



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Merton Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2008



Contents page

	Page Number
1. Introduction	4
2. Chair's report	6
3. Aims and achievements	7
4. Membership	9
5. Recruitment	10
6. Station visit issues	11
7. Statistical analysis of 2008 panel reports	12
8. Targets and plans for 2009	16

Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Merton Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP). This report covers the period 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2008.

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

- Provide the local community and the 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 2008
- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Set out the panel's objectives and plans for 2009.

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

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 Merton ICVP attend Wimbledon 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 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 Merton, 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.

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/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.

Chair's Report

As a new chair, I am very grateful that the panel in Merton is made up of so many knowledgeable and experienced members. Many have been serving in their role for a number of years, influencing the welfare of many detainees at Wimbledon police station. And I welcome the opportunity to work with Wayne Eaves as Vice Chair.

In 2008, we are lucky to have recruited two new members who bring considerable experience and enthusiasm in their own right – Diane Wheeler and Carol Carey. I will be relying on the professionalism and support of all of our panel members over the next year.

While I am grateful for the opportunity to become Chair of the Merton panel, I am saddened that it is caused by Ravi Kurup's departure from the group. After several years as Chair, Ravi has decided to pursue academic studies but we hope that he will return to continue his work after his sabbatical. His experience has been a fantastic asset and I can thank him personally for helping to train me when I joined the panel five years ago. We are also grateful that Cheryl Samuels, formerly Vice Chair, will remain as a panel member.

We would like to thank all of the police at Wimbledon station for their help – particularly Inspector Phillips and Sergeant Lucas for their professionalism and support in working with us. Some panel members have expressed their frustration at some police officers not being aware of the role ICVs play in the custody suite. In response to this issue Inspector Philips and the custody team have undertaken to do their own "virtual" ICV visits to train staff.

The temperature of the custody suite continues to be an issue – which is perhaps understandable given the age and size of Wimbledon police station. We hope the police continue to work with us flexibly – ensuring that items such as blankets are readily available particularly in the winter months.

Issues have been raised in both group meetings and in private correspondence through our coordinator. My personal experience has been of raising general issues, such as the availability of halal food, or asking for clarification on points such as the provision of blankets. Some have been raised in response to specific detainees and others have been learning opportunities for us as a panel. These communications enable to perform our role to the best of our ability, ensure that detainees are well treated and maintain good relations with the police.

Lastly, I would like to thank Sarah Walker and the team at the MPA for their invaluable support. She has facilitated excellent communication with the police and has enabled us to proactively raise questions, clarify issues and maximize our meeting time with the police on a quarterly basis.

Sophie Belcher
Merton 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 objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to Wimbledon police station to check and report on the treatment of people in police custody and 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; 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 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 Merton.
- To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.

In 2008 the panel made a total of 42 visits against the target of 52. This represents an achievement of 81% of the panels visiting target, an increase of 2% on the results of 2007.

A better spread of visiting times was achieved in 2008. However, significantly fewer were conducted on Sundays than any other day. 26 visits were made between 16:00 and 20:00 and only one between 04:00 and 08:00; 6 were conducted between noon and 16:00, and only one visit was conducted between 20:00 and 04:00. The panel will aim to vary the timing of visits more in 2009.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects and in the majority of cases there were no significant issues raised. Recurring issues that the police have been asked

to address include police awareness of the role of ICVs and the correct procedure for conducting ICVs visits and regulating the temperature of the custody suite.

The arrangement for the police to respond to matters raised by ICVs has significantly improved during 2008. Merton police now provide a written response to issues raised for each panel meeting. This is circulated in advance of the panel meetings for members to consider. This not only allows more effective meetings but also improved scrutiny of the police.

The panel meets quarterly to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences and the panel has a good 79% attendance record. Police representatives attend each meeting. Inspector Jon Phillips attended the March, July and October panel meetings and Sergeant Marion Lucas attended the March and December meetings. The panel has an excellent working relationship with the police representatives. Both officers kept the panel advised of developments at Wimbledon custody suite and within borough. The panel would like to thank Inspector Phillips and Sergeant Lucas for their prompt response to panel concerns and their diligent attendance at meetings throughout 2008.

2008 was a successful year for recruitment (see page 10) with the panel reaching full membership in April 2008. Both new members attended their initial training course. One experienced panel member attended central refresher training at the MPA. In 2009 refresher training will be given at panel meetings in addition to central training. This will enable all experienced members to attend refresher training.

The MPA conducted a diversity monitoring exercise during the year; for the first time the panel has information about how it compares to the local community in Merton (see page 9).

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

- Meetings of the Merton Community and Police Consultative Group
- Meetings of the London ICV Chairs with the MPA
- A meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the South / South-East Cluster of ICVPs
- London Independent Custody Visiting Conference
- MPA Christmas Social

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

Panel Membership

Although Merton is one of the smallest London boroughs with a population of approximately 191,790 it is one of the most ethnically diverse. According to DMAG¹ figures 29% of the population of Merton belongs to a black and minority ethnic group (BME). The gender figures show the population is 51% female and 49% male.

As already mentioned, recent diversity monitoring has allowed the panel to consider how well it reflects the community it represents. According to available data, the membership of the panel is broadly representative of the borough as a whole and diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity. The panel has 6 female members and 3 male. The panel has achieved a diverse racial makeup including 45% from a BME group.

Members of Merton ICVP during 2008

Name		Date of Appointment
Warren Abraham		August 2004
Angela Ashmead		September 2004
Sophie Belcher	Chair	August 2004
Carol Carey		March 2008
Edward Correia		January 2003
Wayne Eaves	Vice Chair	August 2004
Ravi Kurup	Sabbatical	June 1999
Cheryl Samuels		August 2004
Diane Wheeler		March 2008

Ravi Kurup decided to take a sabbatical from custody visiting in December 2008. The panel would like to thank Ravi for his committed service to the panel and the local community both as an ICV and the panel's Chairperson.

¹ Population and diversity figures are based on projections derived from the 2001 census calculated by DMAG - the Data Management and Analysis Group - based at the Greater London Authority (GLA). These data comparisons are confined to apparent strands of diversity only.

Recruitment

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. Since April 2007, panels have been asked to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA.

Throughout 2008 we actively promoted Merton ICVP with the aim of recruiting new members. Local recruitment included sending posters and leaflets to all Merton libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureau's, free legal advice centres and various doctors and dentist surgeries and colleges across Merton. The MPA also advertised regularly in the Metro and Evening Standard newspapers. The panel is registered with Merton Volunteer Centre and advertises on the national volunteering website www.do-it.org.uk

Through these efforts we have raised the profile of Merton ICVP and in 2008 the panel successfully recruited two new members. New members complete a six-month probationary period. During this time they must complete their initial MPA training course and visit with experienced panel members. Both members successfully completed their probationary periods.

The panel finished 2008 with 8 active members and another member on sabbatical leave. Although the panel operates well with this number of visitors we continue to seek new members of all ages and from all parts of the community.

Station Visit Issues

There is one custody suite in Merton which is located in Wimbledon Police Station. The custody suite at Mitcham is no longer in operation.

The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Wimbledon custody suite.

The majority 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 issues:

- The panel have, on 3 occasions, expressed concern over the temperature in the custody suites. The ventilation and heating system has been a panel concern for a number of years. Planning approval for a new custody centre at Wimbledon was granted in September 2007. However, the panel was disappointed to learn in December 2008 that the redevelopment of the custody suite had been put on hold. The panel anticipate continued issues with the temperature of custody suite until the police station is redeveloped.
- An ongoing concern has been the lack of knowledge and awareness some custody officers have of the ICV scheme. Inspector Phillips and Sergeant Lucas have responded promptly to the panels concerns by supplementing the initial training given on the ICV scheme to new officers at Hendon. Panel members have also volunteered to give talks on the ICV scheme to police officers.
- Entry to the custody suite was delayed on 4 occasions. On arrival at the public enquiry counter at the police station, ICVs must identify themselves and the purpose of their visit. At this point they should be admitted immediately to the custody area. Access should 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. Two delays were caused by lack of knowledge of the ICV scheme. One delay was caused by miscommunication to the custody officer. The other delay was due to the custody officer's belief that the ICVs could have been placed in danger. On all of these occasions the ICVs completed their visit after the delay and no issues or concerns were raised by the detainees.

Despite these issues overall the panel is impressed with the high standards of most of the Officers in the Division, their helpful, courteous and professional attitude and the high standard of care shown towards detainees.

Statistical Analysis of 2008 Panel Reports

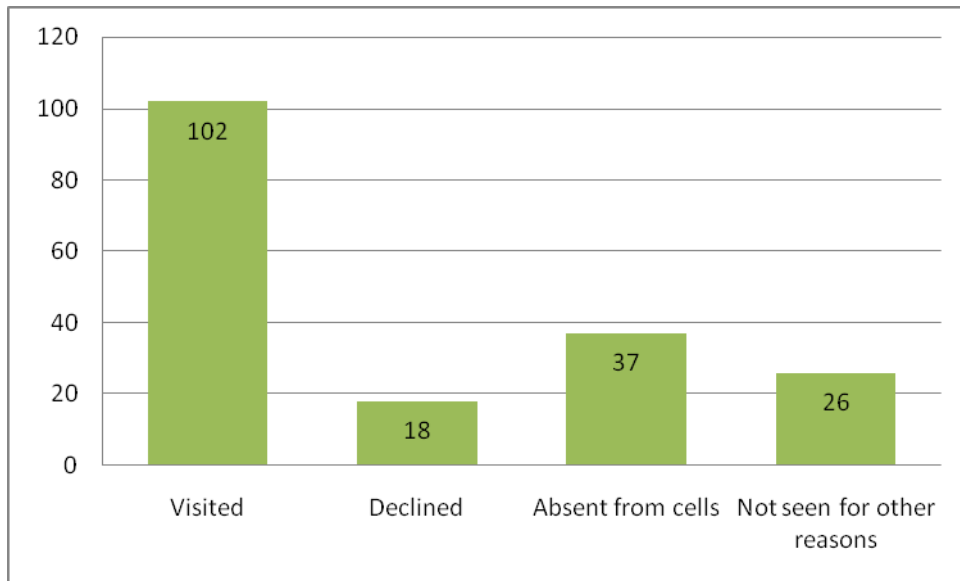
Number of detainees seen by ICVs and total number held at Wimbledon Custody Suite

Year	Seen	Total	% Seen
2008	183	5404	3.38
2007	182	5420	3.36
2006	162	5607	3.09

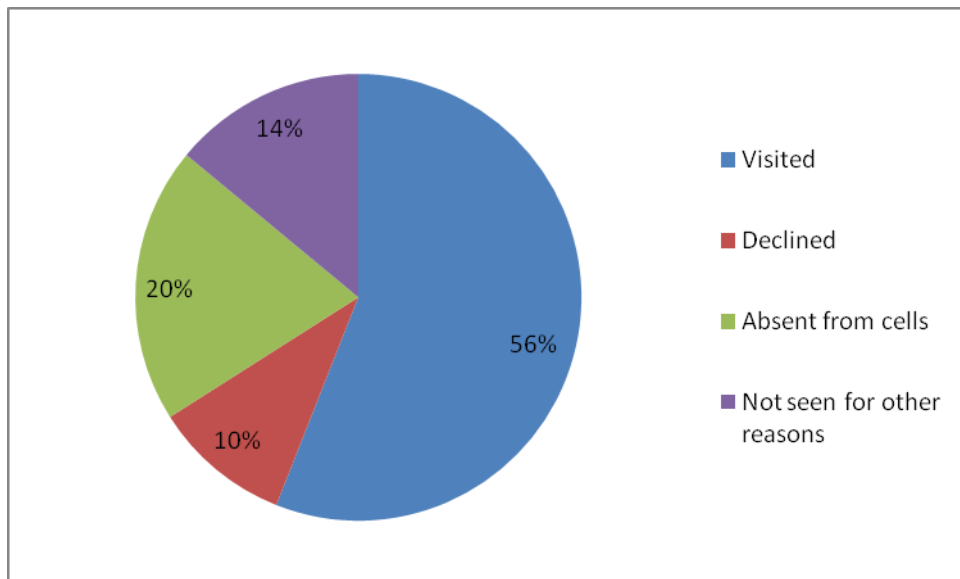
Breakdown of detainees in custody during visits by gender, age and category

PACE Adult Male	145
PACE Juvenile Male	15
PACE Adult Female	17
PACE Juvenile Female	0
Immigration Adult Male	4
Immigration Juvenile Male	0
Immigration Adult Female	2
Immigration Juvenile Female	0
Other Adult Male	0
Other Juvenile Male	0
Other Adult Female	0
Other Juvenile Female	0
Total	183

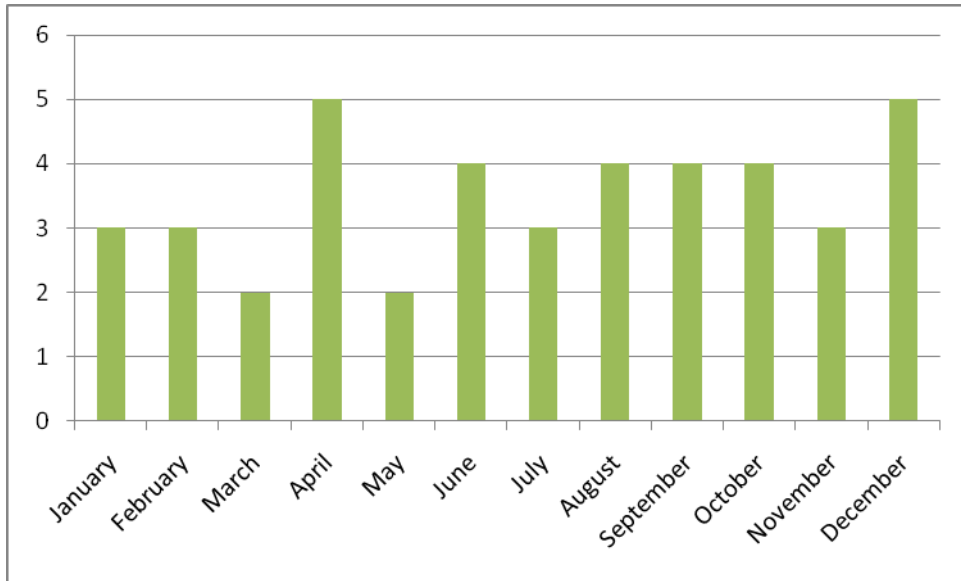
Number of detainees seen by ICVs



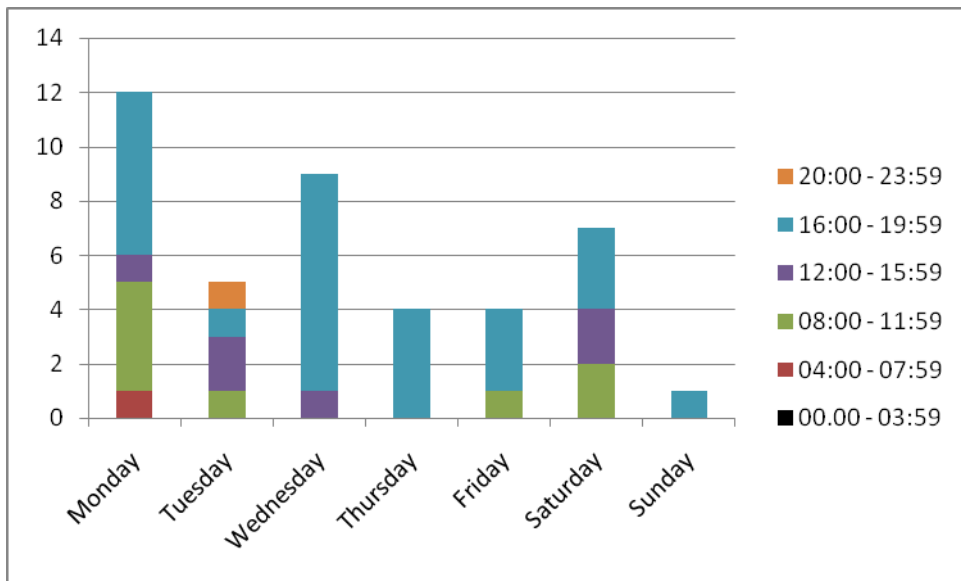
Percentage of detainees seen by ICVs



Visits by month

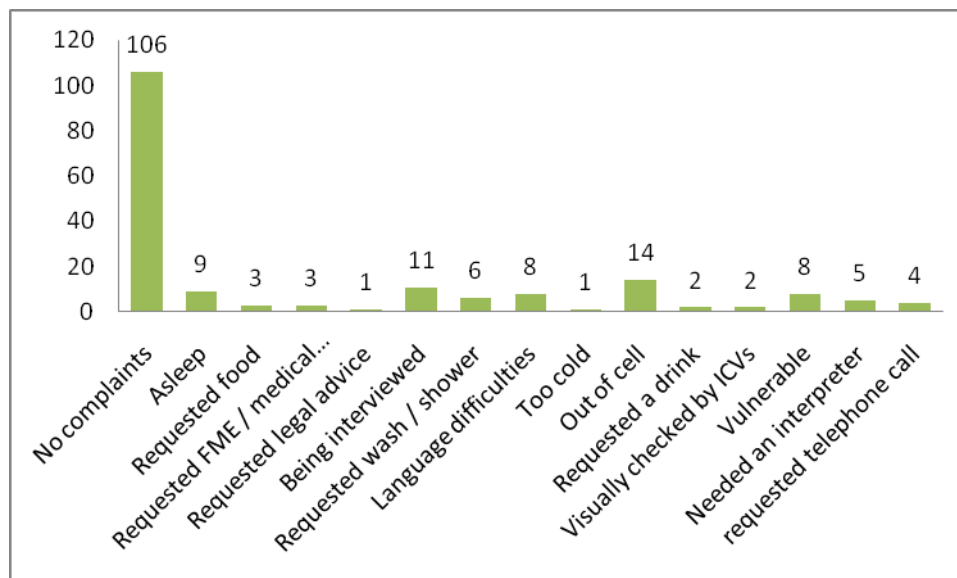


Visits by day and time period



Detainee Concerns

When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them. The chart below shows a summary of concerns raised by detainees during visits made to Wimbledon station in 2008.



Targets and Plans for 2009

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 Police immediately if need be and/or at the next 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 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 Merton.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.