



**Sutton Independent
Custody Visiting Panel**

**Annual Report Year Ending
31 December 2007**



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Sutton Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP), covering the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Inform the community of the work undertaken by the Sutton ICVP
- Set out any issues and concerns that have arisen
- Evaluate the panel's performance and
- Set out the objectives for 2008.

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and help with the recruitment of new panel members.

Who are Independent Custody Visitors?

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local community who 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 Sutton ICVP 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 interview a number of detainees in their cells and complete a structured report form.

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 a legal obligation under the Police Reform Act 2002 to provide a custody visiting scheme in London. From its beginnings in Lambeth in 1984, the scheme now operates across all 32 London boroughs and has around 450 volunteers. Each borough has a custody visiting panel to direct local activity, supported by an MPA staff member who coordinates activities and ensures its efficient management.

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 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.

Chair's Report

London ICVs have seen two major changes in 2007:

- MPA centralisation of administration in April 2007 and
- Introduction of the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

Leading up to the changeover in April 2007 there was much debate amongst the London ICVPs about the pros and cons of the MPA centralising administration. The Sutton ICVP was always a strong supporter of centralisation and from our perspective the changeover has gone very smoothly, with our MPA co-ordinator, Sarah Walker, providing excellent administration and technical guidance when asked for.

The MPA had the added pressure of being evacuated from their premises in Dean Farrar Street when the top two floors of the building opposite collapsed on 12 June 2007 and they were not able to return to their office until 2 July 2007.

One of the first things that the MPA did was to provide all ICVs with a London ICV Handbook; this is an excellent document as it draws together a number of key papers for ICVs.

All ICVs signed a Memorandum of Understanding which for the first time set out what was expected of ICVs and what the MPA will provide.

There has been a good flow of appropriate information from the MPA through newsletters etc and there have been two meetings with Chairs.

NSPIS has been used in other parts of the country for some time and was introduced to the MPS in 2007, with Sutton going live 3 July 2007. Instead of hand written custody records everything recorded by MPS officers, John Laing staff and the Forensic Medical Examiner (FME) is computer based. Where ICVs have implied consent or specific consent from detainees we look at the appropriate parts of NSPIS records. These are either called up on screen by the escorting officer (our preferred choice if time permits) or printed off for ICVs to look at (very heavy on paper due to the way that NSPIS is structured). From an ICV point of view NSPIS is a big improvement as records are far easier to read.

Sutton hosted a number of boroughs whilst their custody suites were being upgraded with NSPIS equipment.

There have been just two recurring issues that were subject to email correspondence and discussed with Chief Inspector, Mark Hill at our quarterly panel meetings.

At our January and April panel meetings we discussed the drugs cupboard being left open in the FME room. Whilst the drugs cupboard does not contain any controlled drugs and the door to the FME room was always locked when the FME left, it was agreed that the cupboard needed to be locked. Reminders were issued to all the FMEs and when a key broke in the drugs cupboard lock it was soon repaired.

On 5 August 2007 ICVs were denied immediate access and were asked to come back one hour later to carry out their visit; this was not possible due to other commitments. This incident was immediately reported to the chair and an email sent to Mark Hill, who responded promptly on 7 August 2007. In this instance an Equion staff member denied access. Mark contacted the Deputy Equion Services Manager and a reminder was issued to all Equion staff that they must allow ICVs immediate access.

Mark Hill advised panel members that if for operational reasons it is not possible to conduct the visit straightaway then it is reasonable to ask ICVs to wait but this should take place in the custody suite. Should this happen again ICVs should contact the custody officer or duty officer and request immediate access to the custody suite.

On 5 October 2007 ICVs were again denied immediate access to the custody suite, this time by the custody sergeant. ICVs contacted the chair who reminded them of the advice given by Mark Hill and after contacting the custody suite the ICVs were granted access. A local operation had taken place involving the Serious Crime Directorate and this had resulted in the custody suite being extremely busy. Custody staff were reminded that ICVs are entitled to immediate access.

In general we found that detainees were treated satisfactorily within the provisions of the law. Many detainees praised the custody staff for the high standard of care shown towards them and commented on the high quality of the custody suite facilities.

I am very grateful to all panel members for their time and commitment and for the **third year running meeting our target of averaging 1 visit per week.** Their efficiency in arranging visits and reporting accurately on them has been exemplary.

On behalf of the panel I thank the following:

- Chief Inspector Mark Hill for his support in: addressing the issues raised and attending all our quarterly panel meetings.
- The MPS officers in the custody suite and the John Laing civilian staff working at the front desk and custody suite who have been professional, courteous, and open to our visits
- Karen Stanley-Bristowe who has been our efficient administrator for 4 years and was replaced by our MPA Co-ordinator in April 2007.
- Last and not least the MPA and our MPA Co-ordinator Sarah Walker for their excellent support during this time of change.

Patrick McHale
Chair Sutton Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Aims and Achievements

The aims and objectives of the panel are laid out in the Home Office Codes of Practice (PACE), the National Standards governing Independent Custody Visiting and the MPA ICV Handbook.

The primary objective of the panel is to check and report on the treatment of detainees in Sutton police station and to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed. This is achieved by:

- Making one visit per week
- Holding quarterly panel meetings and
- Increasing public awareness of the London ICV Visiting Scheme.

Visits

The panel achieved its visiting target of one visit per week during 2007. However, only 50 visits were undertaken in 2007 as the custody suite was closed for part of two weeks in April / May. During this time detainees were not held in Sutton custody suite. Rolling statistics of visit days and times were maintained in 2007, which has enabled members to spread visits evenly throughout the week.

The panel achieved its aim of undertaking some visits between 00.00 and 08.00; two visits were undertaken between 04.00 and 07.59. Detainees have a right to eight hours undisturbed sleep. However, members visit during these hours to check on the running of the custody suite at night.

Sutton has a modern well maintained custody suite with 30 cells. Thankfully the Sutton ICVP does not encounter issues to do with the physical conditions under which detainees are kept, unlike many London ICVPs visiting older custody suites. However, the panel is never complacent and issues of concern are immediately brought to the attention of the custody sergeant/chief inspector.

A typical visit can be summarised as follows:

- Two panel members attend the police station to undertake an unannounced custody visit. ICVs are entitled to immediate access to the custody suite and we are normally let in promptly. Access should only be delayed where the ICVs may be placed in danger
- We introduce ourselves to the custody sergeant and are made aware of any issues that could impact on our visit
- The escorting officer is normally a member of the John Laing civilian staff (formally known as Equion), who is aware of our role and introduces us to the detainees in a professional manner
- The cells are clean and well maintained
- No complaints about dirty blankets; a common complaint in many other Boroughs, although a common request is for a second blanket
- Heating/cooling in cells normally OK
- Food and drink are provided and normally no adverse comments on the quality, although a common request is for a drink of water
- Washing facilities/showers are available although detainees sometimes seem to be unaware of their availability. Staff do not always have the time to arrange showers

- Detainees are aware of their rights and few issues/complaints are raised by them, indeed **most detainees comment positively on the way in which they are handled by the MPS officers and John Laing staff**
- Issues like an extra blanket or a drink of water are noted by the escorting officer as we go around and dealt with promptly
- Showers, medical room, stores and kitchen area all clean and tidy
- ICVs normally have access to one of the interview rooms to talk in private and write their report
- Where appropriate issues are discussed with the custody sergeant and noted on the report; only occasionally have these needed to be discussed at our quarterly panel meetings
- A copy of the report are sent to Chief Inspector Mark Hill, the chair and like all panels a copy also goes to the MPA
- **The MPS officers and John Laing staff at the Sutton custody suite appear to be proud of their well maintained, clean and efficiently run custody suite.**

Meetings and events

The panel meets quarterly to discuss: issues from visits, administration issues and to share experiences. The panel has a good 73% attendance record.

Chief Inspector Mark Hill attended all our quarterly meetings and has: keep us advised of developments at the Sutton custody suite and replied promptly to all emails.

The chair has represented the Sutton panel at:

- Quarterly meetings of the Sutton Community and Police Forum
- Meetings of the Sutton Independent Advisory Group
- Meetings of the London ICV chairs with the MPA
- Custody practitioners meeting with the MPS and
- The Independent Custody Visiting Association National Conference.

Thanks to Debbie Bernard for arranging an enjoyable panel meal at a local restaurant in December. Everyone agreed that it was good to talk to their ICV colleagues in a relaxed environment and get to know each other a little better.

Membership

Members of Sutton ICVP and number of visits made in 2007

• Debbie Barnard		12
• Mahmood Bhatti	Joined December 2007	0
• Alison Griffiths	Vice Chair	15
• Alfred Kessler	Retired	1
• Richard Lennard		14
• Patrick McHale	Chair	19
• Sem Simkins		13
• Amy White	Retired	8
• Fiona White		14
• Anon	Retired	4
• Total		100

Recruitment and Training

Three experienced and highly valued panel members retired during 2007: Alfred Kessler, Amy White and a member who wishes to remain anonymous; we wish them well for the future.

One new panel member joined the panel in December 2007 and was recruited through contact with the Sutton Community and Police Forum. New members complete a six-month probation period. During this time they must complete their initial MPA training course and visit with experienced panel members. Mahmood Bhatti completed his initial training course in December 2007 and will undertake visits from January 2008.

Like all London ICV panels, Sutton ICVP aims to reflect the diversity of the local community. Throughout 2007 we actively promoted Sutton ICVP with the aim of recruiting additional members. As part of our 2007 recruitment drive we sent posters and leaflets to all Sutton libraries, Citizens Advice Bureau's and various doctor's and dentist surgeries and colleges across Sutton. The MPA also advertised regularly in the Metro and Evening Standard newspapers. The chair gave a presentation about Sutton ICVP at a meeting of the Sutton Community and Police Forum.

We are registered with Volunteer Centre Sutton (VCS) and had a stand at the VCS Volunteering Fair on Saturday 8 September 2007.

We are also registered with the National Volunteering web site:

<http://www.do-it.org.uk/> and can see our entry at:

<http://www.do-it.org.uk/oppdetails.do?id=936968>

Through these efforts we have raised the profile of Sutton ICVP. However, our membership has reduced to 7 and whilst we can operate with this number we continue to seek new members of all ages and from all parts of the community.

Administration

Between 1 January 2007 and 31 March 2007 the London Borough of Sutton through the Safer Sutton Partnership provided administrative support to the panel, to a very high standard. During this period Karen Stanley-Bristowe was the designated part time administrator, working from home.

From 1 April 2007 the MPA centralised the administration of the London ICV panels. The MPA appointed seven co-ordinators; our co-ordinator, Sarah Walker, is also responsible for Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton and Southwark (responsibility for Croydon ceases January 2008).

Statistical Analysis of 2007 Panel Reports

No of Detainees held at the Sutton custody suite – MPS figures

2007	6,559
2006	7,565

Detainees in custody during visits by: gender, age and category

PACE Adult Male	175
PACE Juvenile Male	25
PACE Adult Female	39
PACE Juvenile Female	12
Immigration Adult Male	23
Immigration Juvenile Male	0
Immigration Adult Female	3
Immigration Juvenile Female	0
Other Adult Male	2
Other Juvenile Male	0
Other Adult Female	1
Other Juvenile Female	0
Total	280

Detainees seen by Independent Custody Visitors

Number of detainees seen	160
Number of detainees who declined to be seen	43
Number of detainees absent from cell for interviews etc	56
Number of detainees not seen for other reasons	21
Total	280

Visits per month in 2007

January	5	February	3	March	5	Quarterly Total	13
April	4	May	2	June	4	Quarterly Total	10**
July	5	August	4	September	4	Quarterly Total	13
October	5	November	4	December	5	Quarterly Total	14

Visits by day and time

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Totals
00.00 03.59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
04.00 07.59	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
08.00 11.59	2	2	2	0	2	2	3	13
12.00 15.59	3	1	0	3	1	2	1	11
16.00 19.59	3	4	4	3	2	2	1	19
20.00 23.59	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
Totals	12	7	8	7	5	6	5	50**

** Two visits in April/May were missed due to the custody suite being closed for NSPIS preparation.

Targets and Plans for 2008

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
2. To make an average of 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 appropriate MPS staff immediately and if need be at the next quarterly panel meeting.
4. To endeavour to attend all panel meetings.
5. 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.
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 it's statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.

Abbreviations used in the Annual Report:

- FME Forensic Medical Examiner
- ICV Independent Custody Visitor
- ICVP Independent Custody Visiting Panel
- MPA Metropolitan Police Authority
- MPS Metropolitan Police Service
- NSPIS National Strategy for Police Information Systems
- PACE Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- VCS Volunteer Centre Sutton