

Wandsworth Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2010

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Introduction

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

The report covers a period from January 2010 to December 2010

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 2011

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 Wandsworth as part of the London ICV scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Wandsworth, 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. 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 2010:

- To make a total of 52 visits to each of the two custody suites in the borough
- To further improve upon the time that visits are made in order to provide a better spread. In particular to ensure that there are more visits in the early morning (00:00 to 07:59) and on Sundays
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police and 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
- Through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to try to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Wandsworth; the panel will make efforts to recruit more younger people

The panel made 89 visits to stations during 2010. This represented 86% of the target which was a 5% improvement on 2009. The visits were fairly evenly spread throughout the week with a slight dip on Mondays (6). 22 of the visits took place at the weekend and the days when most visits were conducted were Tuesday and Wednesday (44 of the total). The earliest visit was undertaken at 02:00 and was one of 7 taking place before 9 am. The latest visit was begun at 20:30.

Panel membership now stands at 15. There were three members leaving the panel during the year and one being recruited. 17 members is the optimum number for a panel visiting two 24/7 stations. Recruitment to this optimum level remains a priority.

Chairman's report

We have welcomed some new members over the past year and are sadly also saying farewell and a big thank you to our Vice Chair of many years, Sandra Roach, who is joining the Independent Board of Prison Visitors at HMP Brixton. Her experience and dedication will be welcomed in this role

We were pleased to hear at the end of 2010 that the new 30 cell capacity dedicated custody suite at the Wandsworth site will be going ahead in 2011. At the time of writing Wandsworth has closed, leaving Battersea as the main custody suite in the Borough with Tooting taking on a role for the duration of the build. We will have to muddle through until the new facility is completed, but we will look forward to a state of the art custody centre in a few years time when the antiquated provision in Battersea & Tooting will no longer be required. We look forward to a modern suite and fewer power cuts!

Relations with the police continue to be good, and there has been a police presence at all of our meetings in 2010. We have coped well with the reduction in MPA administered meetings although attendance hasn't particularly improved. In spite of this, panel members have continued to provide an excellent service to the community and any issues or concerns have been dealt with promptly by Inspector Wild. Our thanks go to Inspector Wild and his team for their courtesy and consideration during our visits.

Taking a lead from the national ICV body, ICVA, panel members have been focussing on issues around adequate washing facilities or detainees being provided with reading material whilst held in custody. These issues were subject of a London wide Chairs' meeting at the MPA earlier in 2010. To this end, panel members have donated books which are available at each station where people are held in detention.

The panel has undertaken some in service training after panel meetings and regular information is exchanged with our Administrator, Tony Hawker, who has provided an excellent service. As panel Chair, I have been involved with the Wandsworth Police Consultative Committee and presented this body with an overview of the panel's work last year.

My thanks go to all members of the panel for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. I would also like to thank our MPA Coordinator for making sure panel members have had all the support that they need.

Liz Carboni
Chairman

Panel 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.

There have been three members leaving the panel in 2010 (one resigned from the scheme and two have transferred to other boroughs. One new member was recruited but did not make any visits during 2010. This means that the panel is slightly under full strength with 15 members. The optimum size is 17 for a panel that has the responsibility for visiting two 24/7 custody suites.

The population of the borough as a whole is 48% male and 52% female. Of those who visited in 2010, the majority of panel members (12), including the Chair, were female. The panel, over the whole year, tended to be predominantly made up of members in the two older two age brackets 45-65 (7) and 65+ (5). There are now 4 in the 25-45 age group and one member is under 25 years old.

The panel is healthily diverse in its make-up and although this diversity doesn't form an exact match to the demographic breakdown of the borough as identified by census figures and projections, we can confidently state that no applicants are denied membership of the Wandsworth panel on the basis of any information provided in the diversity monitoring completed on application

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Wandsworth and Battersea police stations operate full time. Tooting is used only occasionally as an overflow facility. The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Wandsworth and Battersea police stations. During 2010 a total of 8,442 detainees were held in Wandsworth custody suites. During the times of the visits by ICVs 415 detainees were held. Of these, 302 were offered visits and 178 accepted.

There were few major concerns voiced by the detainees interviewed. Of all detainees who accepted a visit (178), 104 had no concerns, complaints or comments about their treatment while detained. The main issues/requests most reported by detainees and resolved by ICVs were: requests for an FME, supply of already prescribed medication or other general health concerns (24); requests for a solicitor (18), interpreter (9) or appropriate adult (8) and several (11) had worries that no one had been informed of their detention or wanted the use of a telephone. The remaining concerns and requests centred around detainees not receiving food or drink, blankets and washing opportunities. There were also records of conversations with detainees which just noted facts about their detention and were not complaints as such. Wandsworth ICVs also provided detainees with reassurance that problems already raised were being dealt with. The majority of all contacts with detainees were resolved to the satisfaction of the ICVs at the time of the visit and no further action was required.

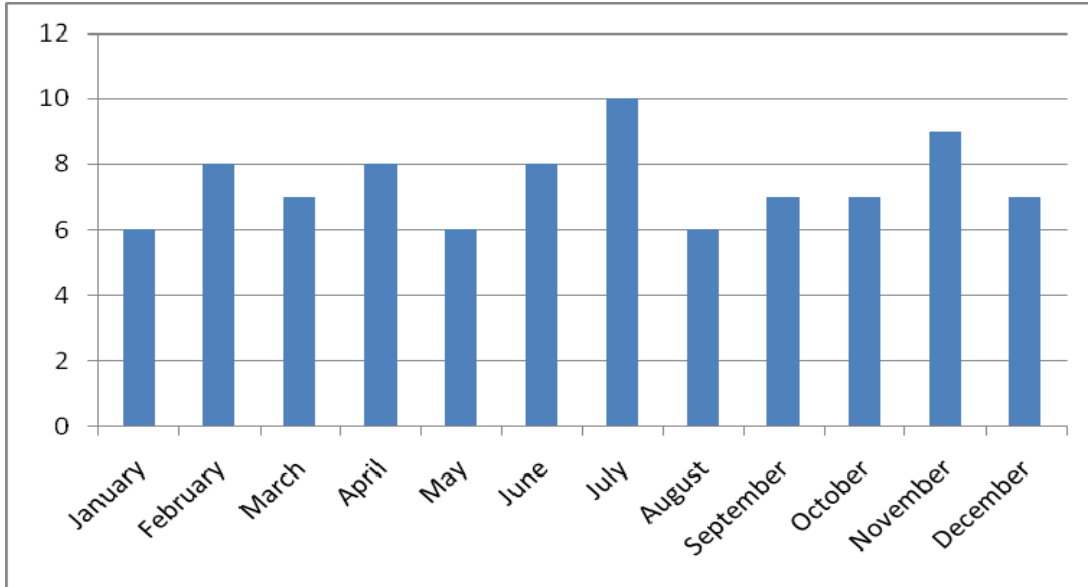
Matters that could not be resolved at the police station were escalated for discussion at the panel meetings. The majority of reports (69 of 89) had no matters requiring a police response. Those that did could be broken down as follows in approximate order according to volume.

- General concerns the provision of support to detainees such as solicitors, Appropriate Adults and interpreters.
- The FME service and the general health of detainees.
- The supply of comforts to detainees such as blankets, opportunities for washing, and reading matter
- Questions about the release of detainees and provision for them in terms of clothing etc..
- There were only a very small number of matters that related to the infrastructure of the custody suites. There were a few cells out of action awaiting repairs on a few occasions.
- The performance of Wandsworth police officers was generally praised with only one negative comment entered as a matter requiring a response and only one occasion when access was delayed inappropriately.

Data from panel visits

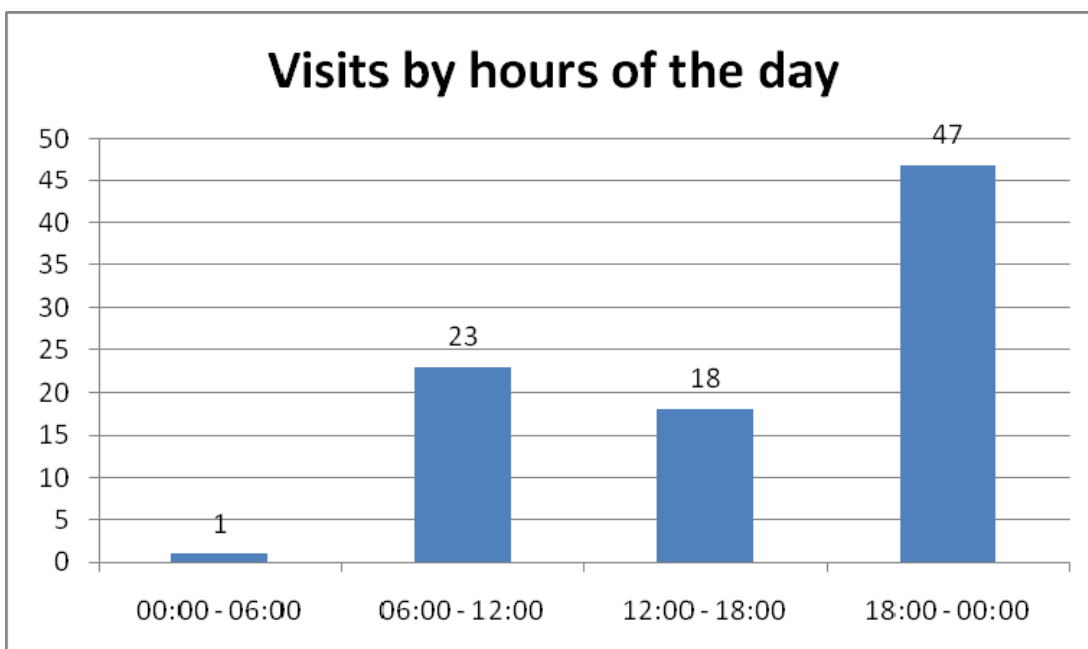
1. Number of Visits

| Station | Annual no. of visits | % of Annual Target |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Wandsworth | 46 | 88% |
| Battersea | 43 | 82% |
| Total | 89 | 86% |

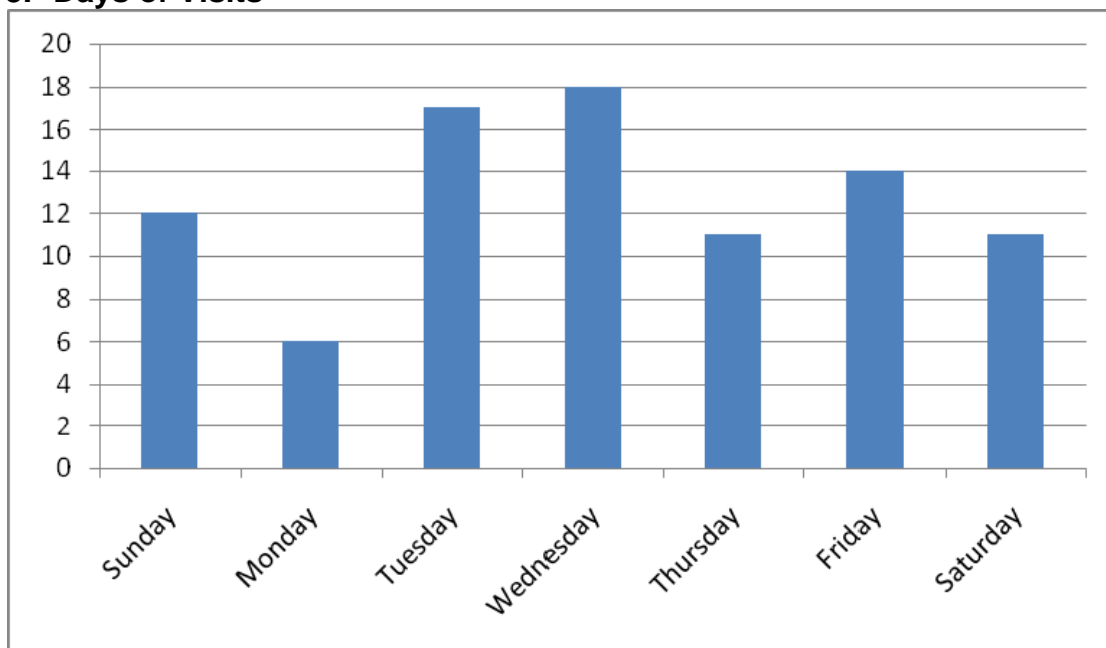


2. Time of Visits

| Time Period | Annual no |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 00:00 – 06:00 hrs | 1 |
| 06:00 – 12:00 hrs | 23 |
| 12:00 – 18:00 hrs | 18 |
| 18:00 – 00:00 hrs | 47 |
| Total | 89 |



3. Days of Visits



Breakdown of detainees at the time of the visits

| Total in custody | Offered a visit | Accepted a visit | Refused a visit |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 425 | 313 | 178 | 135 |

| | Adult | Juvenile | Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 313 | 41 | 354 |
| Female | 62 | 9 | 71 |
| Total | 375 | 50 | 425 |

Detainee by type

| PACE | Immigration | Other | Total |
|------|-------------|-------|-------|
| 408 | 12 | 5 | 425 |

Plans for the forthcoming year 2011

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2011 are as follows:

- To make a total of 52 visits to each of the two custody suites in the borough
- To further improve upon the time that visits are made in order to provide a better spread.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police and 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
- Through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to try to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Wandsworth; the panel will make efforts to recruit more younger people