



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Lambeth Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Lambeth Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP). This report covers the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007.

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

- Inform the local community and the MPA about the treatment of people held in police custody in the London borough of Lambeth;
- Set out the issues and concerns that have arisen during 2007;
- Evaluate the panel's performance; and
- Set out the panel's objectives and plans for 2008.

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the Lambeth Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

Who are Independent Custody Visitors?

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.

What do Independent Custody Visitors do?

Once a week two visitors from the Lambeth ICVP attend Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations 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.

History of Independent Custody Visiting

The Independent Custody Visitors scheme, formally known as the Lay Visitors' scheme was introduced in the mid-1980s following a recommendation in Lord Scarman's report into the 1981 Brixton riots. Since then panels have evolved throughout the United Kingdom as an important means of securing accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, bringing police and communities closer together and enhancing public perception of police procedures and practices. It is now mandatory for each Police Authority in the country to have a Custody Visiting Scheme in place.

The MPA and London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

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 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 Lambeth, 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 each panel.

How to become an Independent Custody Visitor

The MPA is seeking to recruit visitors from as many different backgrounds and communities as possible to ensure the scheme reflects London's diversity.

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/recruit.htm> 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.

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 central objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to the custody suites in Lambeth to check and report on the treatment of people in police custody and to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed.

This is achieved by:

- Making one visit per week to Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations;
- Holding monthly panel meetings; and
- Increasing public awareness of the London ICV Visiting Scheme.

Visits

In 2007 the panel made a total of 58 visits against the target of 156. This represents 37% of the panels visiting target. 20 visits were made to Brixton, 16 to Kennington and 22 to Streatham.

Unfortunately there were a number of setbacks in 2007 which prevented the panel performing at its best. With only 13 panel members and difficulty recruiting new members, the panel remained understaffed throughout the year. However, the panel members are highly dedicated individuals, committed to ensuring detainees are treated well and that their rights are being respected. They carried out as many visits as possible. In 2008 the panel will focus on recruiting new panel members and it is hoped that the panel's visiting performance will improve.

The panel achieved a good spread of visiting days and times in 2007. 6 visits were made between 08:00 and 11:59 and 11 visits were conducted between 12:00 and 15:59. 26 visits were made between 16:00 and 19:59 and 15 visits were conducted between 20:00 and 23:59. One visit was conducted between 00:00 and 07:59. No visits were conducted between 00:00 and 07:59. 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 will aim to vary the timing of visits more in 2008.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects and in the majority of cases there were no significant issues raised. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that have been recorded in ICV reports during 2007.

The panel members continue to donate books and magazines for detainees. These are given to detainees by custody staff following proper risk assessment.

Meetings and events

The panel meets monthly to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences and the panel has a good attendance record. A police representative attends each meeting. Inspector Huitson attends each panel meeting. His role is to inform the panel of developments at Lambeth custody suites and within borough and to give feedback on issues raised during visits. The panel would like to thank him for his attendance at meetings throughout 2007.

During the year the Chair, Vice Chair and Panel Members represented the Lambeth Panel at:

- Meetings of the Lambeth Community and Police Consultative Group
- 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
- Lambeth County Fair

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

Recruitment and Membership

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.

During 2007 the Lambeth panel had 13 accredited members.

The panel comprised of 7 men and 6 women with varying diversity in age and ethnicity.

Recruitment

The target membership for a panel that visits 3 custody suites is around 24 members plus additional members as reserves. This number allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to the 3 Lambeth custody suites. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month.

Throughout 2007 we actively promoted the Lambeth panel with the aim of recruiting new members. Local recruitment included sending posters and leaflets to all Lambeth libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureau's, free legal advice centres and various doctors and dentist surgeries and colleges across Lambeth. Panel Members also attended The Lambeth County Fair and distributed publicity and recruitment material at the event. The MPA advertised regularly in the Metro and Evening Standard newspapers and on the MPA website. The panel is registered with Lambeth Volunteer Centre and advertises on the national volunteering website www.do-it.org.uk.

Despite recruitment efforts the Lambeth panel remained short of members in 2007. In 2008 we will continue to seek new members of all ages and from all parts of the community.

Station Visit Issues

There are three custody suites in Lambeth. These are located in Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations. The panel aims to make weekly, unannounced visits to each custody suite.

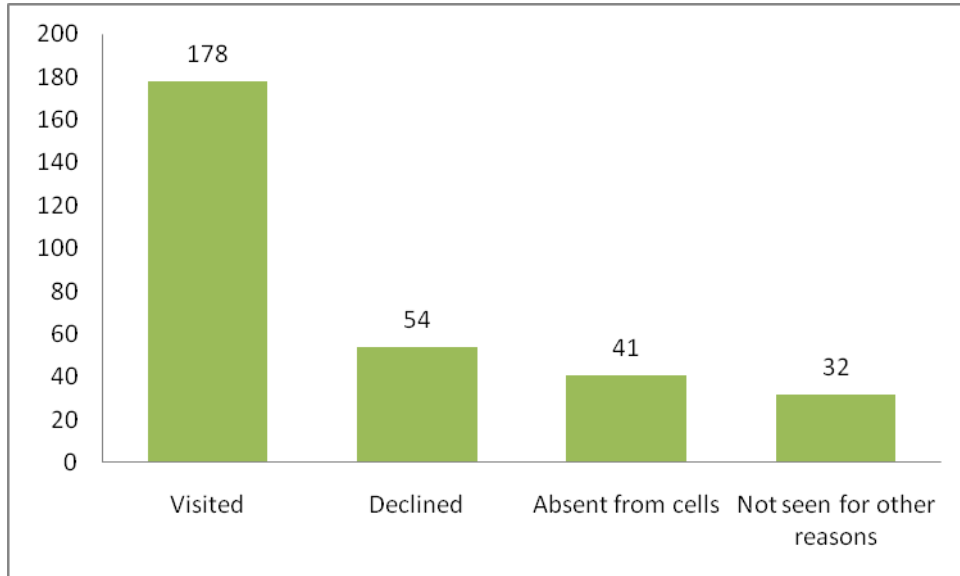
Most of our reports have not raised any significant issues that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. However, there have been some recurring issues of concern:

- Detainees' access to showers and washing facilities was a recurring concern throughout 2007. Detainees do not seem to be aware that they need to ask for a shower or wash, and when they do ask they are sometimes told that there staff are not available to facilitate it. The panel would like to see all detainees held overnight offered a shower / wash.
- The panel has continued to raise concerns about the suitability of Streatham custody suite as a place of detention. Streatham custody suite does not have showering facilities.
- Entry to the custody suite was delayed on one occasion. After identifying themselves as ICVs at the reception desk of the police station ICVs should be immediately admitted to the custody area. Access can be delayed only where ICVs may be placed in danger. If delays occur a full explanation should be given to the ICVs and is included in the ICV visit report.
- On 2 occasions detainees raised allegations of assault or maltreatment on arrest. In such cases the custody visitors always ensure that the detainee is aware of the procedure to make a complaint.

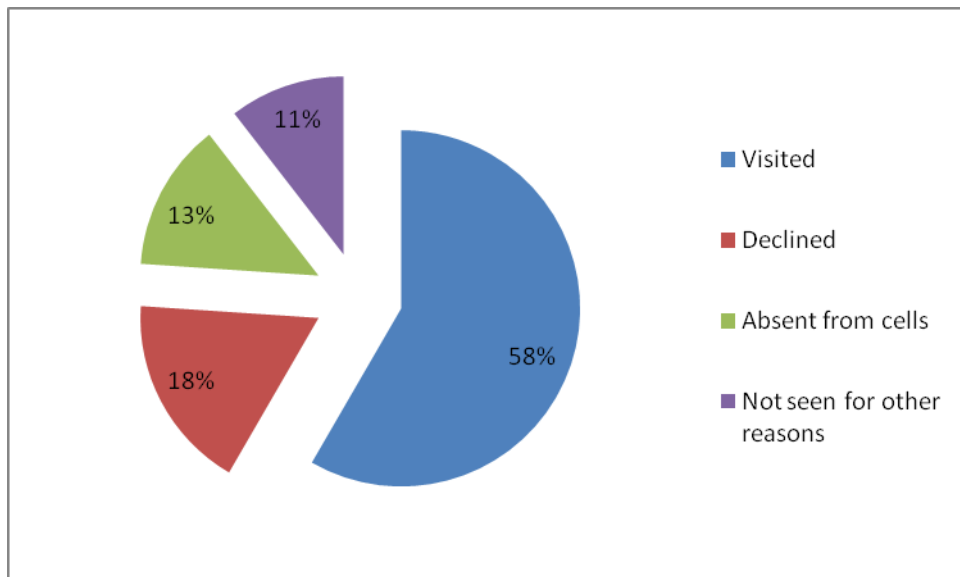
The panel has a good working relationship with the police representative, Inspector Paul Huitson, and the panel is grateful for his prompt and thorough responses to the issues they raise.

Statistical Analysis of 2008 Panel Reports

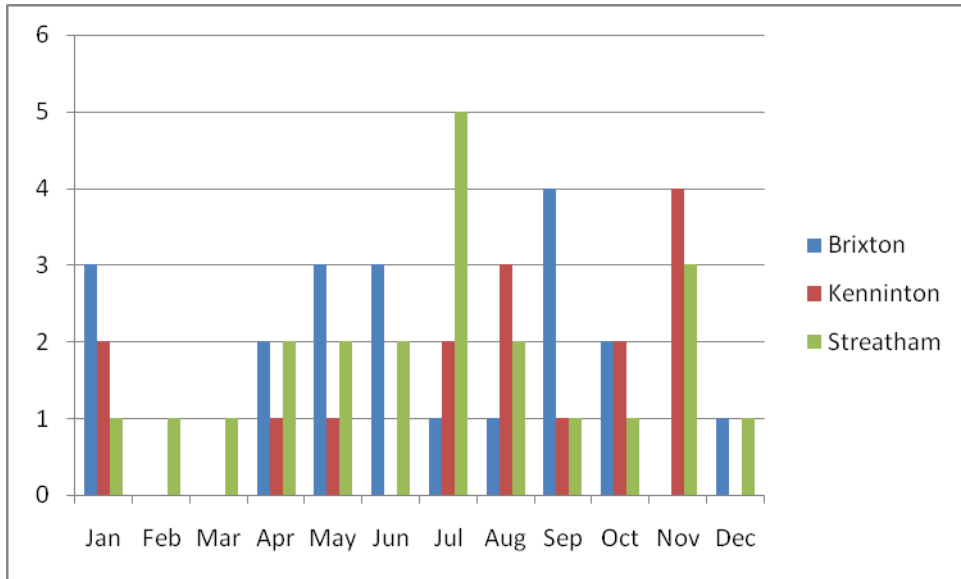
Number of detainees seen by ICVs



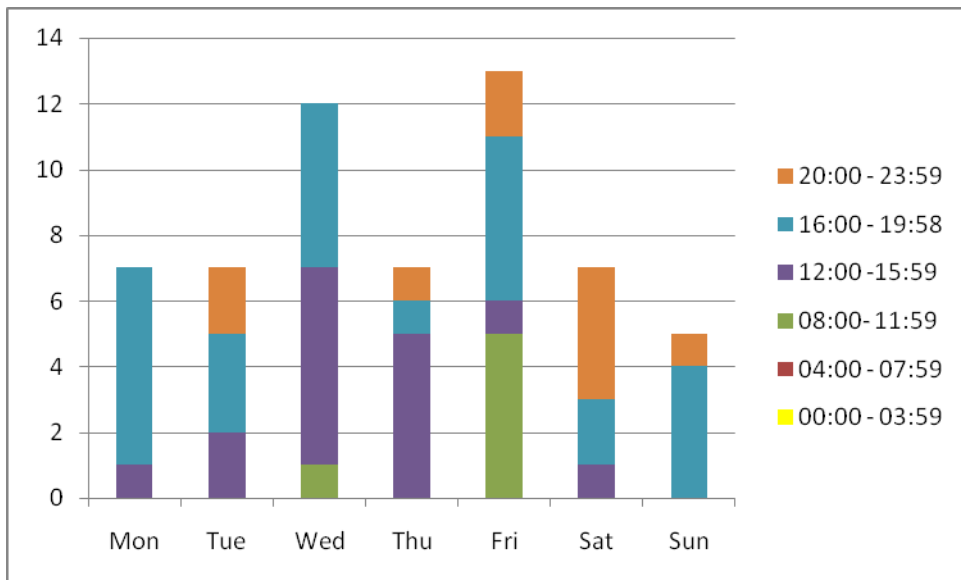
Percentage of detainees seen by ICVs



Visits per station by month

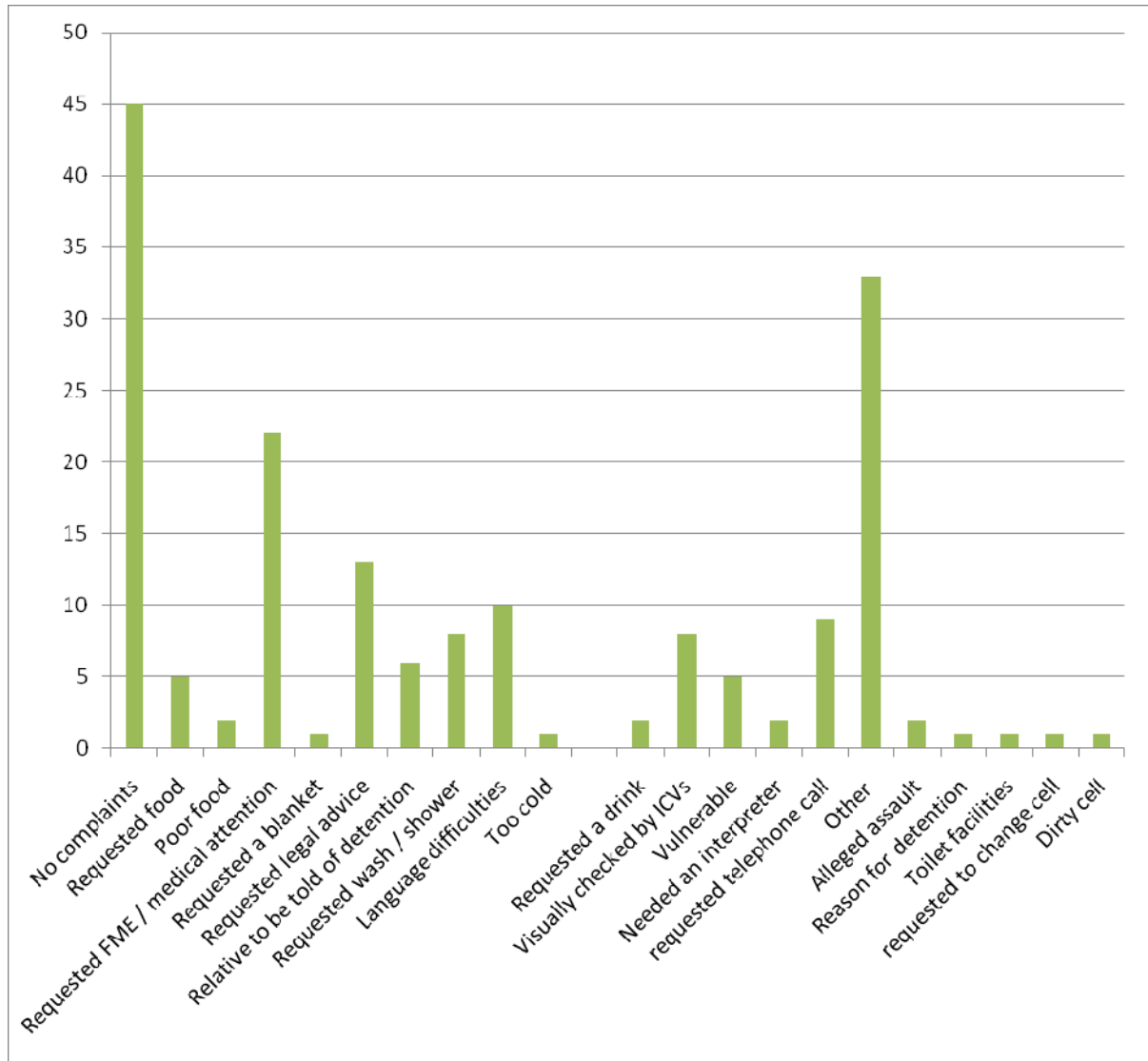


Visits by day and time period



Detainee Concerns

The chart below shows a summary of concerns raised by detainees during visits made to Lambeth station in 2007.



Targets and Plans for 2008

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
2. To ensure each station receives one visit a 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 continue to monitor the provision of washes in all of custody suites
5. To endeavour to ensure regular attendance at panel meetings by all ICVs.
6. To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; to ensure that the membership increases and reflects the community served by the Panel.
7. To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
8. To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Lambeth.
9. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.