

Sutton Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

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Introduction

This is the 2009 annual report of the Sutton Independent Custody Visitors 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 Sutton 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 Sutton panel attend Sutton police station at a random unannounced time to make an inspection 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 Sutton, 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

Welcome to the 2009 annual report of the Sutton ICVP.

I am pleased to report that the Sutton custody suite remains a well run facility and that there were no major issues in 2009. In general the Sutton ICVP found that detainees were treated satisfactorily within the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). Many detainees praised the custody staff for the high standard of care shown towards them and the quality of the facilities. However, the panel is aware of the dangers of becoming complacent and remains vigilant in ensuring that PACE is adhered to.

Sutton, along with Bromley and Lewisham ICV panels, enjoys the benefits of having a modern custody suite provided through a Private Finance Initiative and unlike some panels we only have one custody suite to visit.

The Sutton ICVP is very proud of its 100% visiting record over the past 5 years and I thank all panel members for their ongoing dedication and commitment to custody visiting.

Independent custody visiting plays a crucial role in providing oversight of police practice in regard to people held in police detention. It is through the commitment of the Sutton ICVP that the community in Sutton can be assured that the welfare, rights and entitlements of individuals held in the Sutton custody suite are provided in accordance with the law.

On behalf of the panel I thank the following:

- Chief Inspector Mark Hill for his support in: promptly investigating all issues raised with him and attending quarterly panel meetings.
- The MPS officers in the custody suite and the John Laing staff working on the front desk and in the custody suite for being professional, courteous and co-operative, even when the police station is busy.
- Kerry McClelland, MPA ICV Scheme Manager and her team, for overseeing the scheme and importantly not compromising the independence of ICVs. Also, for providing excellent initial and refresher training so that ICV panels can perform their essential community role.
- Last but not least thanks to Sarah Walker, our MPA Co-ordinator, for her professionalism and excellent support.

Patrick McHale
Sutton 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 Sutton 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 make a total of 52 visits; varying the days of the week and times of visits to get an accurate picture of the Custody Suite.
- To monitor the findings of reports and to discuss concerns with the Police immediately if need be and/or at the next Panel meeting.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
- To endeavour to attend all panel meetings.
- To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; to ensure that the membership does not fall below the current level and ideally reflects the community served by the Panel.
- To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
- To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Sutton.
- To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.

Visits

In 2009 the panel made a total 53 visits against the target of 52. This represents an excellent achievement of 102% of the panels visiting target. The panel has achieved 100% of its visiting target during the last 5 years. All panel members are dedicated individuals who are committed to ensuring detainees are treated well and that their rights are being respected. In June 2009 the panel was one of nine panels awarded a best performing panel award for their visiting achievement during 2008. The panel aims to continue this achievement in 2010.

A good spread of visiting times was also achieved in 2009. 14 visits were made between 06:00 and 11:59, 16 visits were conducted between 12:00 and 17:59 and 21 visits were made between 18:00 and 23:59. 2 visits were conducted between 00:00 and 05:59. Although detainees have a right to eight hours undisturbed rest it

is important that a small number of visits take place between these times to ensure the panel checks on the running of the custody suite at night. The Panel were pleased to observe that Sutton custody officers and staff maintained a high standard of care towards detainees during these visits.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects (see page 13). There were no significant issues raised during majority of visits and any concerns were addressed by custody staff promptly at the time of the visit. There were no recurring issues recorded in ICV reports during 2009.

Meetings and events

The panel meets quarterly to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. **In 2009 the panel achieved a 76% attendance record.**

Sutton borough police representatives attend each panel meeting. The officers keep the panel advised of any custody developments at Sutton custody suite, within borough and across the Metropolitan Police Service. During 2009 Chief Inspector Mark Hill and Inspector Andy Brittain acted as the police representatives for the panel. Inspector Stuart Rushworth attended the July meeting on behalf of the police representatives. The panel has an excellent working relationship with the police representatives and would like to thank them for their prompt response to panel concerns and attendance at meetings throughout 2009.

The panel also welcomed the Mayor of Sutton, Councillor Margaret Court to the July meeting. The Mayor gave an excellent talk on her role, took part in a wide ranging and thought-provoking discussion on policing issues and took questions from the panel. The Mayor also thanked the panel for their voluntary work on behalf of the Sutton community. The panel are very grateful to the Mayor for taking time out of her busy schedule to attend the meeting.

2009 was a successful year for recruitment as two new members joined the panel (see pages 8 and 9). By the end of 2009 both were fully accredited members having attended their initial training course and successfully completed their probationary period.

All panel members undertook refresher training modules during the April and October panel meetings. One member also attended Diversity training at the MPA in November 2009.

During the year the Chair, Vice Chair and Panel Members represented the Sutton Panel at numerous meeting and events including:

- Meetings of the Sutton Community and Police Forum
- Meetings of the London ICVP Chairs and Vice Chairs with the MPA
- A meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the South / South-East Cluster of ICVPs
- The national Independent Custody Visiting Conference
- The London ICV Scheme Summer Social
- The MPA's 'Policing with authority' conference

Five panel members attended the Sutton Police Station Open Day on Sunday 20 September. This was a very popular event with over 1800 people attending the police station to find out more about what police officers do. One of the most visited areas was the Custody Suite. Custody visitors were on hand throughout the day to answer questions. The MPA is grateful to Patrick McHale, Alison Griffiths, David Fendt, Helen Griffin and Richard Lennard for attending the Open Day on behalf of the Sutton panel. The custody visitors agreed that it was a very successful day and a fun way to raise public awareness of custody visiting.

The panel will continue to seek out and use every opportunity to raise public awareness of independent custody visiting in Sutton and London-wide.

The panel would also like to thank Alison Griffiths for organising a Christmas Dinner. Everyone agreed it was an enjoyable evening and a good opportunity to get to know each other better.

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.

During 2009 the panel welcomed two new members; David Fendt and Helen Griffin. Debbie Barnard was also welcomed back following a sabbatical period. By the close of 2009 the panel had 10 active accredited members.

There is an equal balance of male and female membership. Panel membership also covers a spectrum of age groups. However, the panel would like to increase its diversity in terms of ethnicity.

During 2009 the Sutton panel had 10 accredited members:

Name	Appointed
Debbie Barnard	July 2006
Tony Budden	August 2008
David Fendt	April 2009
Helen Griffin	June 2009
Alison Griffiths (Vice Chair)	June 2004
Richard Lennard	April 2004
Jackie McAndrew	May 2008
Patrick McHale (Chair)	January 2004
Sem Simkins	February 2004
Fiona White	January 2005

The target membership for a panel visiting one custody suite is eight members plus one or two people as reserves. This number allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to the custody suite. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month.

The panel finished 2008 with only 7 active members. In 2009 the panel continued its recruitment efforts of previous years. Local recruitment included poster and leaflet distribution, a local radio advert and advertising with Sutton Volunteer Centre.

Through these efforts the Sutton panel had recruited two new members and achieved its target membership by June 2009. 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. Visitors must have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system. For example, they cannot be serving police officers or staff, special constables or magistrates.

For more information please see the MPA web site on the ICV Scheme at: <http://www.mpa.gov.uk/partnerships/icv/get-involved/> or contact: ICV Co-ordinator by freephone: 0808 100 1036, minicom: 020 7202 0173, by e-mail: icvrecruitment@mpa.gov.uk or enquiries by post: ICV Co-ordinator, MPA, FREEPOST, LON17808, LONDON SW1H 0DY.

Station Visit Issues

Sutton borough has one 24/7 operational custody suite located in Sutton 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 Sutton ICVP. Sutton is a large modern police station with 30 cells

The panel is pleased to report that in 2009 there were no major issues or recurring concerns relating to police custody at Sutton Police Station. As can be seen on page 13 issues that detainees put to custody visitors, include requests for food, drink, blankets, medical attention or legal advice. When issues were raised with the custody staff they were dealt with promptly and the custody visitors are grateful for the cooperation that police officers and staff have extended to them on their visits during the year. However, the panel is never complacent and issues of concern will continue to be immediately brought to the attention of the Custody Sergeant / Chief Inspector.

During the year exchange visits were arranged between the Merton and Sutton ICVPs giving custody visitors the opportunity to shadow visits with their neighbouring panel. A number of Sutton and Merton panel members took up the opportunity. Sutton custody suite is a large modern station with a custody suite of 30 cells. By comparison Wimbledon station is much older than Sutton and contains a smaller custody suite of 10 cells. Custody visitors found that it was both interesting and useful to visit in a different custody environment.

2009 saw Sutton custody suite join the Virtual Court pilot scheme. The Virtual Court enables a defendant, to appear in a magistrates' court for their first hearing via video link whilst remaining in the police custody suite. Sutton was one of a number custody suite in the Metropolitan Police Area to join the scheme. Inspector Chris Pullen of the Virtual Courts Implementation Team gave an excellent presentation on the Virtual Court pilot at the panel's January meeting. The panel thank him for attending the meeting. No concerns or issues were raised by detainees with the panel regarding the virtual court.

From 1st September to 30th November the Sutton panel took part in the second stage of the London ICV Scheme Self Introduction Pilot. During this time ICVs introduced themselves to detainees and enquired whether or not the detainee wished to speak with them. ICVs also directly asked the detainees if they could look at the detainee's custody record. Previously it had been the role of the escorting officer to introduce custody visitors. The self introduction pilot was extremely successful, with the acceptance of visits rising from 70% to 94%. As a result the panel decided to continue to use self-introduction on completion of the pilot period.

The panel's relationship with the custody staff has continued to be positive and overall the panel is happy with the standard of care shown to detainees.

Statistical Analysis of 2009 Panel Reports

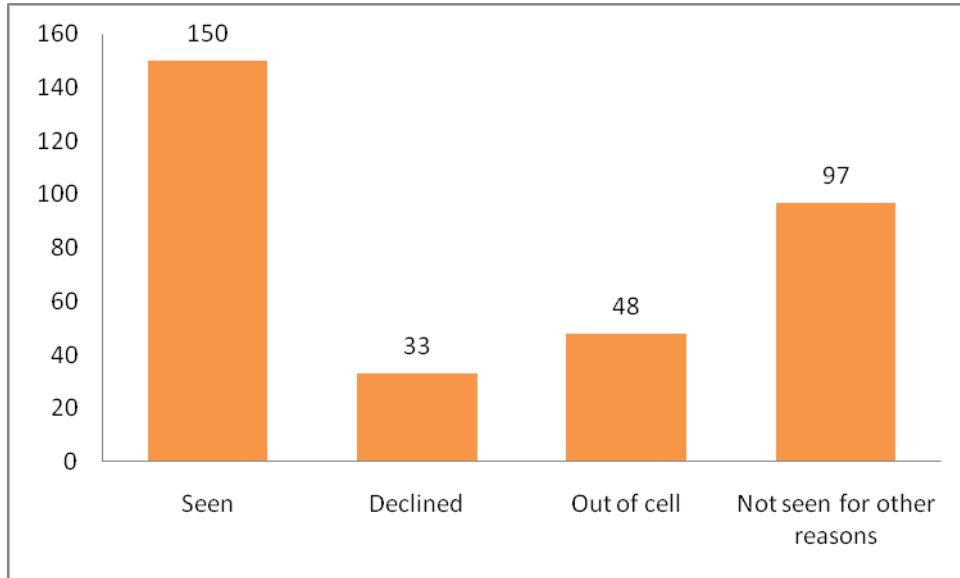
Number of detainees seen by ICVs and total number held at Sutton Custody Suite

Year	Seen	Total	% Seen
2009	150	6578	2.3%
2008	165	6511	2.5%
2007	160	6559	2.4%

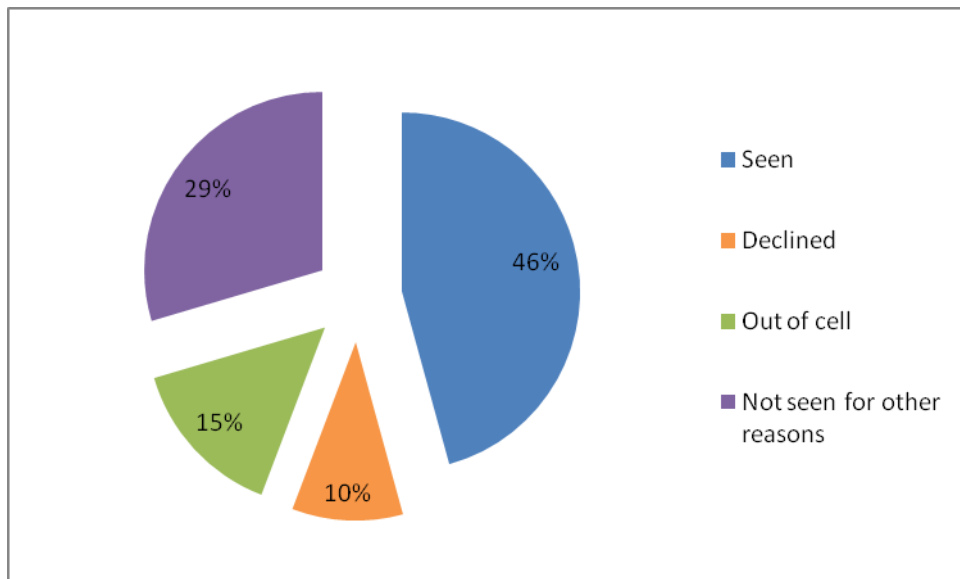
Breakdown of detainees in custody in Sutton Custody Suite during visits by gender, age and category

PACE Adult Male	230
PACE Juvenile Male	28
PACE Adult Female	39
PACE Juvenile Female	8
Immigration Adult Male	11
Immigration Juvenile Male	0
Immigration Adult Female	7
Immigration Juvenile Female	0
Other Adult Male	5
Other Juvenile Male	0
Other Adult Female	0
Other Juvenile Female	0
Total	328

Number of detainees seen by ICVs



Percentage of detainees seen by ICVs

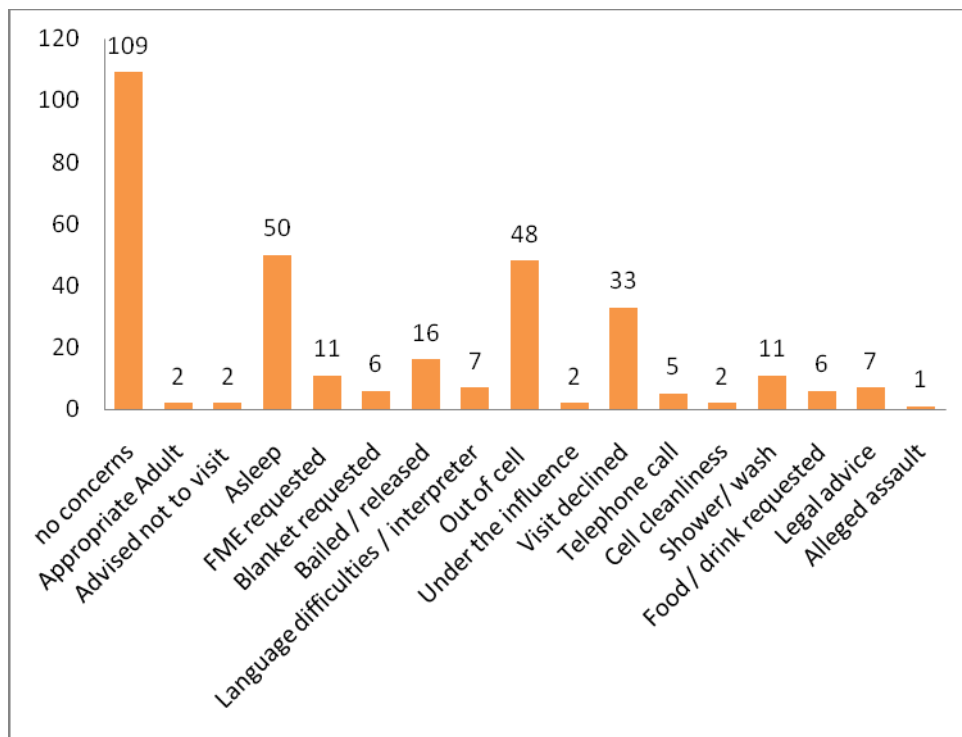


Detainee Concerns

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. Most minor concerns can be resolved during the course of the visit and only more major concerns or more complicated issues will be discussed at a meeting of the whole panel.

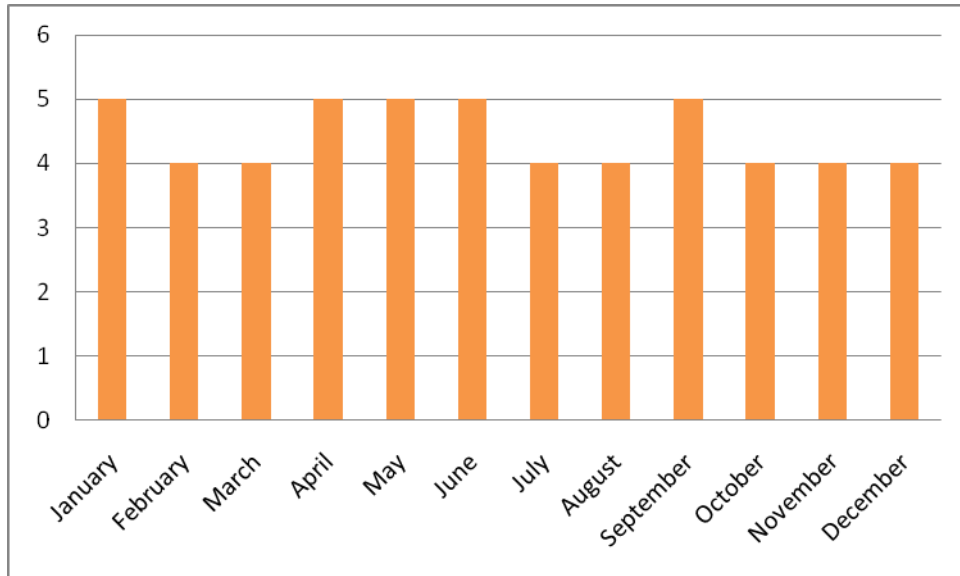
The chart below shows a summary of concerns raised by detainees during visits made to Sutton station in 2009.



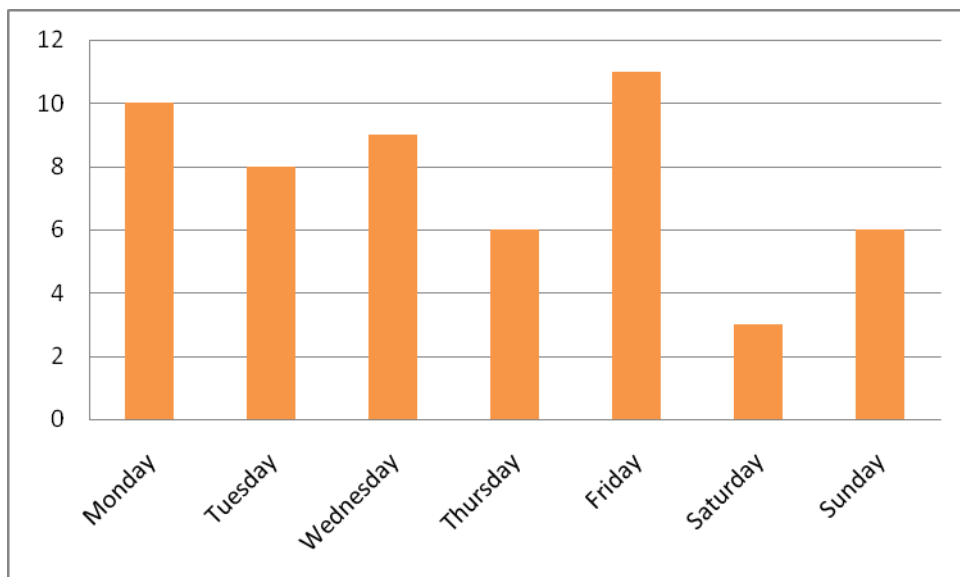
Visit Frequency

Independent Custody Visits are unannounced and the panel's intention is to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern. The following charts display the number of visits carried out at Sutton in 2009, by month, day of the week and time period. As the charts show, the panel achieved a good spread of visits meaning that visits could not have been predicted by the police.

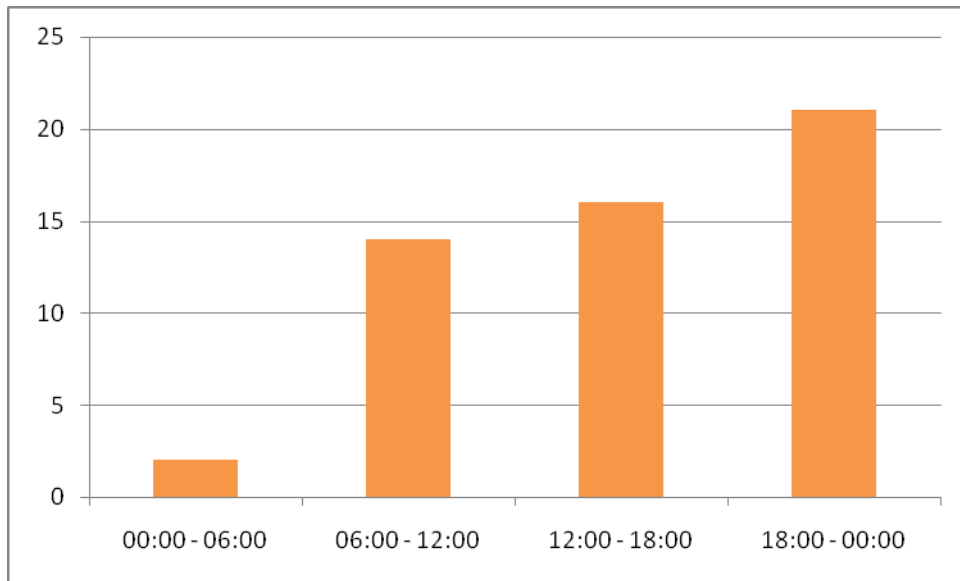
Visits by month



Visits by day



Visits by time period



Targets and Plans 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 Sutton.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide an independent custody visiting scheme in London.