

Croydon Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

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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 2009 to 31st December 2009. 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 2010

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 2009 the panel visited Croydon station 48 times and South Norwood 40 times, meaning that overall they completed 85% of their scheduled visits. This is a very good record, an improvement of 4% on 2008, but one that the panel hopes to build on this during 2010.

During those visits the panel spoke to or checked on 387 detainees in total at Croydon and South Norwood stations. Of these 327 were spoken to at length about their treatment. The issues and concerns that the panel has as 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 by day of visits across the borough is generally excellent although Saturday and Sunday together are less than any one of the weekdays. With time of day of visits, there were no visits between 22:40 and 08:57. A few late night/early morning visits to both stations during 2010 would improve the spread even further. However, as a general rule, members do feel that they can obtain a better picture by visiting when detainees are likely to be awake and able to talk to them.

During 2009 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.

The panel recognises the importance of keeping their knowledge up to date and will be working through the refresher training modules during panel meetings during 2010.

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.

Chair's report

At this time of year I am required to write a report to go in our annual report. As part of that process I always look back over past year's reports to gain some inspiration before writing it.

Reading last year's report I concluded "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". Perhaps I spoke too soon! Since then, apart from learning of changes that will affect us in 2010, we have had a succession of ICV Coordinators, Laura Del Nevo, George Fry and now Tony Hawker. Tony has assured me that he is here for the long haul so I should like to formally welcome him to the Croydon Panel. I hope he will enjoy his time with us.

It has been an interesting year for the panel which has grown by the net amount of one visitor. We remain under the optimum number of Independent Custody Visitors for the workload we have. For two 24/7 custody suites the panel really needs 17 members. For much of 2009 we have only had 12. Despite this the panel has continued in its mission to visit each of our stations once a week and has even improved on its 2008 performance. The individual visits are of a high quality with a creditable attention to detail evident in the visit report forms. The main part of our work is done during visits to the custody suites, where the visitors do much good work in resolving problems for detainees and monitoring the care they receive. On-going problems or issues that cannot be resolved at the time are always followed up with the police and the MPA.

Change is often slow in the management of police custody in London – usually because changes to the built infrastructure are expensive and difficult. However, 2009 saw a new and eagerly awaited initiative become a reality. As part of Operation Herald, Borough based, Custody Nurse Practitioners have been recruited. This has long had the support of the Croydon panel and, indeed, ICV Scheme across London. Croydon was chosen as one of the boroughs where the roll out would start. Following a baseline healthcare survey the service came on-line in September. We look forward to better healthcare provision for detainees in years to come.

At the end of the year the MPA announced changes that will affect the panel in 2010. The role of Independent Custody Visitor and the visiting process remains unchanged but there will be implications as far as panel meeting frequency goes. Some ICVs were unhappy about the way this was handled and announced but it is clear that it was driven by wider economic considerations in the public sector. As we go forward, I feel confident that the panel will adapt to the changes. Whatever else; the borough of Croydon and Z Division has a robust and effective Independent Custody Visiting scheme. That is, that in spite of all changes, the panel continues to function well, visits get done and above all our mission to reassure the community is achieved. I have not the slightest doubt that we will continue to do so.

One of many aphorisms that come back to haunt me from time to time is that "the only constant is change" And boy is this true of custody visiting.

Finally, as ever I wish to pay particular thanks to the panel members who give up their time to carry out the work of custody visiting in the borough. I would also like to thank the many police officers and staff who come into contact with us. They are a credit to the service and perform their duty in frequently adverse conditions.

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 2009 the panel had the following members:

Richard Billington (Chair), Laura Scott-James (Vice-Chair), Lillian Magero, Hilary Cavagnoli, Alan Froude, Julie Salmon, Mohammed Aslam, Paul Berry, Michael Ginsbury, Anthony Ogunnaike, Paulette Heath and Hassan Danjuma. Hassan Danjuma left the panel at the end of the year. During 2009, Alison Thomas, and Bethan Watkins joined the panel which brought about a net increase of one visitor.

The panel has continued to develop as a very stable unit with a core group of long term members and with most of the newer members having served for at least one year as visitors. This is an ideal mix of experience and knowledge with newer members bringing to the panel a fresh approach and new ideas. The panel warmly welcomes the new members who have taken to the role quickly and have taken significantly reduced the work load for the existing visitors.

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. During 2009, the panel had 12 members, 9 of whom have disclosed their diversity information. According to data from the GLA, around 38%* of the borough is of a non-white background. Of the members who disclosed their ethnicity, 4 put themselves in a non-white category, suggesting a generally 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. Again, according to the GLA, 'DMAG Borough & Sub-regional Demographic profiles 2007' approximately 18%* of the borough is aged between 16 and 29 but none of the 12 panel members were of this age group. Around 58% of the panel's membership fell into 30 and 44 age group. This is significantly higher than the borough average of the 26%*. 17% of the panel fell into the 45 to 64 age group against the Croydon average of 23%*. 12.4%* of the borough is aged 65 and over, whereas 25% of the panel membership fell into this group. In terms of age, the panel did not match the wider borough with too few members in the youngest and oldest categories and a predominance in the 30-48 group.

In 2010 the panel will consider ways to increase awareness of the scheme amongst all groups within the borough, in recognition of the data outlined above and target recruitment accordingly.

* GLA, 'DMAG Borough & Sub-regional Demographic profiles 2007'

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 7393 detainees pass through the station during 2009, South Norwood has 8 cells and saw 4881 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. All of the police team 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 2009 the panel's principle concerns, those that featured most commonly on visit report forms, were broadly similar for both Croydon and South Norwood stations. There have been cells out of action at both stations, usually due to broken toilets, but generally there were more problems concerning the building infrastructure at South Norwood. In particular some areas of the suite have experienced high temperatures and the lighting levels have been perceived as a problem on occasions. At Croydon the most common matters requiring a response to the panel were: the reliability and service provided by the FMEs; problems with the clearance and supply of blankets, and cell buzzers not working. Also, at both stations there were occasions when NSPIS was not functioning and causing problems for the police staff. There were a few negative reports about the cleanliness of specific areas in each of the custody suites. However, generally speaking both suites were normally clean and well maintained.

The detainees in custody at the time of the visits broke down as follows:

Adult Male	390	Juvenile Male	73	Male Total	463
Adult Female	53	Juvenile Female	9	Female Total	62

PACE	478	Immigration	39	Other	8
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The majority of detainees had no concerns but most of those detainees with concerns had them resolved by ICVs at the time of the visits. As the table on the following page shows that of the 139 matters recorded as concerns, 18% were requests for/about medical attention; 12% requests for blankets; and 11.5% detainees wanting someone informed of their detention or a request to use a telephone. Requests for food and drinks were 9.3% and 10% respectively.

Overall the panel considers the treatment and conditions of detainees in Croydon and South Norwood to be very good and the panels work effective. The panel hopes to see this continued during 2010.

Data from station visits

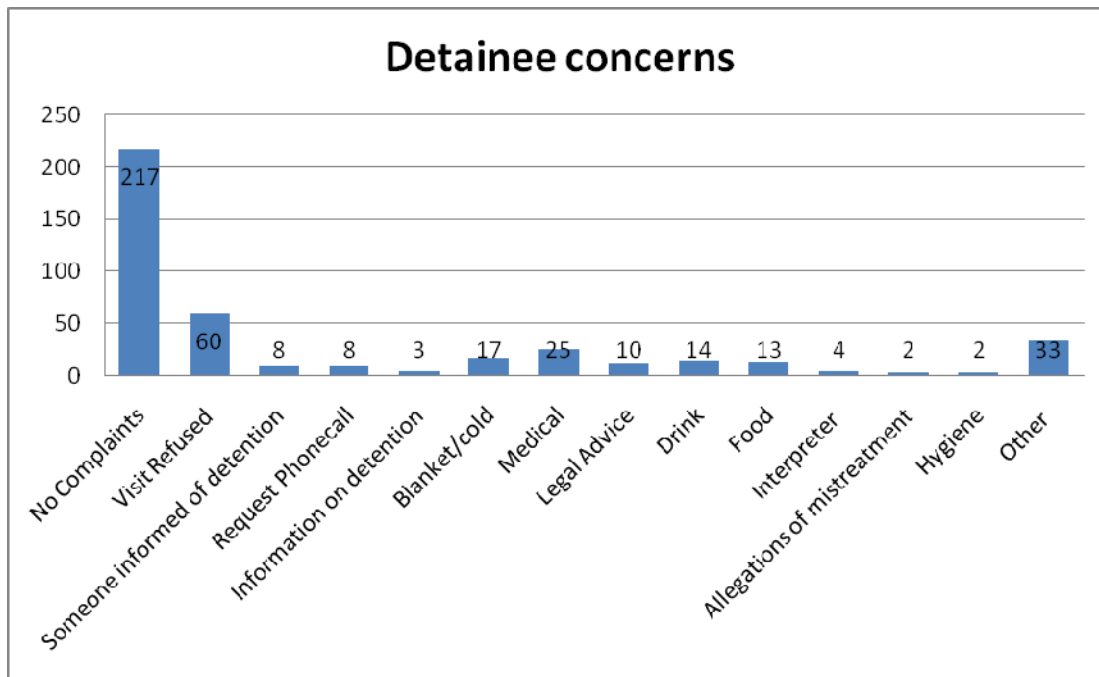
Visit Concerns

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. The panel members resolve most concerns with the custody staff at the station during the course of the visit. Only more major concerns, concerns that by their nature cannot be resolved at the time of the visit or more complicated issues will be raised on the visit report form as a matter requiring a police response to the panel. These will then be discussed at a meeting of the whole panel and, if necessary, escalated via the appropriate channels in the MPS or the MPA.

Concerns raised by detainees

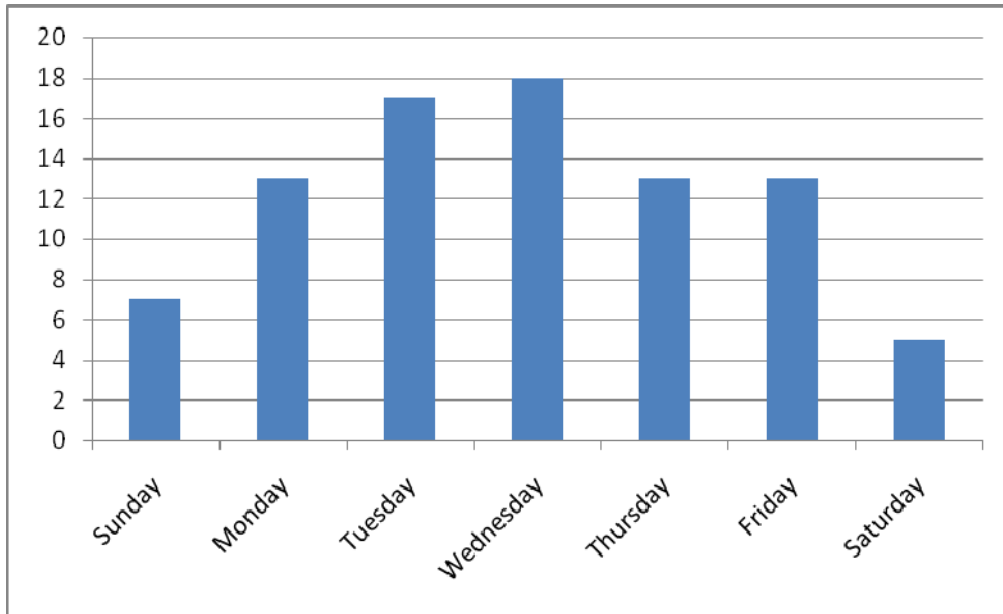
Croydon & South Norwood Stations



Visits by Day of the week

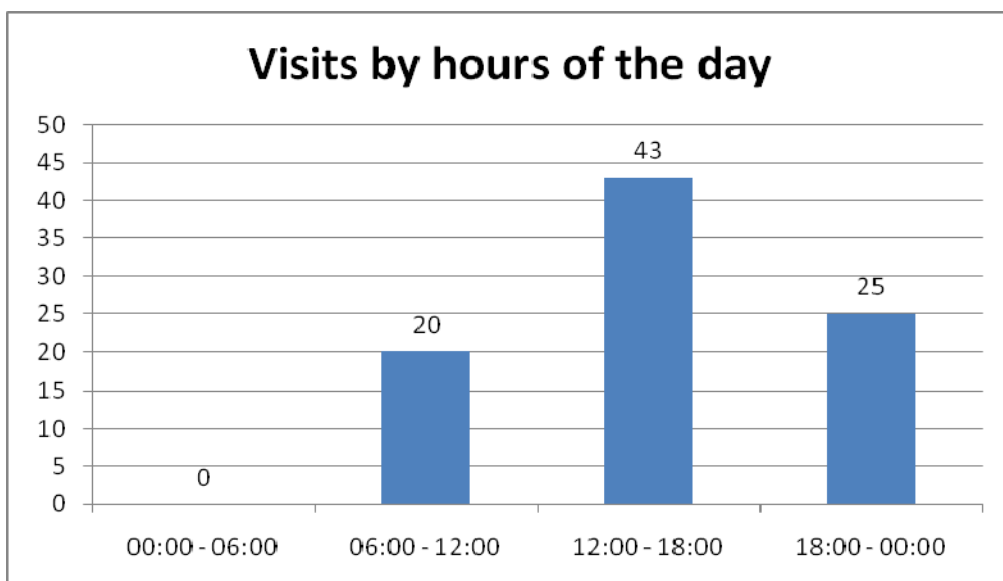
Independent Custody Visits are unannounced and the panel's intention is to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern.

The chart below displays the number of visits carried out at Croydon and South Norwood in 2009, by day of the week. As the chart shows, visits to both stations were fairly evenly spread across the weekdays but much reduced at weekends.



Visits by Hour of the Day

The chart below displays the number of visits carried out at Croydon and South Norwood in 2009, by hours of the day. As the chart shows, visits to both stations were considerably less frequent in the early morning. What the table does not illustrate is that during 2009 there was only one visit done before 9:00 a.m. and only one after 10:00 p.m. 41 visits took place between 4:00 and 7:00 p.m.



Objectives for the coming year

During 2010 the panel, with the support of their MPA coordinator, will strive to achieve the aims set out below:

- During 2009 the panel completed 85% of their scheduled weekly visits which translates as a 4% improvement on 2008. During 2010 the panel will aim to continue 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/early morning visits to each station during the year and achieve a more even spread between 9am and 10pm.
- 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.