



**MPA**

**Metropolitan Police Authority**

**Newham  
Independent Custody  
Visiting Panel**

**Annual Report 2008**



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# Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Newham 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 scrutinize 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 Newham, 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 Newham in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

# Chairperson's report

The period covered by this report was exceptionally challenging for the panel as it both adapted to the new administrative arrangements provided directly by the MPA and addressed a coincidental severe decline in membership. I am pleased however to be able to report that on-going recruitment has proved to be successful and the panel's performance has significantly improved as enthusiastic new members have joined.

The Panel currently comprises 13 active members; with a further five on agreed periods of absence. They are all unpaid volunteer members of the local community who collectively accurately reflect the demographic of the London Borough of Newham.

Members of the local Police service and the Panel are constantly working in tandem to try to improve the facilities available to detainees, and also to ensure appropriate 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 in helping maintain confidence in the Police-Community relationship, which is of paramount importance within the borough.

I have no doubt that the Panel, with the support of the MPA, will continue to improve on its work and maintain its outstanding service in the years to come.

Finally I would like to thank all panel members who have undertaken there 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.

Finally the panel recognises the important role of the MPA in overseeing the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme and for providing the training and support, through their Coordinator, to enable us to perform our community role.

Aijaz Rashid Sheikh  
Chair, Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

January 2009

# 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 over the year at a rate of 1 visit per week to both Forest Gate and Plaistow Police Stations.
- To make a total of 12 visits over the year at a rate of one per month to the BTP West Ham Police Station.
- To maintain the good distribution of visits across the week, but to undertake more visits over the weekend to even out the spread.
- To vary the times of visits in order to provide a better spread over 24 hours, particularly between the hours of 24:00-07:59 and 12:00–15:59 and to reduce the number of visits taking place between the hours of 16:00-19:59.
- To achieve and maintain panel membership at a minimum of 18 volunteers
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Newham 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 Newham 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 77 visits throughout 2008 to Newham police stations. In 2007 this figure was 37, and this increase in 40 visits throughout 2008 indicates a great improvement in visit performance. Against a target of

116 visits to be carried out during the year – 52 at Forest Gate and Plaistow, 12 at West Ham; representing an achievement of 66.4% of the annual target.

Visits continue to be well spread throughout the week with visits taking place on every day. There is a tendency for a greater number of visits to take place on a Saturday; however this is an improvement on 2007 data where few visits took place over the weekend.

Visit distribution throughout the day is adequate although figures indicate a strong preference for visits to take place during 16:00 – 19:59. Although this is a good time of day to visit, a greater number of visits need to take place during the rest of the day.

In 2007, no visits were undertaken during the period 00:00 – 07:59. 2008 saw this increase to 2 visits that took place during this time and this figure should be at least maintained, but an increase desirable.

Generally visit data has seen a dramatic improvement from the previous year, not least in the vast increase in total number of visits taking place and the consistent visiting of West Ham BTP station during the second half of 2008 when 6 consecutive visits were carried out.

Membership remains strong but 2008 saw a number of members either withdraw from the scheme or go on study leave or sabbatical. The panel has coped well with this decline in active members but these members will be need to be replaced if they do not return to ensure the panel continues its development and progress.

At the year end, membership comprised of 18 members, 4 of whom were currently inactive but anticipated to return in 2009. Despite this low figure, 3 below the ideal number of members for panel visiting 2 stations, evidence confirms Newham's progression in terms of overall performance. With interviews planned for the first half of 2009, and inactive members returning, it is strongly anticipated that the panel will continue to improve.

With an improved marketing and advertising strategy for 2009, and in continually developing partnerships and investigating new avenues to recruit, it is hoped that 2009 will see a more successful recruitment campaign to bring numbers to a satisfactory level and that the panel will adequately represent the demographic and diversity of the borough it represents.

The relationship between the custody manager and panel members remains effective with strong communication links and is strongly supported by Newham MPS Officers. Representation from the British Transport Police has been observed at panel meetings later in the year and it is hoped these links will continue to remain positive and beneficial.

The Panel meetings are held monthly at Newham Town Hall and the venue continues to satisfactorily facilitate the monthly panel meetings. All members are expected to try to attend and express their thanks to the Council for allowing it to meet there.

The Panel is represented at meetings of the Newham Police and Community Forum. The Chair, or a representative, also attends the MPA London ICV Chairs and Cluster meetings.

# 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 Newham ICV panel has not proven overly difficult and the panel has maintained a good number of visitors throughout the year. At the end of 2008 the Newham panel had 14 accredited and active members, with a further 4 on periods of agreed absence.

The panel is operating increasingly well with a steadily increasing number of visitors. The optimum number of members is 17 and it is hoped that this quota shall be fulfilled and surpassed in the beginning few months of 2009.

Recent publicity has brought significant expressions of interest, which it is hoped will become applications and later accredited members.

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. The active panel comprises of 9 men and 5 women with varying diversity in age and ethnicity.

# Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough at Newham; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Forest Gate and Plaistow and the BTP station at West Ham

The majority of our reports have not raised any significant issues that required the attention of the MPA. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that are frequently raised:

- The FME room is sometimes unlocked, or the cupboards within the room containing medical supplies are unlocked.
- The general and chronic poor cleanliness of the custody suite, FME room, floor and cells is often raised. A deep clean of the custody unit resolved this issue temporarily but the problem has resurfaced. It is recommended that a deep clean becomes a frequent undertaking.
- Panel members continue to be concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities.
- Over the year concerns over the supply of blankets has been raised.
- The low temperature is another recurring theme which needs to be monitored and remedied, particularly over the Winter months.

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



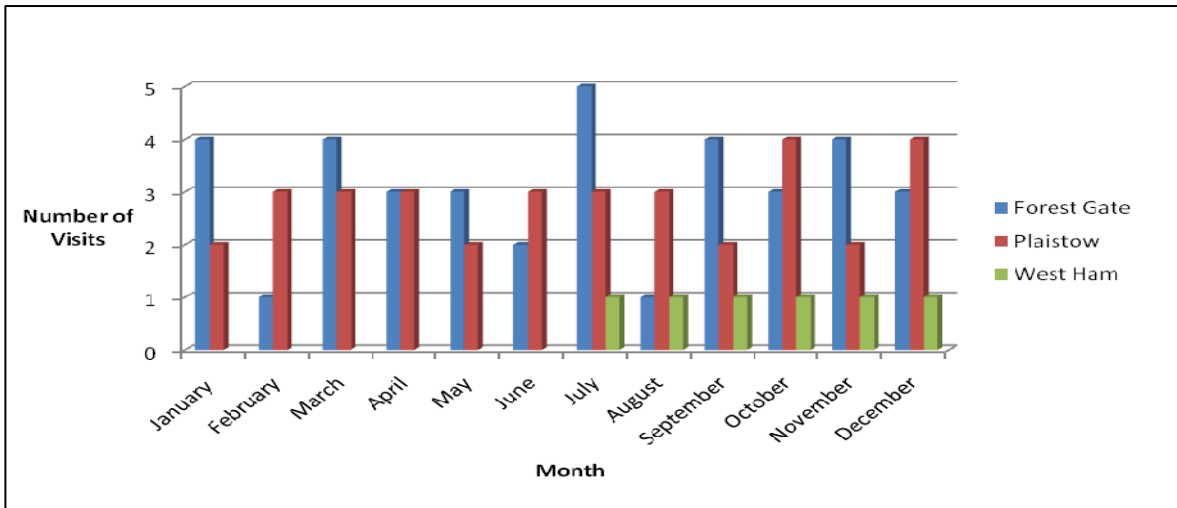
# Data from panel visits

## 1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Forest Gate*	37	71.2%
Plaistow*	34	65.4%
West Ham**	6	50%
Total	77	66.4%

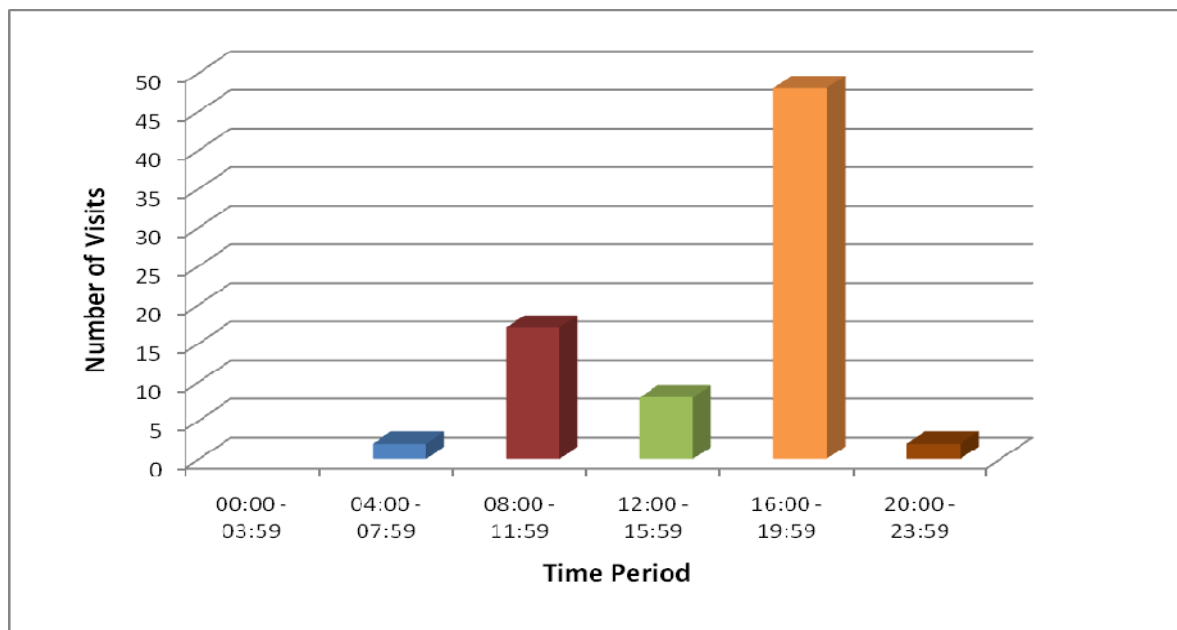
\*Annual Target is 52 visits

\*\* Annual Target is 12 visits



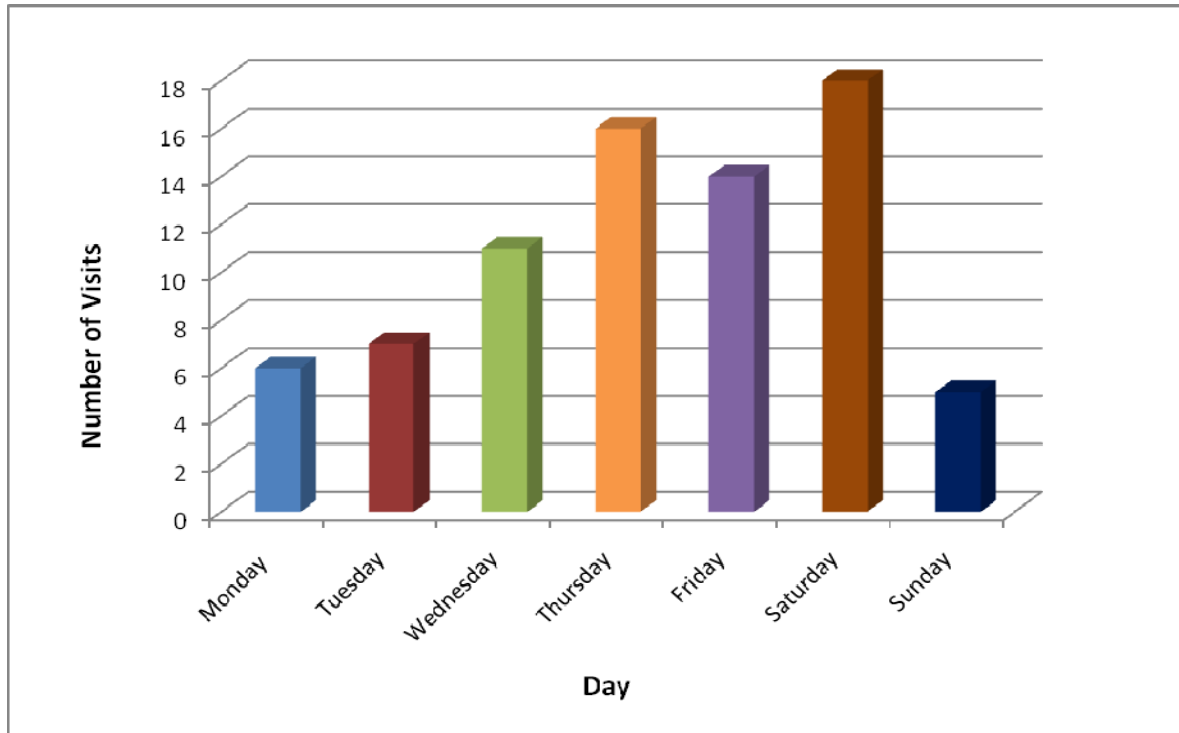
## 2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of Total Visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	-
0400 – 0759 hrs	2	2.6%
0800 – 1159 hrs	17	22.1%
1200 – 1559 hrs	8	10.4%
1600 – 1959 hrs	48	62.3%
2000 – 2359 hrs	2	2.6%

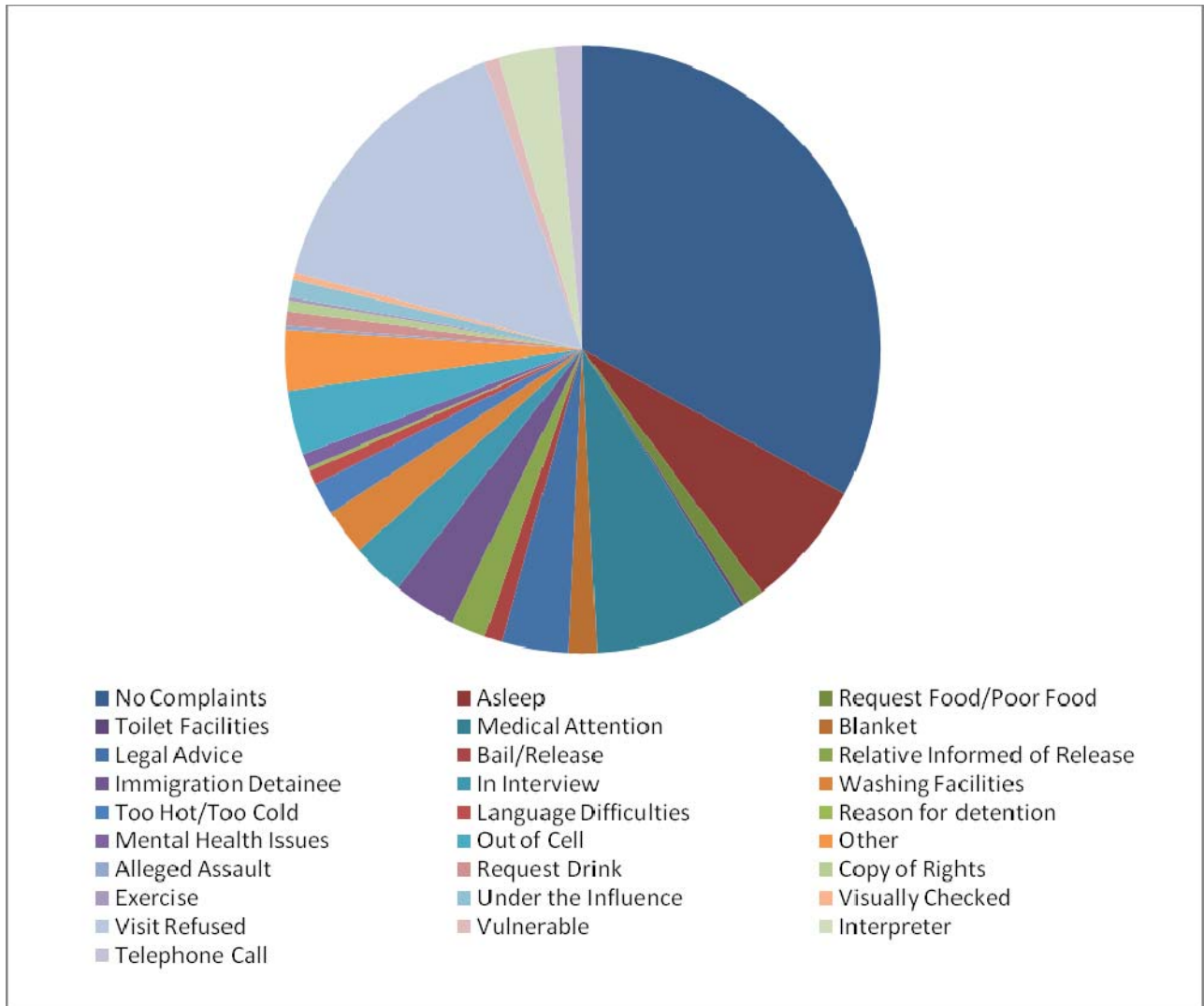


### 3. Days of Visits

Day	No. of visits	% of total visits
Monday	6	7.8%
Tuesday	7	9.1%
Wednesday	11	14.3%
Thursday	16	20.8%
Friday	14	18.15%
Saturday	18	23.35%
Sunday	5	6.5%



#### 4. Details of detainees' concerns:



# Plans for forthcoming year 2009

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2008 are as follows:

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