



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

**Barking and Dagenham
Independent Custody
Visiting Panel**

Annual Report 2008



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Barking and Dagenham Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers the period from January 2008 to December 2008

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 2009

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. In April 2007 the MPA brought together the custody visiting arrangements managed by the boroughs into one London scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Barking and Dagenham, 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.

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 a balance of age, gender and ethnicity. 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. This year's annual report covers the period January 2008 to December 2008. This new reporting arrangement brings Barking and Dagenham in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

Chairperson's report

The period covered by this report has been a challenging time for the panel with a decline in membership and the new administrative arrangements provided directly by the MPA. We are successfully addressing recruitment with a number of new members joining the panel which reflect the demographic of the borough and have reflected on the panel's performance which has significantly improved.

Working with the local Police service, the panel is constantly working to improve the facilities available to detainees with an awareness of their varied cultural and religious needs. I believe the work of the panel continues to be highly regarded and has an important role to play in Barking and Dagenham.

With the building of the new police station in the next few years, the responsibility of the panel will increase but I am sure that with the support of the MPA we will continue to work and maintain an outstanding service in the years to come.

Finally I would like to thank all panel members who have undertaken their visiting during the year for their cooperation and sense of duty, and for the level of support they have provided to me as Chair. Also thanks to all the police staff and officers, whose cooperation, often in difficult circumstances, is much appreciated by the panel.

In conclusion we, the panel of the Barking and Dagenham recognise the important role of the MPA in overseeing the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and for the training and support they provide to enable us to perform our community role.

John Mack

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 2008:

- To make a total of 52 visits to Dagenham custody suite and occasional visits to Barking when being used.
- To maintain the excellent distribution of visits across the week.
- To vary the times of visits in order to provide a better spread over 24 hours, particularly between the hours of 20:00-07:59.
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Barking and Dagenham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld. To raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate and to challenge where 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 diversity of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham across all strands.
- To investigate new initiatives designed to target different types of people and increase the take up of the ICV role

The panel made a total of 40 visits throughout 2008 to Dagenham police station. Against a target of 52 visits to be carried out during the year at a rate of one visit per week, this represents an achievement of 77% of the annual target and the panel should be pleased with this figure, although there is scope for improvement.

Visits have been well spread out through the week. More visits need to be carried out over the weekend and on Mondays as the majority of visits have been carried out midweek but generally the distribution is respectable.

The distribution of visits throughout the day indicates an overwhelming preference for visits during the hours of 08:00-19:59. Only 1 visit (2.5% of total visits) took place between the hours of 20:00 – 07:59 and this figure will have to be improved in 2009. Whilst it is appreciated that these are unsocial hours and detainees are often taking advantage of their continuous rest period, it is essential that some visits are carried during these quieter periods over the course of the year.

Relations with the police remain positive and effective with both the custody manager and panel members having invested a lot of effort to ensure lines of communication are kept clear and that matters requiring a response to the panel are dealt with effectively.

Recruitment to the panel has been successful and efforts are continuing to recruit younger people and people from ethnic backgrounds to adequately reflect the diversity of the community it represents.

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, faiths, races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

Recruiting volunteers to the Barking and Dagenham ICV panel has been a challenge in 2008 and for some time the panel was below its ideal number of visitors.

Posters and leaflets have been placed in libraries and community centres and the ICV role has been advertised on the council's intranet as well as in the Metro. Success was limited but a few candidates did apply.

During 2008 three of these applicants were interviewed and two have successfully passed vetting and are now accredited members of the panel. The third volunteer is awaiting vetting clearance and if they pass, panel membership will be at twelve, three above the ideal number at the request of the panel and at its strongest for some time. This will help the panel fulfil the central objectives and allow more visits to take place at Dagenham and Barking.

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy. It is hoped that future recruitment will result in an increased number younger people. New initiatives will be needed both to target different types of people and to increase the take up of the role.

Visits to police stations

There are two custody suites in the borough at Barking and Dagenham; Barking does not operate full time however it is used for overflow purposes, when the main station is shut, or occasionally under Operation Safeguard.

The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Dagenham police station and to Barking when it is known that the station is being used.

The majority of our reports have not raised any significant issues that required the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. However, there have been a number issues that are frequently raised:

- Panel members were concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities.
- General maintenance issues were frequently raised – such as door handles being broken, floors being slippery, blocked sink, broken lock on freezer and the water dispenser needing descaling. These matters are often rectified quickly.
- Issues in the FME room appear to be consistently raised, specifically problems with the clinical waste bin often requiring emptying lack of blue roll and doors being left unlocked on cupboards containing medical equipment and stock.
- A number of concerns were raised about the poor cleanliness and untidiness in some areas within custody.

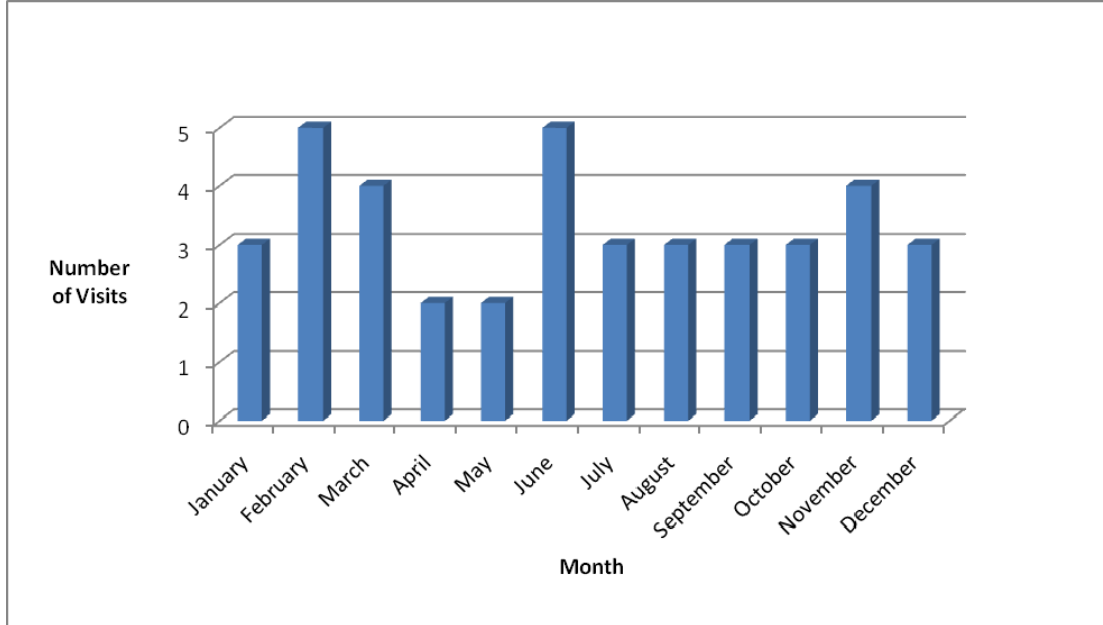
Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2008 that have required intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

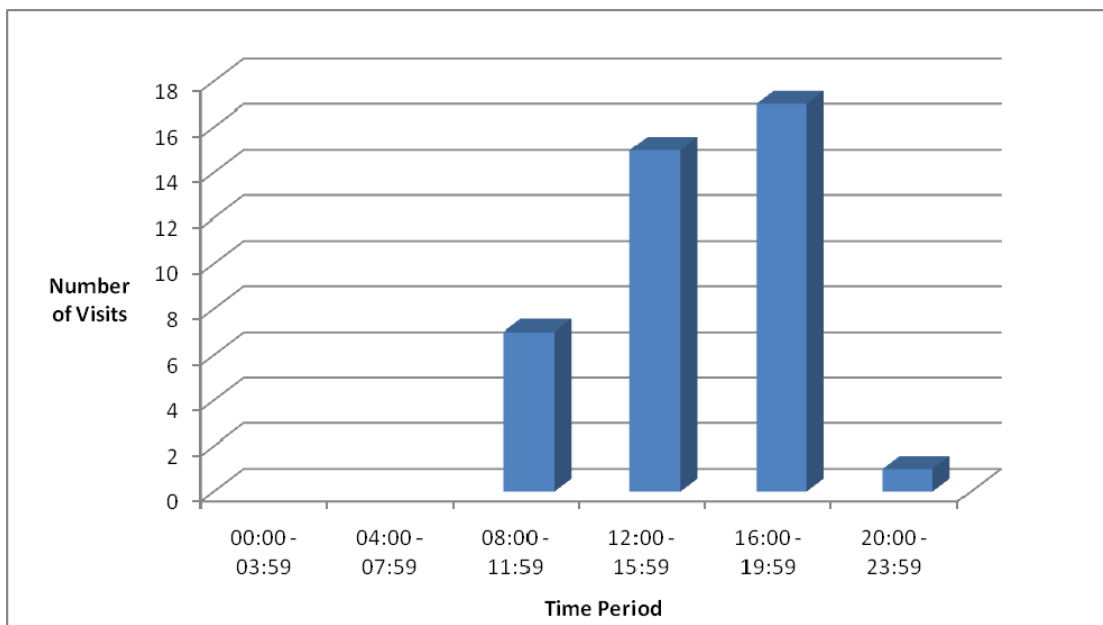
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Dagenham	40	77%

*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.



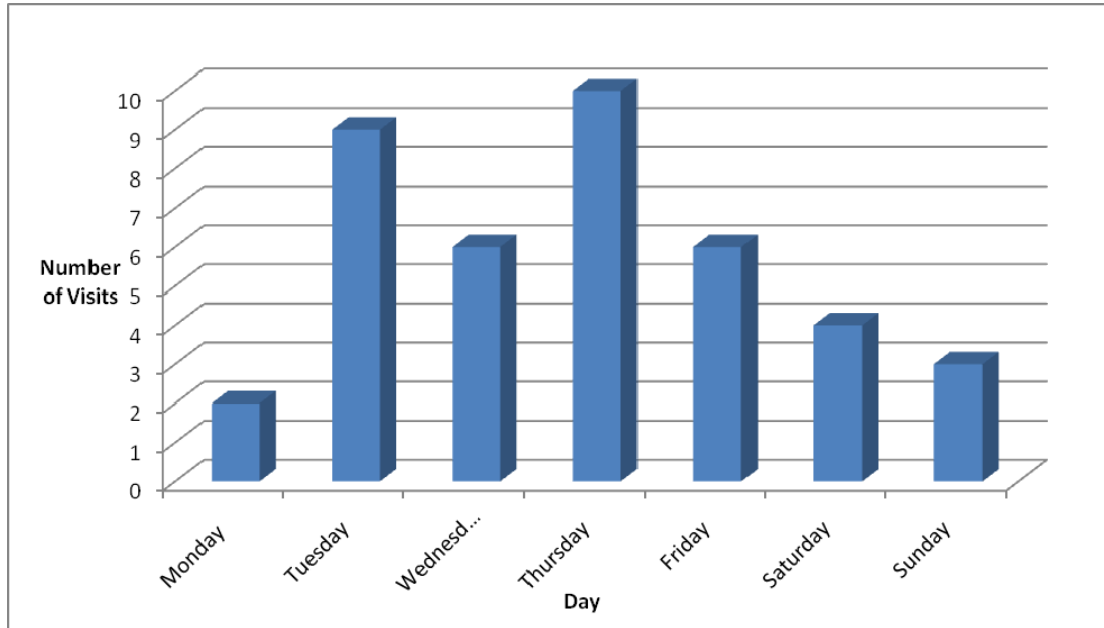
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	7	17.5
1200 – 1559 hrs	15	37.5
1600 – 1959 hrs	17	42.5
2000 – 2359 hrs	1	2.5
Total	40	100

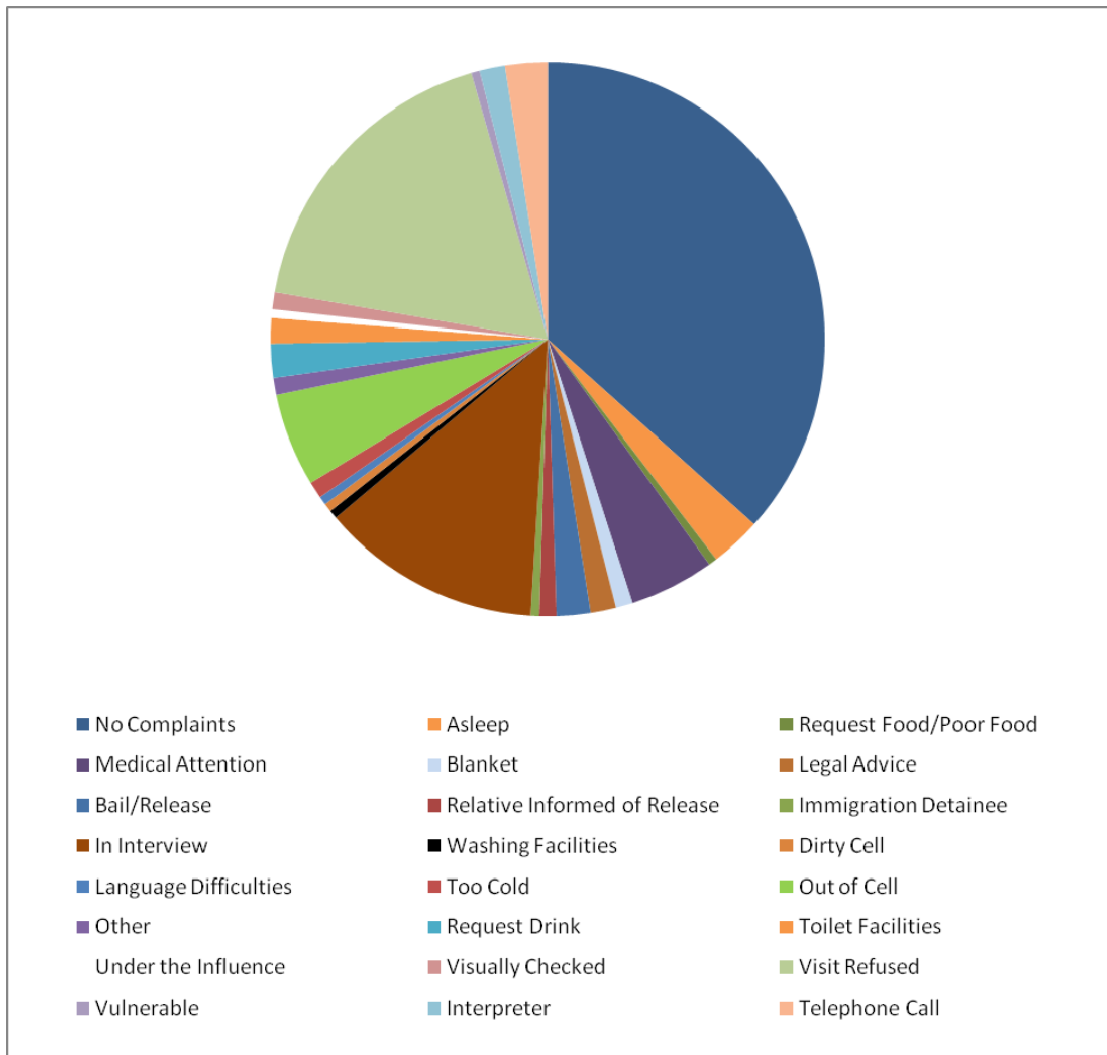


3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	2	5
Tuesday	9	22.5
Wednesday	6	15
Thursday	10	25
Friday	6	15
Saturday	4	10
Sunday	3	7.5
Total	40	100



4. Details of detainees' concerns:



Plans for forthcoming year 2009

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2009 are as follows:

- To make a total of 52 visits to Dagenham custody suite and to implement visits to Barking station on a regular basis.
- To improve the distribution of visits across the week to include more visits on Sunday and Monday.
- To vary the times of visits in order to provide a better spread over 24 hours, particularly between the hours of 20:00-07:59.
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Barking and Dagenham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld. To raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate and to challenge where 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 diversity of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham across all strands.
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