been received well by members.

Recruitment and Retention

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.

Tower Hamlets panel are fortunate to have a good number of volunteers undertaking visits and the panel has operated at full strength for the majority of 2008. Limited recruitment has taken place to replace odd members and now a waiting list is in operation for when existing members retire from the panel.

A few members retired from the panel in the latter part of 2008 and recruitment is planned in 2009 to replace these members to keep membership levels high.

At the end of 2008 there were 21 active members on the panel with one member on sabbatical. The optimum figure for a panel visiting two stations is 17 and the panel prides itself in maintaining strong membership.

Recent diversity monitoring has allowed the panel to consider how well it matches the community it represents. The population of the borough as a whole is 50% male, 50% female; Tower Hamlets ICV Panel has 11 male members and 11 female members, precisely representing the borough in terms of gender.

The panel has achieved a diverse racial makeup including proportionately more people from the black community (9.10%) than the borough (6.55%). The report indicates there are less white people on the panel (27.27%) than the borough (50.40%) as well as considerably less Asian members (9.10%) than the borough (40.55%). There diversity of 8 members of the panel is unknown and 2 of the panel members belong to mixed race categories; both therefore cannot be categorised

In terms of age, the panel has a smaller number of young members (6) between the ages of 18-45 (31.60%) than the borough (55.45%). The majority of the panel consists of older members (10) between the ages of 46-65 (52.6%), disproportionate to the borough (13.84%). Similarly there are 3 members over the age of 66 (15.79%) compared to only 7.5% within the borough as a whole.

This indicates that Tower Hamlets needs to recruit a larger contingent of younger members to adequately represent the borough, but in terms of other strands of diversity, it compares well.

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy.

*based on projections derived from the 2001 census calculated by DMAG - the Data Management and Analysis Group - based at the Greater London Authority (GLA). These data comparisons are confined to apparent strands of diversity only.

Visits to Police Stations

There are two custody suites in the borough of Tower Hamlets; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Bethnal Green and Forest Gate.

The majority of our reports have not raised many significant issues that required the attention of the MPA. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that have been frequently raised:

- The FME room is often unlocked, or the cupboards within the room containing medical supplies are unlocked. There have been reports of this room being untidy and the sharps bin being overfilled.
- Over the year there have been concerns raised regarding the poor supply of blankets to custody suites and the hazardous storage of blankets.
- Panel members continue to be concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities
- The custody suite is sometimes reported as being unclean.
- A few reports have indicated a strong unpleasant odour in the custody area, however this has often dissipated or been dealt with.

Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2008 that have required intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

There have been a couple of recordings of delays in the granting of access to the custody suite. It should be noted that only on the grounds of safety should ICVs be prevented from access to the custody area.

It has been relatively rare for there to be an unexplained delay in entering the custody suite, even though visits are often made at busy times. It is a source of satisfaction to the panel that there have been few complaints from detainees on how they are treated at any station.

It has transpired that a number of Officers are unaware of the existence and role of ICVs which has caused some delay and confusion on visits. Whilst instruction regarding ICVs does form part of an Officers training, it should be encouraged that ICVs themselves educate unaware Officers about the work they do.

There were no significant concerns raised during the year that have not been addressed and dealt with either during a custody visit or through the monthly panel meetings.

The relationship with custody staff has continued to be positive and panel meetings have been frequently well attended by the Custody Manager or other Custody staff. Inspector Boyle was kind enough to arrange a demonstration with a colleague of the technique used in handcuffing and show to the panel the common marks that often appear, especially when there is a struggle.

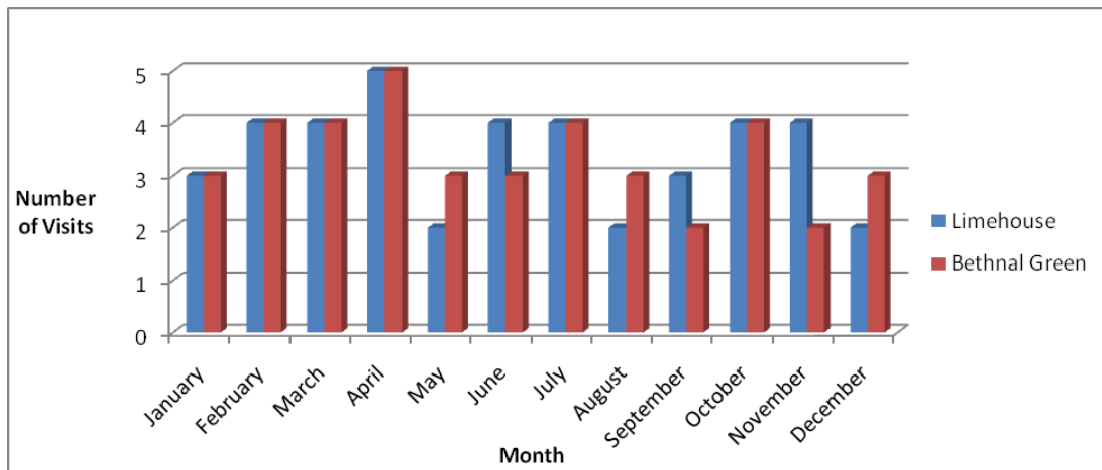
The panel also continues to monitor the standards of cleanliness in both custody suites.

Data from Panel Visits

1. Number of Visits

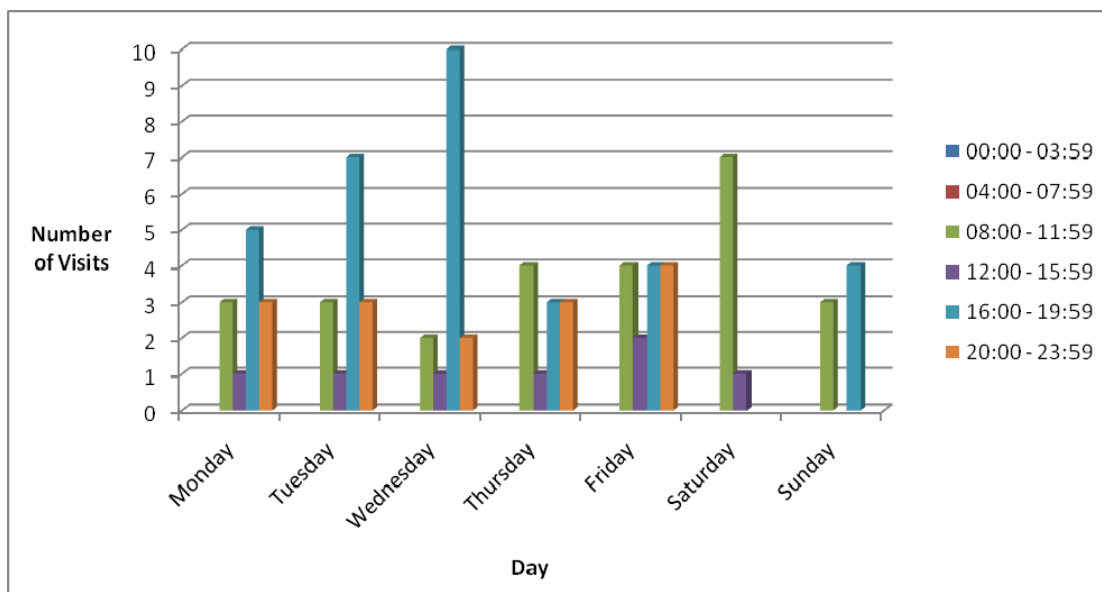
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Bethnal Green	40	76.92%
Limehouse	41	78.85%
Total	81	77.88%

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



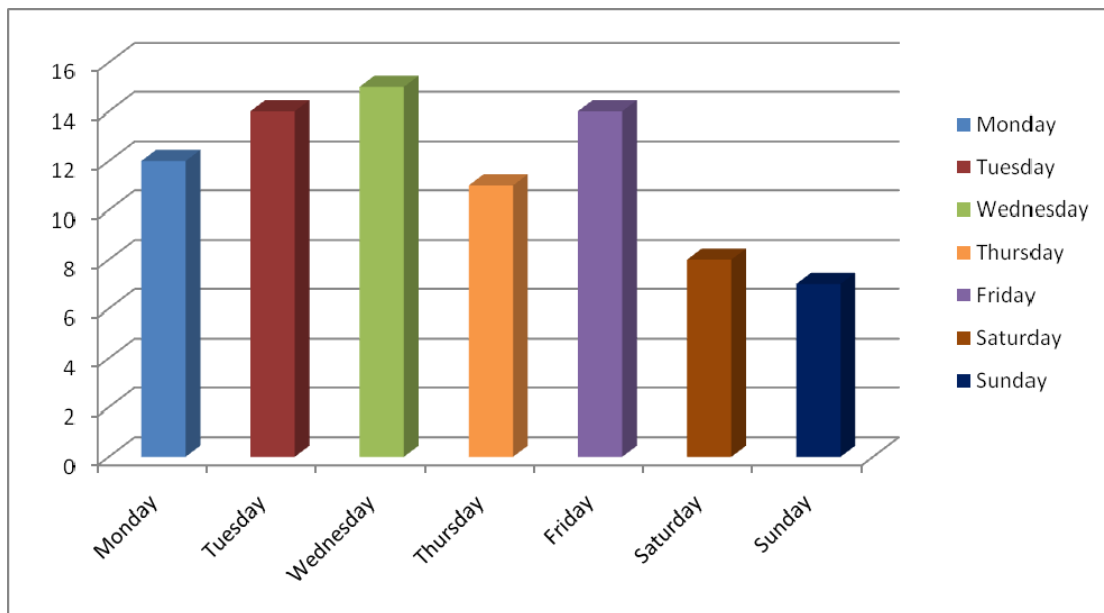
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of Total Visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	-
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	-
0800 – 1159 hrs	26	32.10%
1200 – 1559 hrs	7	8.64%
1600 – 1959 hrs	33	40.74%
2000 – 2359 hrs	15	18.52%

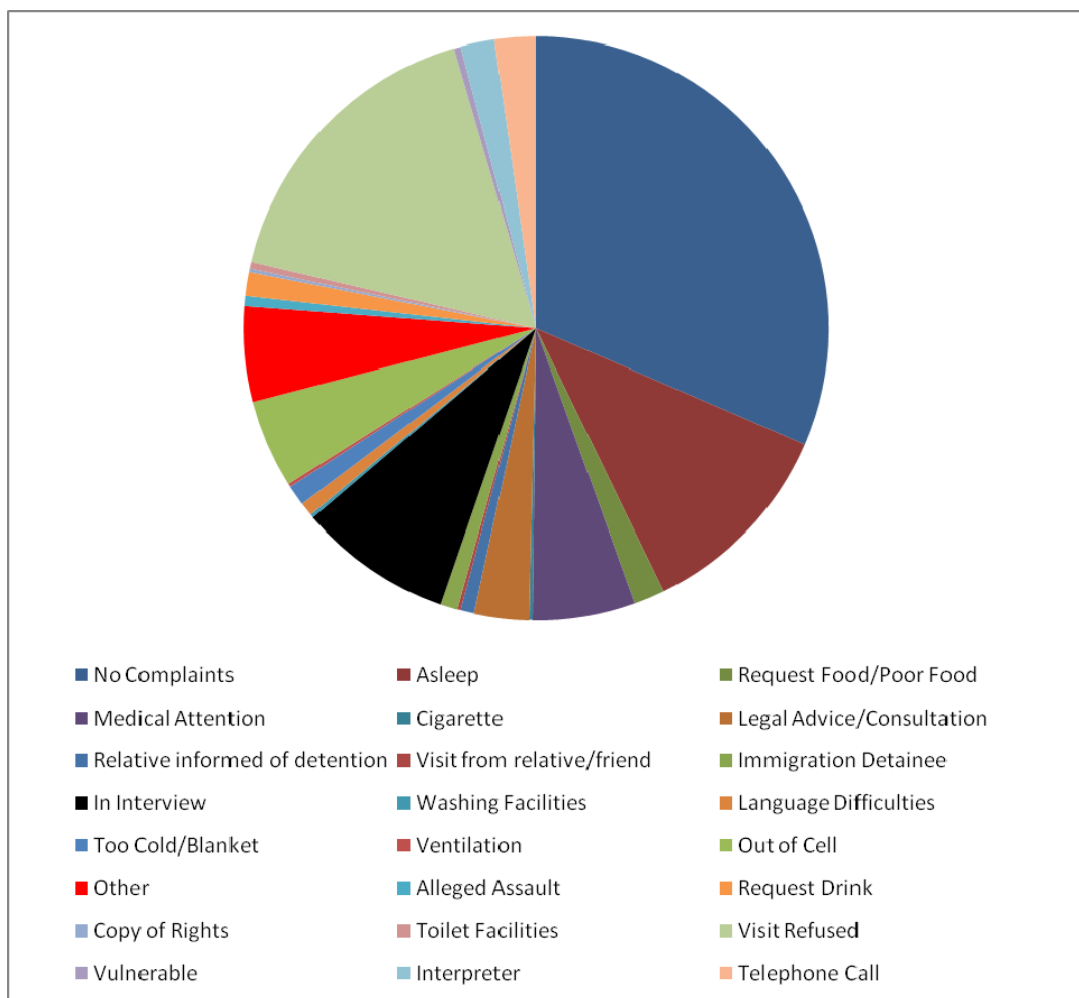


3. Days of Visits

Day	No. of visits	% of total visits
Monday	12	14.82%
Tuesday	14	17.28%
Wednesday	15	18.52%
Thursday	11	13.58%
Friday	14	17.28%
Saturday	8	9.88%
Sunday	7	8.64%
Total	81	



4. Details of detainees' concerns:



No Complaints	167
Asleep	60
Request Food/Poor Food	9
Medical Attention	30
Cigarette	1
Legal Advice/Consultation	16
Relative informed of detention	4
Visit from relative/friend	1
Immigration Detainee	5
In Interview	45
Washing Facilities	1
Language Difficulties	4
Too Cold/Blanket	6
Ventilation	1
Out of Cell	26
Other	28
Alleged Assault	3
Request Drink	7
Copy of Rights	1
Toilet Facilities	2
Visit Refused	89
Vulnerable	2
Interpreter	10
Telephone Call	12

Plans for Forthcoming Year 2009

Targets:

- To make a total of 52 visits over the year at a rate of 1 visit per week to both Bethnal Green and Limehouse Police Stations.
- To maintain the excellent distribution of visits across the week.
- To improve the distribution of the times of visits across the 24 hour period, to include visits between 00:00 – 07:59.
- To maintain panel membership above a minimum of 17 volunteers.
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Tower Hamlets police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld. To raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate and to challenge where 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.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.
- To attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets across all strands.
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