

Barking & Dagenham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

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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 2009 to December 2009

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 2010
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Independent Custody Visitors

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from within the community who visit police stations unannounced to check on the rights, entitlements and conditions of detention of people held in police custody. Independent custody visiting is governed by a range of legislation and guidance including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 as well as the Home Office Codes of Practice and National Standards.

History of Independent Custody Visiting

The Independent Custody Visitors scheme, formally known as the Lay Visitors' scheme was introduced in the mid-1980s following a recommendation in Lord Scarman's report into the civil disorders in Brixton and other parts of the UK. He recommended a system of independent, unannounced inspection of procedures and detention in police stations by local community members. Since then Panels of ICVs have evolved throughout the United Kingdom as an important means of securing accountability of the police to the local communities they serve. ICVs play a vital role in bringing police and communities closer together and enhancing public perception of police procedures and practices. It is now mandatory for each Police Authority in the country to have a custody visiting scheme in place.

Visits to police stations

ICVs always visit in pairs. A rota is drawn up to ensure that pairs of ICVs are allocated to visit the operational custody suites in the local borough. Visits can be made at any time of the day or night, and on any day of the week. All detainees are offered the opportunity to speak to the ICVs but may choose not to. ICVs do not take sides but look, listen and report on what they find in the custody unit. Before leaving the custody area ICVs compile a report on their findings that will draw attention to any matters that may need addressing. A copy is also provided to the police. Minor issues can usually be dealt with before ICVs leave the station by speaking with Custody Staff, but more serious issues can be escalated further.

Panel Meetings

ICV Panels hold regular meetings where issues that have been raised on the visit report is discussed and a response provided by the police representative of the

station visited. Some issues may need persistence by the Panel in monitoring and calling for action. The meeting also provides an opportunity for members to share their experiences on visits, undertake training, and be updated on relevant criminal justice issues.

London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) is an independent statutory body, which exists to make sure that London's police, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), 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 scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Barking & Dagenham, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration, providing a team of MPA staff to support the panels. There are 32 ICV Panels in London, one in each borough.

The MPA is responsible for the scheme's management and administration (under the Police Reform Act 2002). A member of MPA staff is responsible for supporting the panel.

Prospective custody visitors are volunteers from within the community. The MPA and the panel are responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing all custody visitors and try 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.

How to Apply

To be eligible to become an Independent Custody Visitor in the Barking & Dagenham borough you must:

- Either live, work or study in the borough
- Be aged over 18
- Have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system, for example, serving police officers, special constables and magistrates

For vetting purposes you must have resided in the UK for the last 3 years. Appointment as an Independent Custody Visitor is subject to successful security vetting clearance by the MPS Vetting Department.

Independent Custody Visitors are accredited by the Metropolitan Police Authority and appointed to the panel. The MPA provides all new ICVs with training to enable them to carry out their role. All new Panel members are paired with more experienced members of the Panel until they have successfully completed a six month probationary period.

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 2009;

- *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.*

The panel made a total of 37 visits throughout 2009 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 72% of the annual target, This is a 5% decrease in the number of visits carried out in 2008 (78%).

Visits have been well spread out through the week. More visits need to be carried out on Fridays and over the weekend 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 two visits took place between the hours of 20:00 – 07:59. 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. The panel will endeavour to improve this figure in 2010.

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.

Issues that were frequently raised in 2008 such as access to washing facilities and, issues in the FME room were not raised this year. The concerns raised this year focused on medical issues and toilet facilities.

The panel carried out several activities to raise awareness of the scheme locally and recruit new members. Members attended the Dagenham Town Show in July and the panel's annual report was presented at the borough CPEG. Efforts are continuing to recruit people from different backgrounds to adequately reflect the diversity of the community it represents.

In June a summer social and awards evening was held for independent custody visitors in London which provided an opportunity to increase engagement with other panels.

Refresher Training has been delivered and will continue in 2010

Visits to police stations

There are two custody suites in the borough at Barking and Dagenham;

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 were frequently raised regarding medical and toilet facilities.

Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2009 that have required intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

Data from panel visits

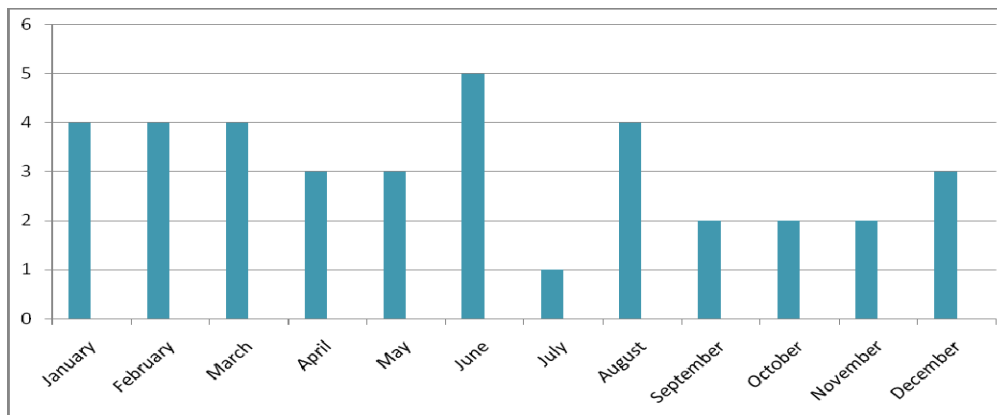
1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Dagenham	34	-
Barking**	3	-
	37	72%

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

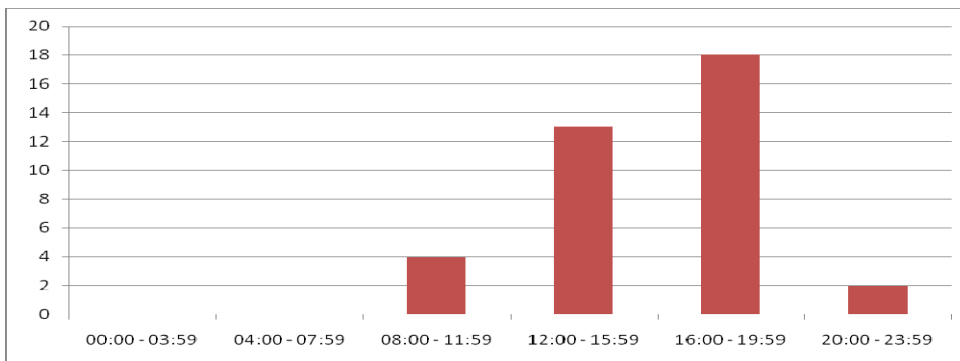
** Dagenham closed between 5 Oct-31 October, Barking used instead

2. Visits per month



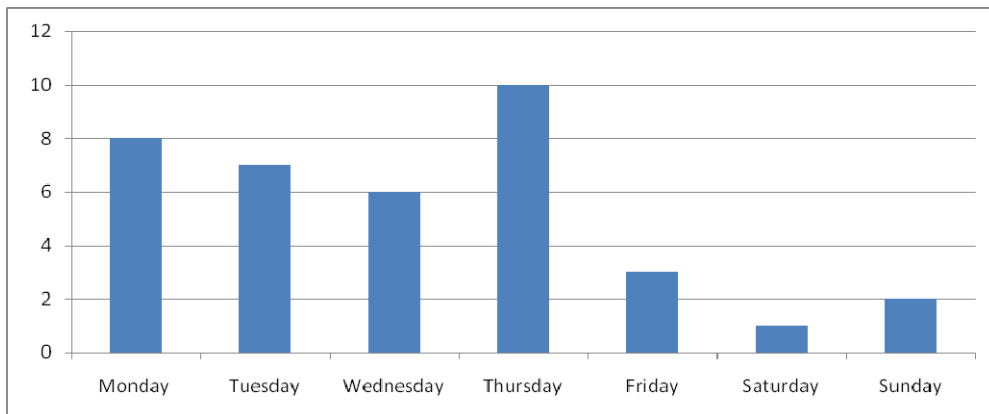
3. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.
0000 – 0359 hrs	
0400 – 0759 hrs	
0800 – 1159 hrs	4
1200 – 1559 hrs	13
1600 – 1959 hrs	18
2000 – 2359 hrs	2
<i>Total</i>	37

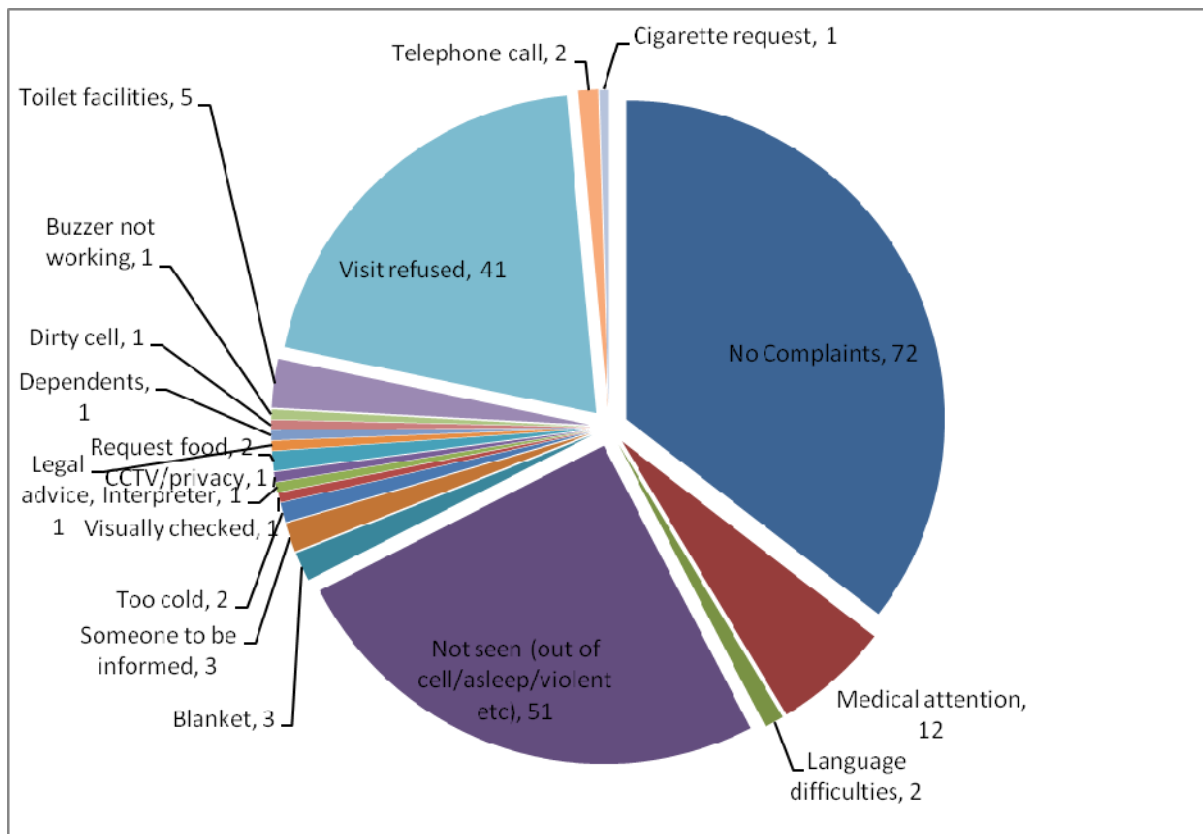


4. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.
Monday	8
Tuesday	7
Wednesday	6
Thursday	10
Friday	3
Saturday	1
Sunday	2
Total	37



5. Details of detainees' concerns:



Chairperson's report

The period covered by this report has been interesting and challenging for the panel. 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.

The panel managed to cover 72% of the scheduled visits and we need to try and improve in this area during 2010.

The panel was disappointed to learn of the changes in the service delivery of ICV panels following an MPA restructure; the main change from January 2010 will be the reduction in the number of panel meetings to quarterly, instead of six weekly intervals.

The panel looks forward to the opening of the new build custody suite at Fresh Wharf in 2010. 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 and continue to reassure the local community that those held in police custody are, on the whole, treated well.

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

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.

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 2009 two applicants were interviewed, successfully passed vetting and are now accredited members of the panel. The panel membership at the end of the year was 11.

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.

Plans for 2010

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2010 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 Fridays and weekends.
- 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 recruit additional members to the panel and 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.

****To carry out weekly visits to the new Borough Based Custody Centre when it opens in October 2010.***