

Lewisham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

Contents Page

	Page Number
1. Introduction	3
2. Chair's report	4
3. Aims and achievements	5
4. Membership and recruitment	6
5. Station visit issues	7
6. Statistical analysis of 2009 panel reports	8
7. Targets and plans for 2010	11

Introduction

This is the 2009 annual report of the Lewisham Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP), covering the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009.

The purpose of this report is to give a general overview of the work of Lewisham ICVP and:

- Provide the local community and the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) with information about the visits made including the treatment of those held in custody
- Set out the issues and concerns that have arisen during 2009
- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Set out the panel's objectives and plans for 2010

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

Who are Independent Custody Visitors and what do they do?

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local community who volunteer their time to visit police stations unannounced to check on the conditions and treatment of people in police custody. Once a week two visitors from the Lewisham panel attend Lewisham police station at a random unannounced time to make an inspection of the custody area and speak to detainees. On arrival at the police station, visitors are escorted to the custody area where they speak to a number of detainees in their cells and complete a structured report form.

London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The 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 works in partnership with the police 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 to provide a custody visiting scheme in London. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Lewisham, 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.

Chair's Report

We have gone through a number of changes as a panel during 2009. We have been developing and growing and this will serve us well to deliver to our community the reassurance that independent checks on the welfare of those in police custody are being carried out.

We always aim to visit the custody suite once a week and over the past year our visiting record has improved significantly.

As the data in this report shows, many panel members visit in the evenings. There have been no visits made between midnight and 6am. Visitors try to visit the station in an unpredictable pattern, though in practice many of us have jobs that make carrying out this voluntary work during office hours difficult. We have also found it more beneficial to visit when the station is busy and detainees are awake, rather than in the middle of the night, as we do not wake detainees up to speak to them.

We were particularly grateful to have had guest speakers at our meetings over the past year. We welcomed a speaker from Operation Trident, the area of the MPS that tackles gun and drug related crime, often dealing with incidents where both the victims and suspects are from black communities.

Police attendance at meetings has been patchy during 2009 and this is something I will be working with our MPA coordinator, Ann Howard, to improve during 2010.

I would like to finish by thanking the panel members for all the work they do. This is a vital role that sees our knowledge, skills and experience used to improve the treatment of Lewisham's police detainees.

Dionne Lewis
Lewisham ICVP Chair

Aims and Achievements

The aims and objectives of the panel are laid out in the Home Office Codes of Practice, the National Standards governing Independent Custody Visiting and the MPA ICV Handbook.

The primary objectives of the panel are to make unannounced visits to Lewisham police station and to check and report on the treatment of people held in police custody ensuring their rights and entitlements are being observed.

In the previous annual report the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2009:

- To improve the number of completed visits.
- To undertake refresher training courses and invite guest speakers from other criminal justice agencies to meetings.
- To improve the effectiveness of panel meetings through the regular attendance of both custody visitors and the police at meetings.
- To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Lewisham.

In 2009 the panel made a total 36 visits against the target of 52. This represents an achievement of 69% of the panels visiting target. Although an increase from 2008 figures, the panel is disappointed with the overall figure for the year. Visits were missed during September and October when the panel ran out of visit report forms affecting the overall total. Report forms sent to the custody suite in early September were affected by the postal problems and were not received until late October.

Lewisham station is a large, busy station and in 2009 12,784 detainees passed through the custody suite. Visitors aim to speak to all those in custody who want to see them but they inevitably have to prioritise the most vulnerable detainees at very busy times. In 2009 Lewisham custody visitors spoke to 230 detainees.

During 2009 the panel met every 8 weeks to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. Lewisham borough police representatives attended 5 out of 6 panel meetings. At these meetings the officers keep the panel advised of any custody developments at Lewisham custody suite, within borough and across the Metropolitan Police Service. Refresher training was delivered at the May panel meeting. Throughout the year the panel welcomed speakers on the work of the Engagement and Partnerships Unit at the MPA, the Lewisham Drug Intervention Programme and developments in dealing with detainees in police custody with mental health issues. The panel found all talks interesting and informative and would like to thank all speakers for taking the time to attend the meetings.

2009 was a successful year for recruitment as two new members joined the panel. The panel has continued to use every opportunity to raise public awareness of independent custody visiting and a panel member regularly attends meeting of the Lewisham Community Police Engagement Group.

Membership and Recruitment

All panels must 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. Since April 2007, panels have been asked to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA.

In 2009 the Lewisham panel had the following members:

Name	Appointed
Valerie Antoine	June 1999
The Bean	May 2003
Trilok Bhalla (Vice-chair)	November 2004
Rachael Briggs-Canegan	May 2006
Michael Canegan	May 1999
Rose Davidson	April 2006
Allison Davies	June 2004
Dionne Lewis (Chair)	July 2005
Jeni Osbourne	February 2009
Denise Robinson	March 2009
Leigh Scott	October 2004
Alan Till (sabbatical during 2009)	June 2003

Optional diversity monitoring enables the panel to consider how well it reflects the community it represents. According to data from the London Development Agency 61% of the borough is of a white background, 29% is of a black background and 7 % is of an Asian background. The panel membership is made up of 4 men and 8 women. 9 of the 11 members disclosed their ethnic background in the diversity monitoring exercise. Of those, 5 have described themselves as being of a black background, suggesting that this ethnic group is represented by the panel. The borough's Asian population is represented by one member of the panel.

The target membership for a panel visiting one custody suite is 8 members plus one or two people as reserves. This number allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to the custody suites. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month. During 2009 the panel welcomed two new members; Jeni Osbourne and Denise Robinson. By the close of 2009 the panel had 10 active accredited members, achieving its target membership. As a result the panel will not actively recruit new members in 2010 and will instead focus on raising public awareness of the scheme within the borough.

However, the MPA continues to seek volunteers for panels in other boroughs. To be eligible to join the London ICV Scheme you must be 18 or over and live, work or study in the capital and have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system.

Station Visit Issues

Lewisham borough has one 24/7 operational custody suite which is located in Lewisham Police Station. In line with the panels in the rest of London, this station is visited once a week by a pair of custody visitors from Lewisham ICVP. Lewisham is a large modern police station with 28 cells and during 2008 12,784 detainees passed through the station, making it one of the busiest in London.

In 2009 the panel met every 8 weeks to discuss issues of concern arising from their visits. Police attendance at panel meetings was good, with a police representative attending 5 out of 6 meetings. Following changes to the administration of the scheme the panel will meet quarterly in 2010. As a result it will be vital that police representatives continue to attend panel meetings in order for the scheme to fulfil its purpose of making sure that the welfare of detainees and community confidence in this area of policing is maintained.

The panel has had relatively few concerns about the welfare of detainees held at Lewisham station in 2009. In general they have found that basic needs have been met and that detainees are held in a safe and sanitary environment.

The panel did raise concerns about detainee access to showers or other wash facilities. Many detainees seem unaware that they can ask for a shower and those that do ask are often told that staff are too busy to facilitate it. Take up of shower facilities was further hampered by an inadequate shower door, which was rectified in July. The panel does understand that Lewisham is a very busy station, that facilitating a shower does take-up a significant amount of a gaoler's time and that other tasks, such as checking on those thought to be at risk of self-harm, have to take high priority. However, the panel strongly believes that detainees who spend several days in the cells (as is often the case with immigration detainees) must be offered a shower.

Other issues that detainees put to custody visitors, such as requests for food, drink, blankets, medical attention or legal advice are usually already in hand when visitors raise them with custody staff on duty, or addressed promptly afterwards.

The panel has a good working relationship with the custody staff and they are happy which the overall standard of care shown to detainees.

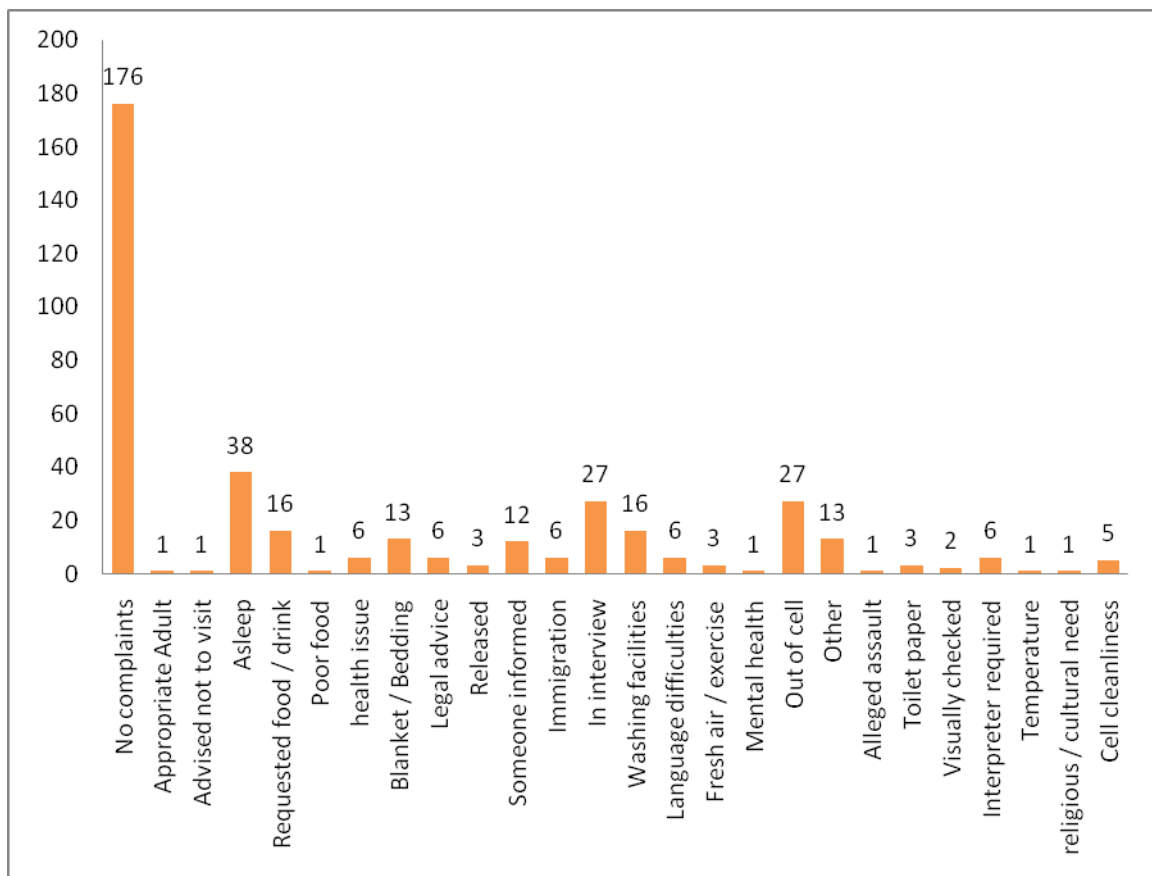
Statistical Analysis of 2008 Panel Reports

Visit Concerns

Visitors 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 concerns can be resolved at the time 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 during visits made to Lewisham station in 2009.

Detainee Concerns

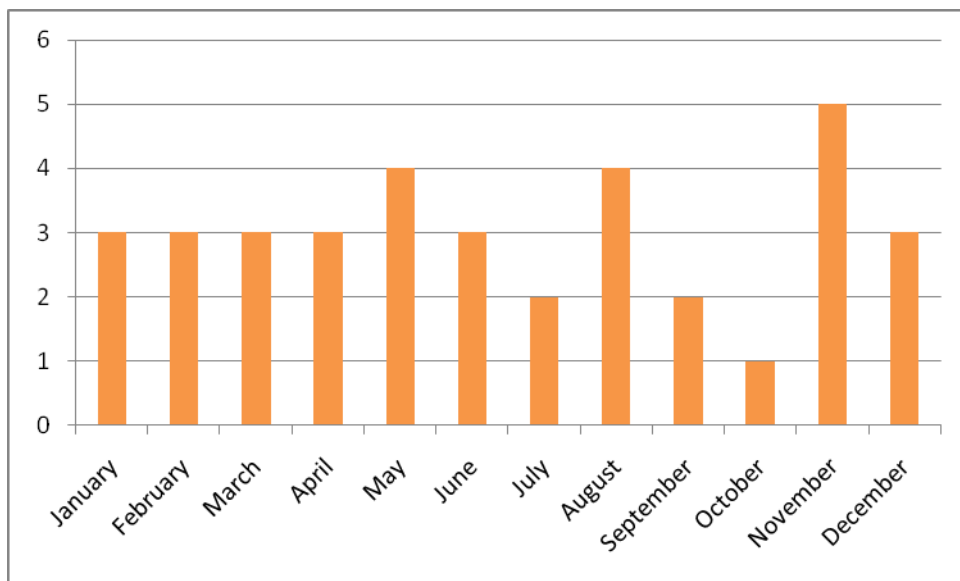


Visits by month, day and time

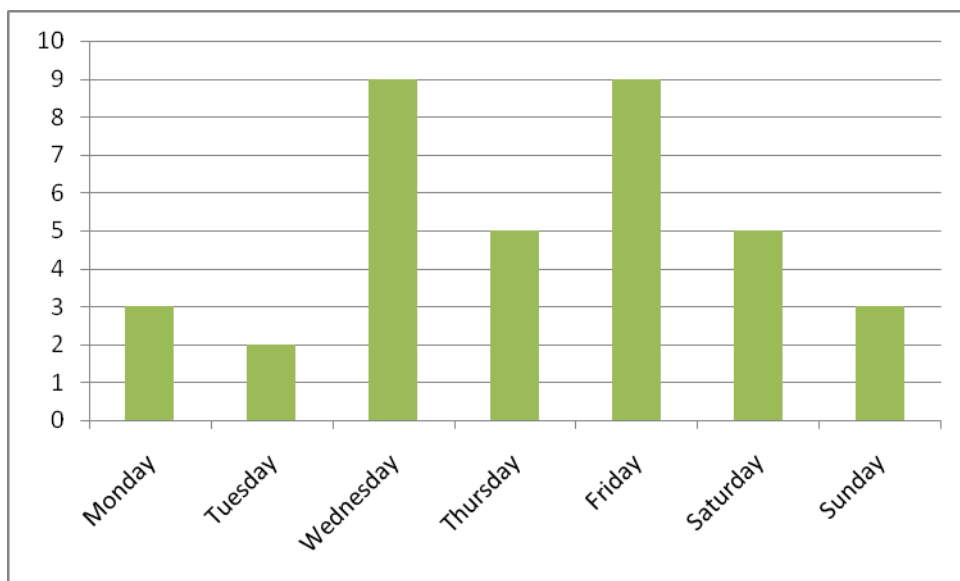
In line with the rest of the scheme Lewisham panel aims to make one visit per week to Lewisham police station. Visits are unannounced and the panel aims to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern.

The chart below displays the number of visits carried out at Lewisham in 2009 by month, time period and day of the week. As the charts show, across the year the panel have achieved a good spread of visits across the days of the week and periods of the day.

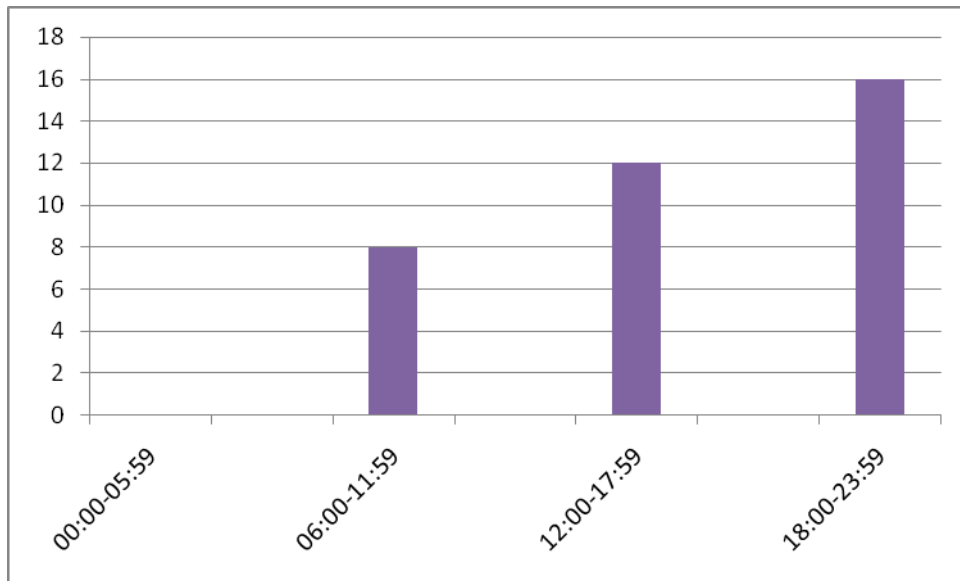
Visits by month



Visits by day



Visits by time period



Objectives for 2010

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
2. To make one visit per week; varying the days of the week and times of visits to get an accurate picture of the Custody Suite.
3. To monitor the findings of reports and to discuss concerns with the Police immediately if need be and/or at the next Panel meeting.
4. To endeavour to attend all panel meetings and to send apologies in advance of missed meetings.
5. To ensure that the membership does not fall below current level and if necessary to work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members.
6. To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
7. To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Lewisham.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide an independent custody visiting scheme in London.