



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Wandsworth Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2008



Contents page

1. Introduction	3
2. Aims & achievements	4-5
3. Chairperson's report	6
4. Panel membership	7
5. Visits to police stations	8
6. Panel data	9-11
7. Targets and plans for Forthcoming Year	12

Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Wandsworth Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers a 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. Since April 2007 the MPA has overseen custody visiting arrangements in Wandsworth as part of the London ICV scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Wandsworth, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration and 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 that the panel is as diverse as the community it represents. 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.

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 each of the two custody suites in the borough.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread. In particular to ensure that there are more visits in the early morning (04:00 to 07:59) at the weekend and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and more early evening (16:00 to 19:59) visits on a Saturday.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police and the MPA as 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.
- To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, shared training and providing resources if appropriate.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.

Through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to try to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Wandsworth.

It is the practice of the panel to make weekly visits to both Wandsworth and Battersea police stations where there are 24/7 custody suites in operation. In the twelve-month period from January 2008 to December 2008, the panel made a total of 90 visits with the panel making slightly more visits to Wandsworth than to Battersea. This represents an achievement of 86.5% which is an increase of almost nine percentage points over what was achieved during 2007.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects and there are no significant themes appearing. There were significantly fewer people with no complaints than during 2007 and the numbers refusing a visit were also fewer. The panel were seeing, or recognising, more people with vulnerabilities and with mental health issues. ICVs continue to be concerned about the absence of proper washing facilities at Battersea police station, there being no shower and only a small washbasin.

Visits are spread evenly across the week except for Sunday when visits were significantly fewer; the results are an improvement on those for 2007. In terms of the times of visits, there has been a marked increase in the number of visits in the later evening (20:00–23:59); there have however been no early morning visits during 2008. The relative proportion of the visits remained otherwise much the same as in 2007.

Panel membership now stands at 14. Two visitors left during the year however the current number is still sufficient to carry out the schedule of visits. There has been no recent recruitment however this is likely to change during 2009. It is intended to try to seek more, younger panel members so as to better reflect the age profile of the borough. The MPA conducted a diversity monitoring exercise during the year which will help inform how well the panel compares to the greater Wandsworth community; the amount of data collected is too little to say anything of consequence however.

Chairman's report

The past year was perhaps slightly less eventful than 2007, however there have been a number of challenges for the ICV Panel.

While relations with the police have continued to improve, and there has continued to be a police presence at all panel meetings, there has however been considerable change in the leadership of custody in Wandsworth. The panel is grateful to Sgt Brian Robertson for assisting the panel towards the end of 2007 and at the beginning of 2008. Insp Martin Wild, who took over as Custody Manager in February, ably responding to matters raised by the panel and kept the panel well informed about the improvements he was introducing into Wandsworth custody. The panel welcomed Insp Janet Stokoe to the role of Custody Manager towards the end of 2008.

It is worth noting that the police have continued to provide appropriate responses to panel queries in advance of meetings despite the changes that have been made. The panel's thanks go to all three officers mentioned for their help and support.

It is a shame that the problems associated with the physical provision of custody in Wandsworth still seem unlikely to be resolved another year on. The panel were encouraged by the proposal to add Wandsworth to the priority list for renewing custody facilities. With the change in circumstances it now seems unlikely that these facilities will be available soon. It is perhaps now appropriate for the police to make some improvements to both the custody suite heating systems and to the washing facilities at Battersea.

Two members left the panel during the year. While this has not seriously affected the panel's ability to conduct its scheduled visits, it has now made recruitment a higher priority. The panel plans to invite applications from as wide a range of applicants as possible and will make a special effort to attract younger applicants.

My thanks go to all fourteen members of the panel for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. I would also like to thank our MPA Coordinator for making sure panel members have had all the support that they need.

Caroline Roberts
Chairman

Panel 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.

There has been no recent recruitment to the panel although two panel members have left during 2008. A further departure during 2009 is expected making recruitment now slightly more urgent. It is intended to advertise to as many residents as possible and to encourage applications from younger people; this is in order to address some of the disparities in panel composition that have been recognised (see below).

The population of the borough as a whole is 49% male, however the majority of panel members (71%), including the Chair, are female. The panel is quite old, with a majority (54.5%) of members being between 45 and 65. This compares unfavourably with the population of Wandsworth* as a whole where a majority (46.4%) are 26-45 years old; 27.3% of the panel are between 26 and 45.

*based on projections derived from the 2001 census calculated by DMAG - the Data Management and Analysis Group - based at the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Wandsworth and Battersea police stations operate full time. Tooting is used only occasionally when other stations are closed; it was used for a few weeks early in the year for Operation Safeguard. The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Wandsworth and Battersea police stations.

The majority of reports have not raised anything significant that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. Most issues have been resolved with the police locally. However, there have been some issues worth mention in this report; some of these are a repeat of those mentioned in the 2007 report:

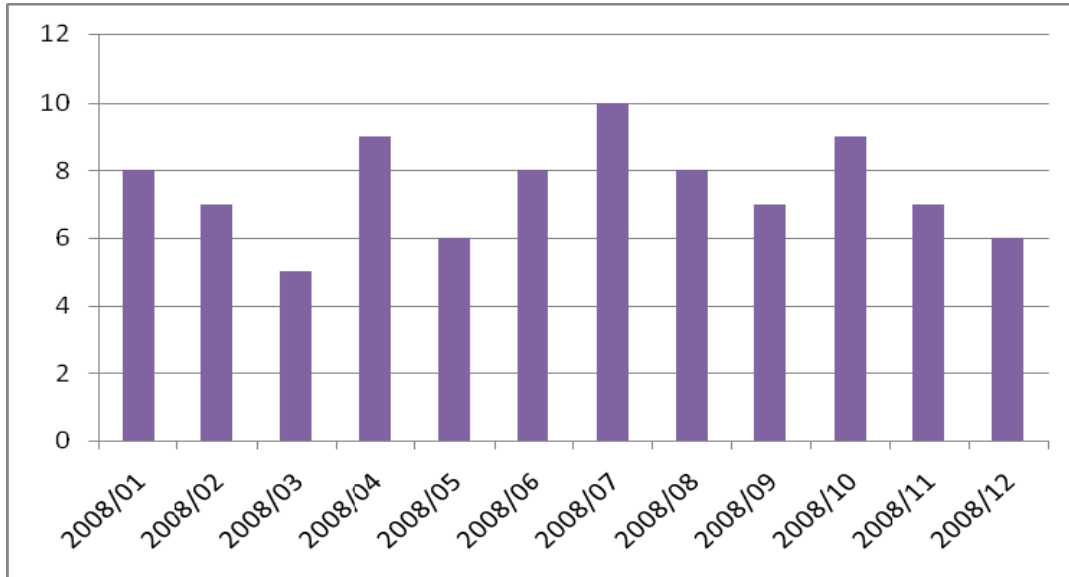
- Battersea is a Victorian building and the condition of the cells is not as good as at Wandsworth, which has an extended custody area
- Detainees who have been in custody for longer periods of time are not routinely offered a shower despite the fact that there is one available at Wandsworth police station. At Battersea there is no shower within the custody area and the basin available for washing is very restricted
- The design of the hot water and heating system at Wandsworth causes cells to sometimes get over hot; this especially happens in warm weather
- The temperature at both stations can also fall quite low causing cells to be closed; this happens most often at Battersea custody suite
- ICVs saw significantly more people who they considered vulnerable or were recognised as having mental health issues. This may represent a genuine increase or may be due to a change in the way ICVs are observing or recording these aspects

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

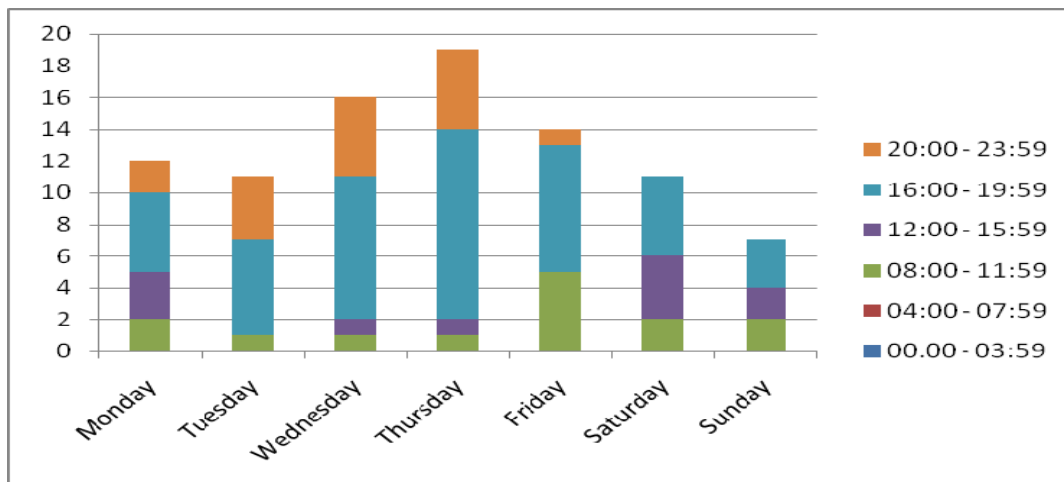
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Wandsworth	47	90.4
Battersea	43	82.7
Total	90	86.5

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



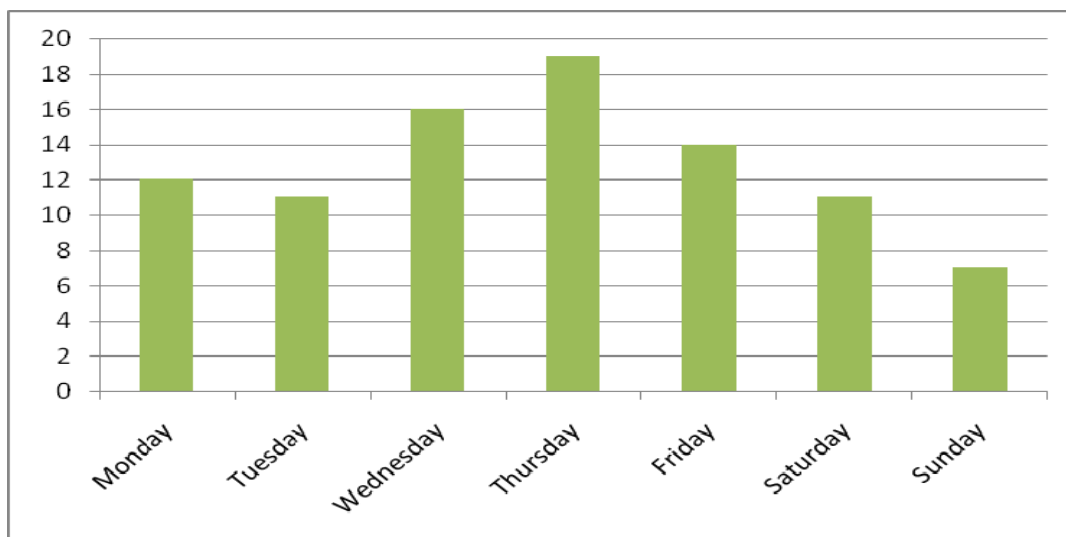
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	14	15.6
1200 – 1559 hrs	11	12.2
1600 – 1959 hrs	48	53.3
2000 – 2359 hrs	17	18.9
Total	90	100



3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	12	13.3
Tuesday	11	12.2
Wednesday	16	17.8
Thursday	19	21.1
Friday	14	15.6
Saturday	11	12.2
Sunday	7	7.8
Total	90	100



4. Details of Visits

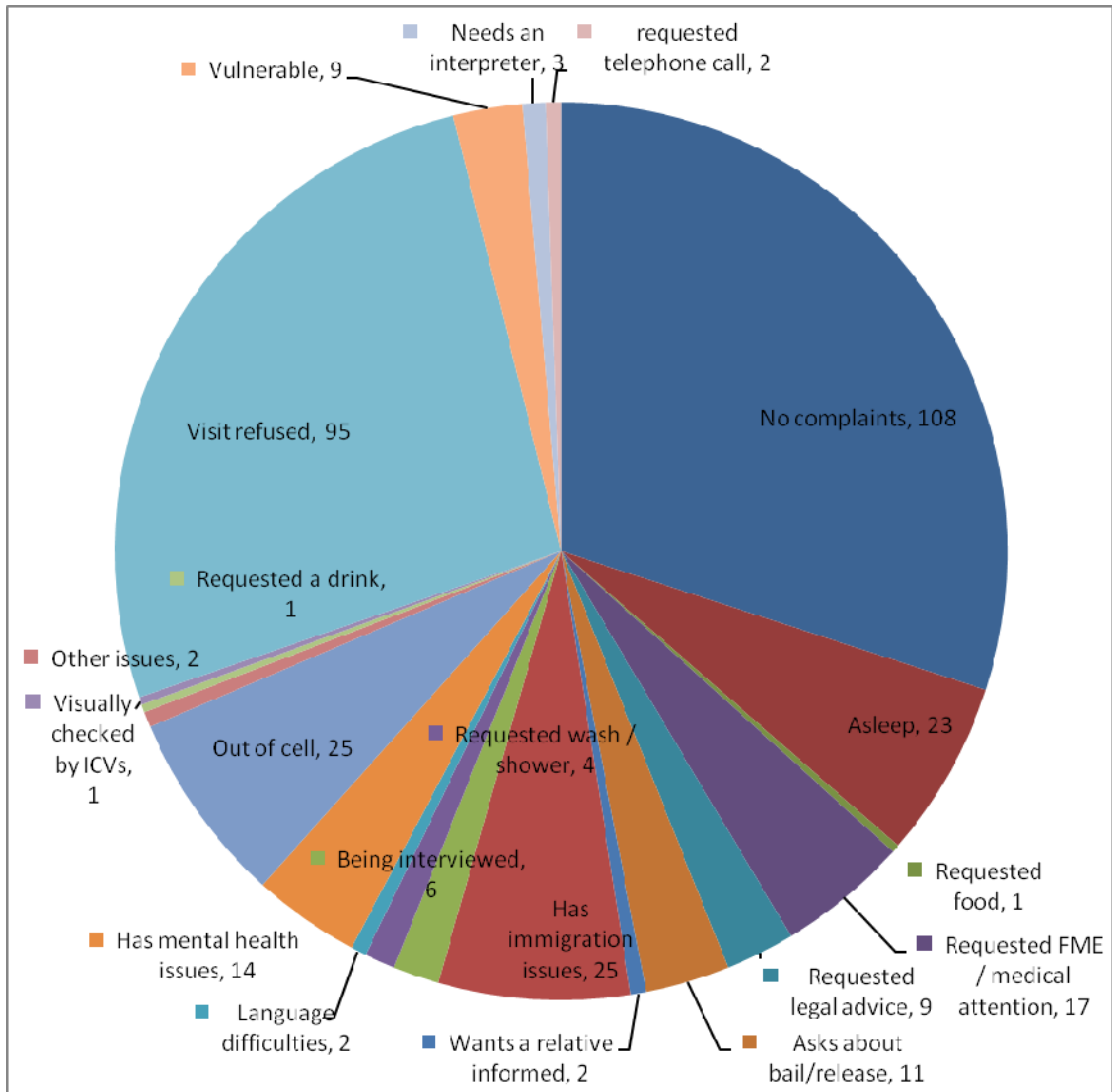
Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	102	1.1
Detainees who refused to be seen	95	1.1
Detainees who cannot be seen for any reason	55	0.6
Total	252	2.8

*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit

5. Numbers of detainees by type:

Category of Detainee	Annual no.	% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2008	8937	100
Immigration Detainees included	155	1.7
Home Office Prisoners included	114	1.3
Total immigration and home office prisoners included	269	3.0

6. Details of detainee concerns:



Plans for the forthcoming year 2009

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

- To make a total of 52 visits to each of the two custody suites in the borough
- To further improve upon the time that visits are made in order to provide a better spread. In particular to ensure that there are more visits in the early morning (00:00 to 07:59) and on Sundays
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police and the MPA as 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
- To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, shared training and providing resources if appropriate
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors
- Through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to try to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Wandsworth; the panel will make efforts to recruit more younger people