

Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

**Annual Report
2009**

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Introduction

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

The report covers the period from January 2009 to December 2009.

The purpose of the 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 2010

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 scrutinize 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 Commander for Newham, 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

In the period covered by this report the Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel has worked hard in their role, in order to secure the accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, and hopefully bringing police and communities closer together. It is hoped that this annual report will aid in the task of providing the community with information about the work the Panel has carried out on its behalf during the year 2009.

The Panel itself presently comprises of 15 active members with a further three on agreed periods of absence. All Panel members are unpaid volunteer members of the local community who collectively work in tandem with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to try and improve the facilities available to detainees, and to ensure their rights under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) are being met. The role of an ICV is to address the needs of detainees such as the provision of clean cells, clean bedding, appropriate food and washing facilities etc. We have found that on the whole the police welcome our input as independent members of the public, and try to help resolve any issues reported by ICV's in order to get problems sorted out.

Our weekly visits have continued to be carried out to Forest Gate and Plaistow police station and monthly visits to the British Transport Police (BTP) custody suite at West Ham. Although a few visits were missed during the course of the year due to a shortage of Panel members I am pleased to report that on-going recruitment has proved to be a success and the Panel's performance has significantly improved as enthusiastic new members have joined. I am also pleased to report missed visits are very low compared to previous years and are a statistic to be proud of. No major issues have arisen from our visits to the above three custody suites, and any problems have been dealt with promptly during our visits by the Custody Sergeants and then followed up and reported back on to the Panel by the Custody Inspector David Price (MPS) and Sergeant Wayne Stock (BTP). All three custody suites continue to be run to a high standard, whereby they are maintained and detainees are recorded to be treated fairly and receive their rights in accordance with the requirements of PACE.

Even with the major changes that have had to be made to the scheme by the MPA, which have had an impact on all London Panels, in 2010 we hope to be able to continue our hard work in ensuring that the rights and needs of detainees continue to be met.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all current Panel members for their hard work and dedication and their professional attitude with which they carry out their visits and attend Panel meetings. My thanks also go to the police staff and officers at the three stations we visit for their continued help, support and assistance despite often being under pressure from the increasing demands of the custody suite. Lastly I would like to thank the MPA for overseeing the ICV scheme and for providing the training and support through their Coordinator, to enable us to perform our community role.

Bushra Khan
Newham ICVP Chair.

Aims and achievements

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 previous annual report specific aims and objectives were set out for 2009. The panel aimed to carry out a weekly visit to its two MPS custody suites and one monthly visit to the BTP suite at West Ham. Of this target the panel managed to carry out 79%. This is an improvement on last year by around 15%.

Visits took place across the week and at various times of the day, however the most popular times were after 12 noon and on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

The level of communication with Newham and BTP police has been maintained to a good level, and this will have to be built upon in 2010 when interim reports are introduced between meetings. This will be in order to bridge the more lengthy gap between meetings and ensure feedback from the police is timely.

Membership remains strong and 2009 saw a number of new members join the scheme, helping to increase membership and in turn improve visiting levels. The panel as a whole also took part in refresher training modules with their Coordinator during panel meetings

A greater emphasis was put on marketing and advertising in 2009, and new avenues to recruit were continually being developed. This has also meant that 2009 saw a more satisfactory level and that the panel better reflects the demographic and diversity of the borough it represents.

The relationship between the custody manager and panel members remains effective with strong communication links and is strongly supported by Newham MPS Officers. Representation from the British Transport Police has improved although attendance at panel meetings later in the year hasn't been possible. It is hoped these links will remain positive and beneficial, and that a physical presence at meetings will increase.

Panel meetings were held monthly at Newham Town Hall and the venue continues to satisfactorily facilitate the monthly panel meetings.

The Panel is represented at meetings of the Newham Police and Community Forum. The Chair, or a representative, also attends the MPA London ICV Chairs and Cluster meetings.

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, faiths, races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

Recruiting volunteers to the Newham ICV panel has not proven overly difficult and the panel has maintained a good number of visitors throughout the year. At the end of 2009 the Newham panel had 15 accredited and active members, with a further three on periods of agreed absence.

The panel is operating increasingly well with a steadily increasing number of visitors. The optimum number of members is 17 and it is hoped that this quota shall be fulfilled and surpassed in the beginning few months of 2010 as two new members (who have been awaiting security clearance) join.

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy. The active panel comprises of eight men and nine women with varying diversity in age and ethnicity.

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough at Newham; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Forest Gate and Plaistow and the BTP station at West Ham.

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

- The general cleanliness of the custody suite seems to have improved.
- Panel members continue to be concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities.
- Over the year concerns over the heating and cooling systems in custody have been raised. Also, during cold periods, blankets are not automatically provided and therefore this issue is raised more frequently.

Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2009 that have required high level intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

Data from panel visits

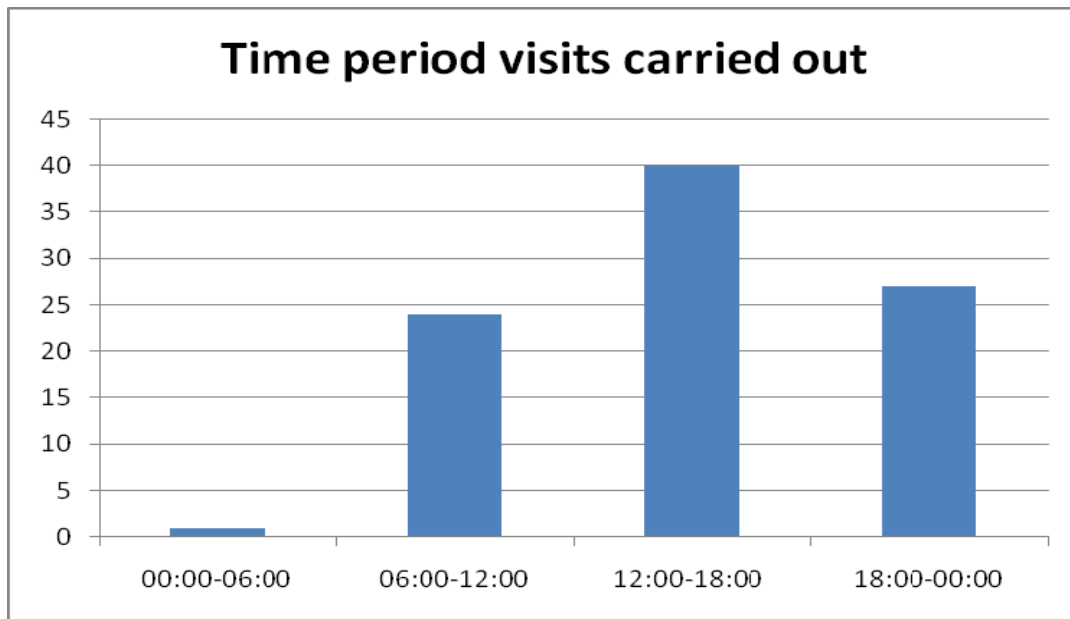
1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Forest Gate*	45	87%
Plaistow*	38	73%
West Ham**	9	75%
Total	92	79%

*Annual Target is 52 visits

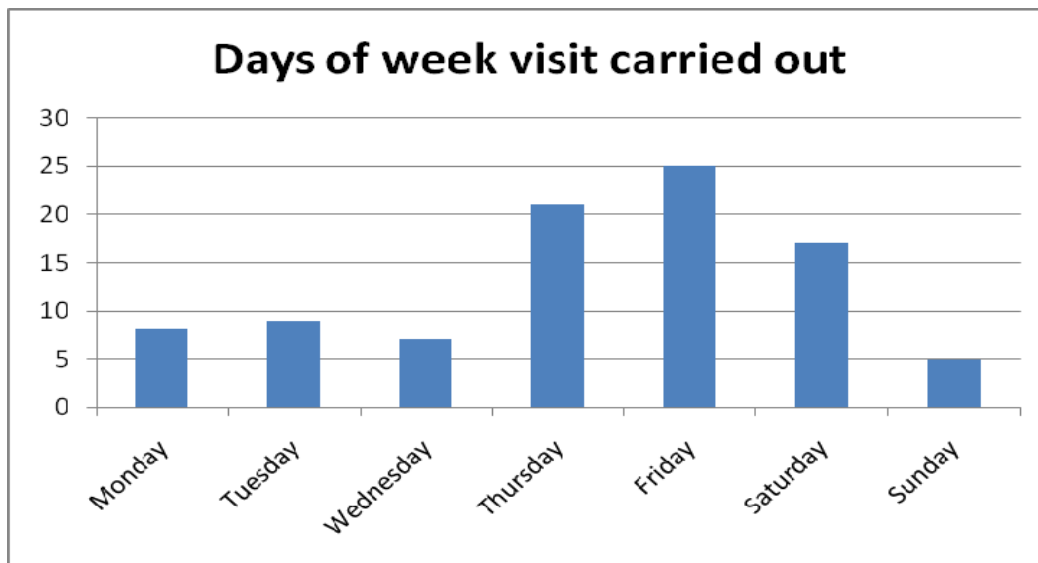
** Annual Target is 12 visits

2. Time of Visits

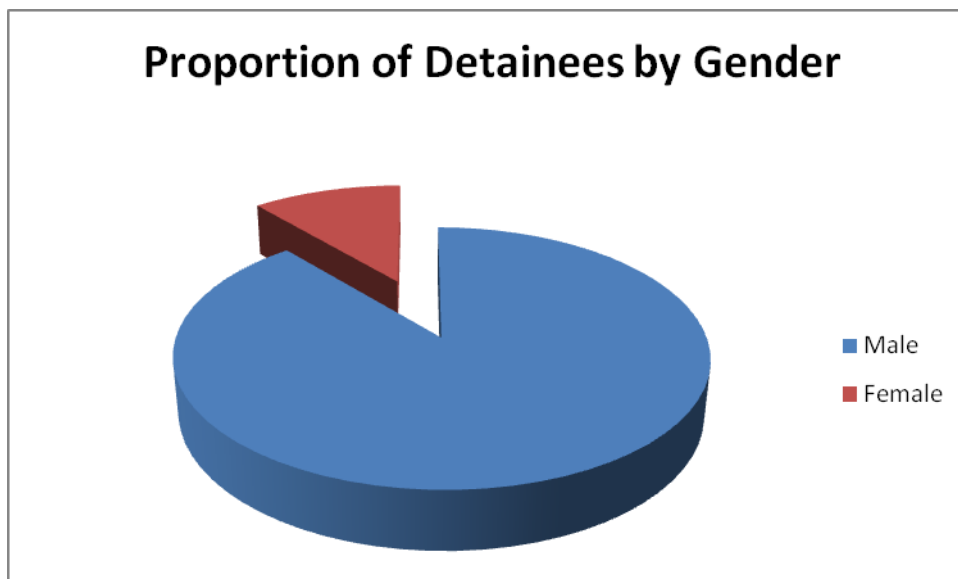


As can be seen from the graphs above and below, visits were spread throughout the week; however the majority were carried out Thursday – Saturday. As well as this, the majority were in the middle of the day.

3. Days of Visits

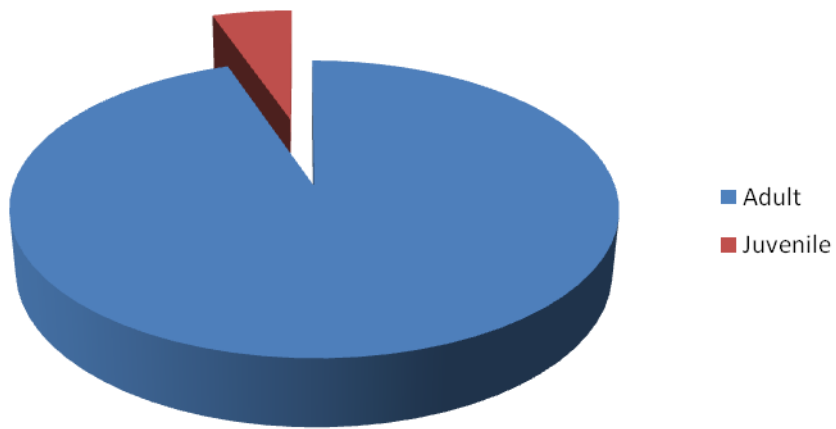


4. Demographics of Detainee

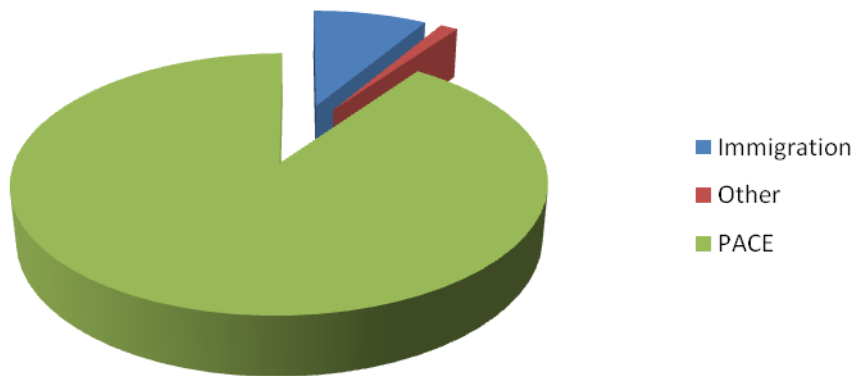


As can be seen by the graphs above and below the majority of detainees were male adults. A significant number of these were held under PACE, with a much smaller number being immigration, and even smaller number being "other" – this category includes detainees who have been transferred from HP Prison or who are wanted on a warrant (WOW).

Proportion of Detainees by Age



Proportion of Detainees by Category



Plans for forthcoming year 2009

- to continue to carry out visits at a rate of one per week to both Forest Gate and Plaistow, and one a month to West Ham (BTP).
- To maintain membership at least 15 (preferably 17 as stipulated by the MPA) active members.
- To build on existing links with the Police.
- To continue with refresher training in panel meetings and to have presentations from external agencies.