

**Richmond upon Thames
Independent Custody Visitors Panel**

**Annual Report
2009**

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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Richmond upon Thames Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers a 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 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. Since April 2007 the MPA has overseen custody visiting arrangements in Richmond as part of the London ICV scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Richmond upon Thames, 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.

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 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.

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. These are supplemented by the panel's constitution.

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 the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2009:

- *To make a total of 64 visits to the two custody suites in the borough, of which 52 to Richmond, with additional monthly visits to Teddington.*
- *To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread and in particular to ensure that a minimum of 10% of visits are carried out between 20:00 and 04:00 and that the number of visits on a Sunday is also increased.*
- *To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA as 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.*
- *To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, shared training and providing resources if appropriate.*
- *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 age, gender and ethnic diversity of the Borough of Richmond.*

The panel completed 43 visits to Richmond and 3 visits to Twickenham while the Richmond custody suite was closed for refurbishment, plus 12 to Teddington, achieving 91% of our planned visits to the two main custody suites.

Visits were reasonably well spread throughout the week. Seven visits were made on a Sunday, a marked improvement from the previous year. In addition, we achieved our target of at least 10% of visits between 20:00 and 04:00.

In the majority of cases, detainees expressed no concerns about their treatment. A small number of recurring items were raised including access to washing facilities and requests for interpreters.

The MPA provided cluster based refresher training in March which was attended by a member of the panel. We have also run two short training modules within our panel meetings.

Chairperson's report

2009 was a relatively quiet year for the Richmond upon Thames custody panel. Our panel ended the year with eleven members. This is slightly more than is needed to carry out our scheduled visits and means that we can offer resources to neighbouring boroughs if required.

During the year Richmond, along with other selected boroughs in London, participated in a self-introduction pilot. Self-introduction involves visitors introducing themselves directly to detainees and asking whether they wish to be interviewed. Trials in Hampshire suggested that the number of interviews granted was much higher than when the visitors were introduced by custody staff. The trial in Richmond lasted 6 months. The figures for the year as a whole suggest that there was no impact on the number of detainees agreeing to be seen. In 2008, 84 out of 131 agreed to be seen and in 2009, 87 out of 137 agreed. The proportion has remained stable at 64%.

Later in the year the Richmond custody suite was closed for three weeks for refurbishment and the fitting of smoke detectors and the custody facility was transferred to Twickenham. Twickenham also opened occasionally during the summer and again in the run up to Christmas as part of the police campaign to tackle anti-social behaviour, and we made three unscheduled visits in this time.

Towards the end of the year some changes were announced within the MPA and in particular the resources allocated to the administration of the independent custody visiting scheme. The number of co-ordinators has been cut and each one is being asked to look after a larger number of boroughs. The changes take effect in January 2010. The principal impact for Richmond is to reduce the number of panel meetings from six a year to four; there will also be some reduction in the frequency of training sessions, social events and cross panel meetings. At this stage I believe that the changes, although regrettable, should have no impact on our ability to deliver a robust independent custody visiting scheme for this borough.

During the year we carried out most of our scheduled visits but disappointingly achieved only 91% of our target compared to 98% in 2008. The spread of visits through the week was much improved compared with the previous year but too many of our visits (just over half) were in the early evening and we need to address this in 2010.

In terms of outcome, we spoke to 87 of the 137 people who were in custody at the time of our visits. The majority of the detainees who agreed to be interviewed expressed no concerns at all about their treatment while in custody. For the most part, complaints were minor and could be dealt with on the spot. On only one occasion was an issue raised that was a potential breach of the PACE codes outlining the rights of people held in detention.

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.

The panel membership at the end of the year was 11. This stability has been very welcome in terms of the experience of panel members and their ability to conduct effective visits. On the other hand, it has given us few opportunities to improve the balance of panel membership in terms of age and gender. As we reported last year, it remains the case that the majority of our panel membership is female, compared with the population of the borough as a whole, which is 49% male. One member of the panel had a six month sabbatical during the year.

We do operate an equal opportunities policy as far as recruitment is concerned and will continue to welcome applications from all sections of the community as and when vacancies arise.

The number of visitors is slightly more than is required to cover our commitment to weekly visits to Richmond and monthly visits to Teddington. In the past we had provided assistance to the Hammersmith and Fulham panel, however, this arrangement came to an end early in 2009 after a very successful recruitment drive in that borough. Late in the year, two of our panel volunteered to help with visits to the British Transport Police custody facility that has been relocated to Hammersmith until November 2010.

New recruits attend MPA training and in addition we have delivered refresher training to all panel members through short modules held at the end of panel meetings.

There have been occasions in the year to increase engagement with other panels. In June a summer social and awards evening was held for independent custody visitors. The panel was presented with an award for carrying out 98% of visits in 2009.

There have been additional cluster based and London wide meetings and training sessions directed specifically at Panel Chairs, which the Chairperson has attended.

Visits to police stations

There are two custody suites in the borough, but only Richmond Police Station operates full time. Teddington is used primarily for bail to return and for occasional overflow. Twickenham had been decommissioned as a custody suite but was used in the latter part of the year, when Richmond custody closed for refurbishment and fitting of smoke detectors. Twickenham also opened occasionally during the summer and again in the run up to Christmas as part of the police campaign to tackle anti-social behaviour.

As well as weekly unannounced visits to Richmond, we schedule monthly visits to Teddington. Because Teddington is used on only an occasional basis, it is often the case that there are no detainees there when we visit. Nevertheless we consider it important that we continue to schedule regular visits.

This year we completed 43 visits to Richmond and 3 to Twickenham while Richmond was closed for refurbishment. We also made 12 visits to Teddington, against targets of 52 and 12 respectively. This represents an achievement of 91%, down on the previous year.

Visits are made in pairs and the visitors decide on times that are suitable to them. The graphs on the following pages show that the spread of visits was uneven, with approximately half being made in the early evening and another quarter in the morning. We did however achieve our target of making at least 10% of visits between 20:00 and 04:00. This year the distribution of visits through the week is acceptable, with no less than 10% of the total on any one day of the week. We will continue to monitor the timing of visits throughout the year and try to ensure that we are achieving a reasonable spread.

None of our reports raised any significant issues that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA, and only a few raised issues that required a response from the local police.

Throughout the year we commented on several occasions that the temperature control in Richmond custody was very poor with the interview rooms and FME room often unacceptably warm. We are pleased to note that this problem appears to have been resolved.

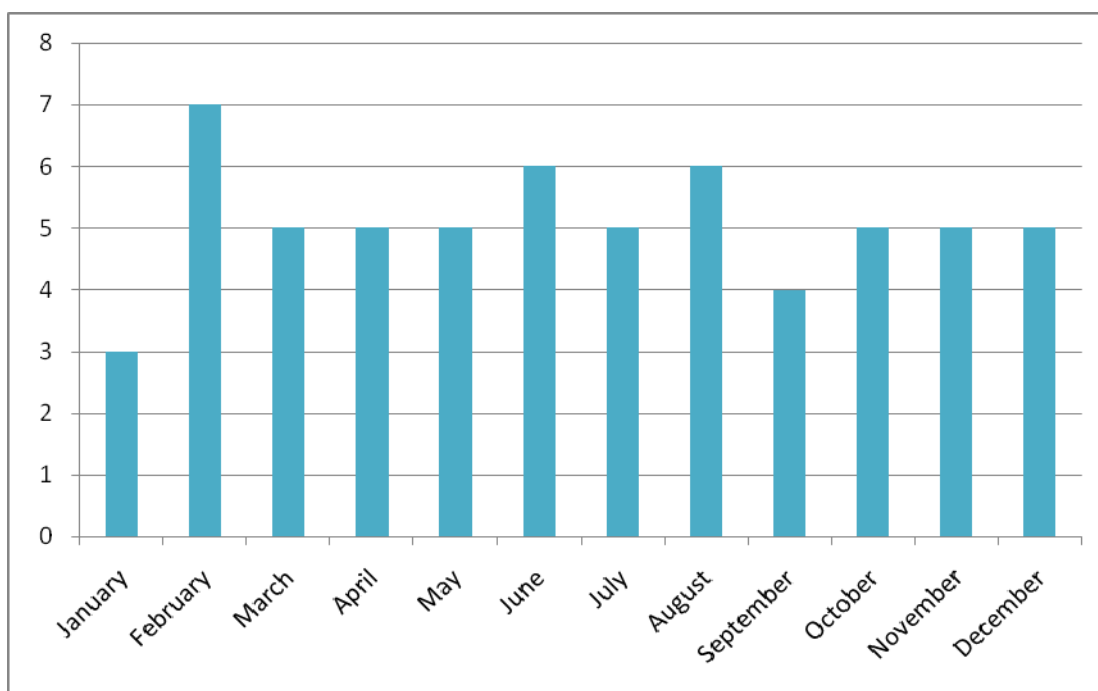
As far as the detainees themselves are concerned, the majority of those who agreed to be interviewed expressed no concerns at all about their treatment while in custody. Most complaints were minor and could be dealt with on the spot. There were a couple of recurring issues: one was about washing facilities (this remains an issue for detainees who are in custody for longer periods of time and may not be offered a shower or not be aware that they can ask for one) and the other concerned the need for interpreters.

Data from panel visits

Visits undertaken in London borough of Richmond upon Thames during 2009:

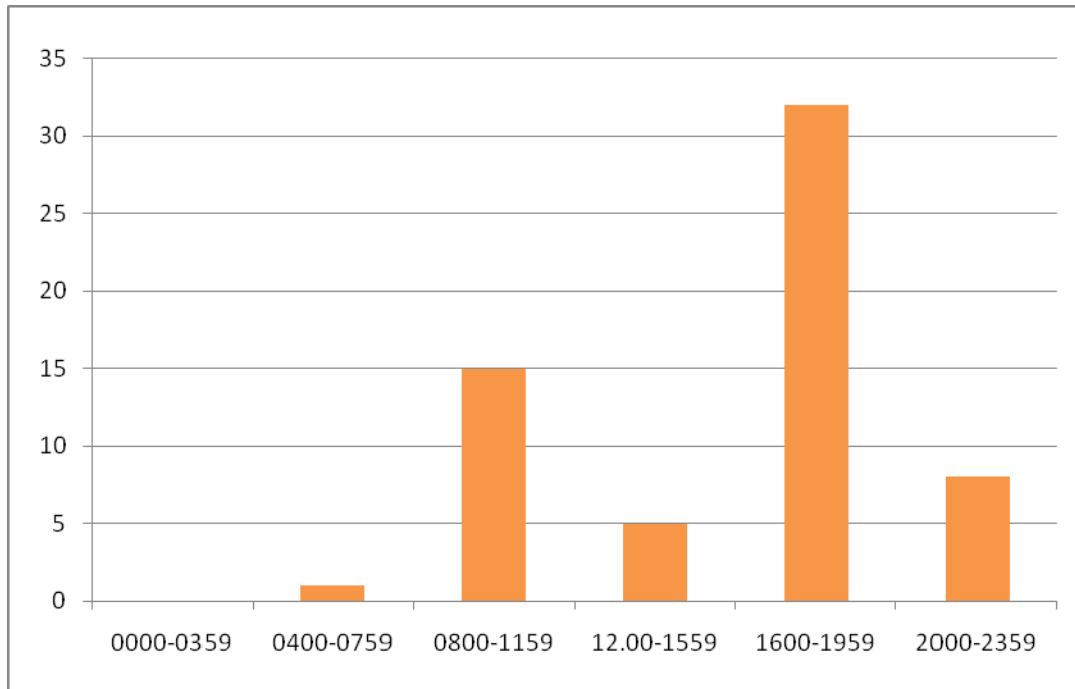
1. Number of Visits:

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of annual target
Richmond (incl. Twickenham while Richmond closed)	46	88%
Teddington (overflow)	12	100%
Subtotal	58	91%
Twickenham	3	n/a
Total	61	n/a



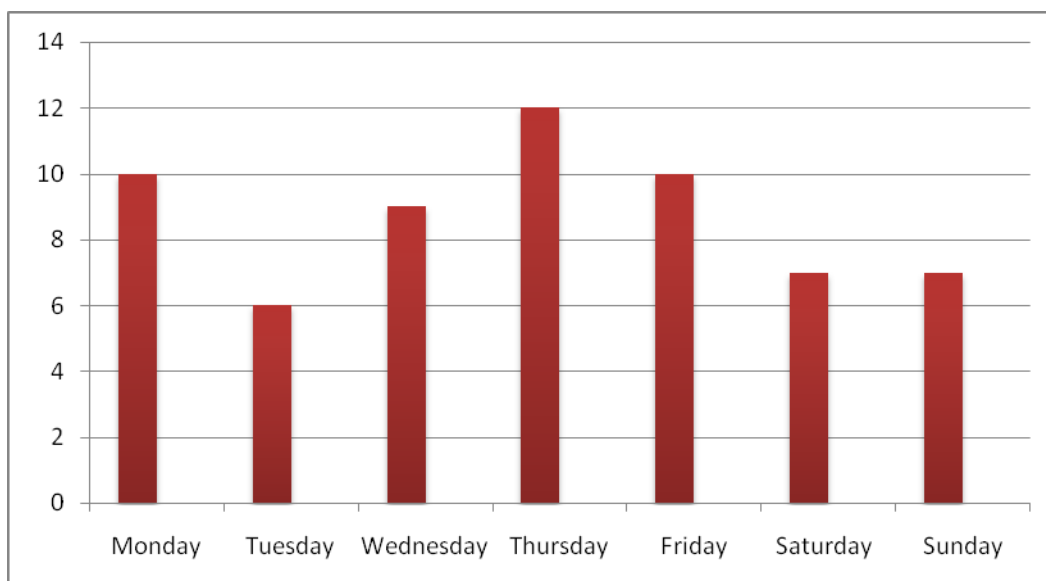
2. Time of Visits

	Annual no.
0000 – 0359 hrs	
0400 – 0759 hrs	1
0800 – 1159 hrs	15
1200 – 1559 hrs	5
1600 – 1959 hrs	32
2000 – 2359 hrs	8
Total	61



3. Days of Visits

	Annual no.
Monday	10
Tuesday	6
Wednesday	9
Thursday	12
Friday	10
Saturday	7
Sunday	7
Total	61



4. Details of Visits

	Annual no.
Detainees in custody at time of visits	137
Of which:	
Detainees seen	87
Detainees who refused to be seen	20
Detainees not seen-absent from cell/ asleep/interview, etc	28
Detainees not seen due to language or communication difficulties	2

5. Total numbers of detainees by type

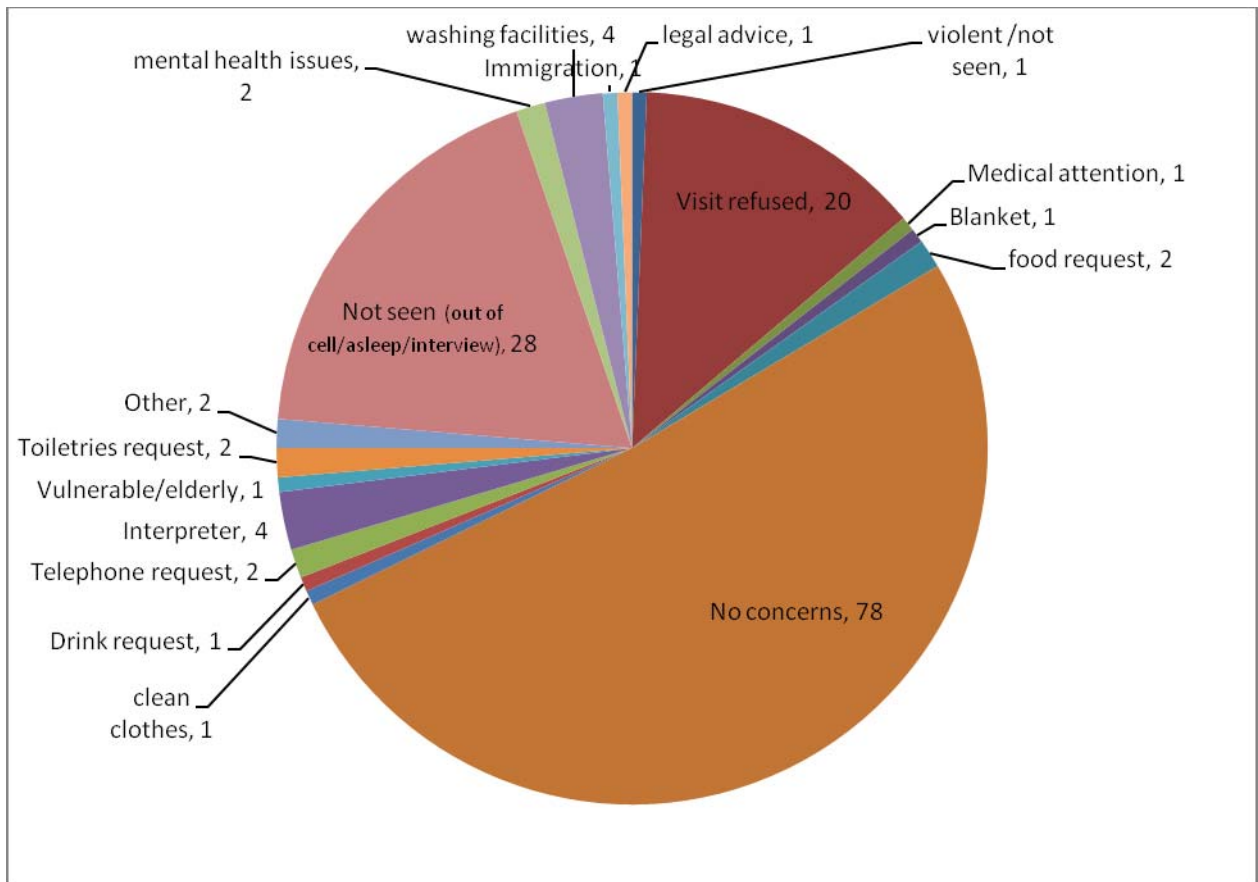
	Police data	Panel data
<i>Total number of detainees held in custody during 2009</i>	3660	137
<i>PACE detainees</i>	3615	135
<i>Immigration detainees</i>	22	1
<i>Other</i>	23*	1**

*Prison

**category not specified

6. Details of issues raised:

The following graph is based on data taken from visit reports and reflects both concerns raised by detainees in interview, and issues raised by visitors on those occasions when they had permission to review the custody record of detainees who had refused an interview. It shows that the majority of detainees had no issues, and also gives a good overview of the types of concerns that have been raised. Only one of the issues (provision of legal advice) is a potential breach of PACE regulations. No significant patterns emerge from this data and even where issues are raised they are generally of the sort that can be resolved easily.



Targets and plans for 2010

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2010 are as follows:

- To make a total of 64 visits to the two custody suites in the borough, of which 52 to Richmond, with additional monthly visits to Teddington.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a good spread and in particular to try to increase the proportion of visits that are carried out between 8 pm and 8 am and reduce the number that are carried out early evening.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA as 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 age, gender and ethnic diversity of the Borough of Richmond.