

Lambeth Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report
2009

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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Lambeth Independent Custody Visiting Panel (ICVP). This report covers the period 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009. The purpose of this report is to give a general overview of the work of Lambeth ICVP and:

- Inform the local community and the MPA about the treatment of people held in police custody in the London borough of Lambeth;
- Set out the issues and concerns that have arisen during 2009;
- Evaluate the panel's performance; and
- Set out the panel's targets and plans for 2010.

We hope this will increase knowledge and understanding of the Lambeth Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

Who are Independent Custody Visitors and what do they do?

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. Once a week two visitors from the Lambeth panel attend Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations 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.

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 1981 Brixton riots. Since then panels have evolved throughout the United Kingdom as an important means of securing accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, 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.

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 Lambeth, 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

Chair's Report

The past year was both interesting and challenging for the Lambeth Independent Custody Visitors Panel.

We always aim to visit each of the custody suites in Lambeth once a week and we have achieved a total of 121 visits against our target of 156 (78%) . I thank my Panel members for their commitment to custody visiting and commend them for their hard work and commitment

The Panel is now 17 members strong. In 2010 we will continue to recruit new members as we are still short of our ideal number of 24 volunteers. As we continue to develop and grow in 2010 we will be placed in a better position to deliver to our community the vital reassurance that independent checks on the welfare of those in police custody are being carried out.

Although most of our reports have not raised any significant issues the panel has expressed their frustration that some police officers were not aware of the role ICVs play in the custody suite. Occasionally immediate, unannounced entry to the custody areas was a particular problem at the front desk of the three Lambeth stations, Brixton, Streatham and Kennington.

During 2009, every five weeks or so, at Gipsy Hill Police Station, I continue to address newly appointed police recruits on the role of independent custody visiting and include the history of how the scheme came into being following the Brixton disorders and the Scarman Report in 1982. I plan to train the more experienced members of the Lambeth Panel who are interested in this role.

I am very disappointed that despite many reports made during our visits to the three Lambeth stations it became apparent that washes / showers were not always offered to the detainees who are not aware that they must ask for a shower or wash if not offered. The Panel agree that this is unacceptable as it is part of the detainee's rights and entitlements. This is especially relevant if the detainee is held overnight and often even longer in the case of immigration detainees. Unlike Brixton and Kennington stations, Streatham does not have shower facilities but a sink in the corridor, which is in view of the CCTV. A previous Home Office directive stated that detainees could use a wash bowl in the cell. However, this facility was not always available for some detainees as the wash bowls were not in the stores. Although I have requested the police many times that this omission should be rectified, my Panel members are still reporting that washes/showers are NOT routinely being offered at all three Lambeth Police Stations .

In 2010 the Panel will continue to monitor the provision of washes in all of custody suites. We hope the police will continue to work with us flexibly – ensuring that showers or washes are offered. Generally however, the custody officers and staff of the Lambeth custody suites are helpful towards the ICVs and the Panel thanks them for their assistance.

The Panel continues to supply Bibles, Koran's, prayer mats, books and magazines for the use of detainees, which are most welcome and help them to pass many stressful hours.

The panel's police liaison officer, Inspector Paul Huitson who for had been working with the Panel for over five years left us in September as he had been appointed as the Police Federation Representative. The Panel presented him with a book entitled Lambeth Past and Present. He was thanked profusely for his professionalism and help in investigating the panel's concerns and answering questions at panel meetings over the years. Inspector Morag Palmer replaced Paul as our liaison officer in October and we have already forged a friendly and compatible working relationship. We thank her for willingness and professionalism in investigating matters brought to her attention.

At a meeting in September between the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) and Panel Chairs Met. Wide, the MPA announced that due to staffing cuts they would not be supporting monthly held Panel meetings supported by an MPA co-ordinator. The decision had been made that in future meetings would only be quarterly. This decision caused much concern, which is ongoing and has caused some Panel Chairs to resign.

At the meeting I spoke of the need for Lambeth, a very complex Borough, to continue to have monthly meetings with the Panel and the Police to address any issues that had arisen from custody visits to the three police stations, Brixton, Streatham and Kennington. Also, a quarterly meeting would undermine the cohesion of the Panel, leave newly appointed ICVs without the support of experienced ICVs and anyone who could not attend the quarterly meeting would have to wait six months for the next.

More importantly, issues concerning detainees, some whom are very vulnerable, or suffering from mental health issues, juveniles or detainees held on behalf of the immigration authorities, whom at the worst can legally be held for up to 7 days in cells designed to hold a person for a few hours, with no opportunity for exercise, to smoke and in the case of Streatham Police station, no opportunity to shower. In this particular station the only facility being a sink in the corridor, in full view of the CCTV camera and all who pass, would not be addressed for some time.

Despite the MPA's initial opposition, later withdrawn, we, Lambeth, and some other Panels intend to go ahead with monthly meetings without the MPA co-ordinator. Our Borough Commander, Nick Ephgrave has voiced his support for us and agreed that the Lambeth police liaison officer, Inspector Morag Palmer will attend, for which I and my Panel are very grateful. Inspector Morag Palmer will meet with me prior to the meeting to address issues raised on the visit reports.

I take this opportunity to make a tribute in memory of Mrs Greta Brooks who died on the 26th December 2009 at the age of 92, after spending two happy days of Christmas celebrations with her family and all of her grandchildren. Greta was a founder member of the Lay Visiting Scheme (later to be called Independent Custody Visiting) following the Scarman Report on the Brixton disorders in 1981.

From this the first Community-Police Consultative Group (CPCG) was formed in 1982 following meetings with the Home Office between Greta and other members of the Lambeth community. Following further meetings with the Home Office the Lay Visiting Scheme was formed, with Greta a driving force behind it. It became a statutory obligation under The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, code C.

We owe Greta and the other members of the community a huge debt of gratitude for all their work and commitment in those days by helping to make Lambeth and other boroughs a safer place for detainees, all members of society and for improving police and community relationships.

Finally this report reflects the commendable contributions made by the volunteers of the Lambeth panel. My sincere thanks to my colleagues on the panel for their dedicated service and commitment throughout 2009. Custody visiting could not be maintained without their selfless support.

Jane Warwick
Chair Lambeth Independent Custody Visitors

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 the custody suites in Lambeth to check and report on the treatment of people in police custody and to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed.

This is achieved by:

- Making one visit per week to Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations;
- Holding panel meetings; and
- Increasing public awareness of the London ICV Visiting Scheme.

Visits

In 2009 the panel made a total of 121 visits against the target of 156. This represents an achievement of 78% of the panels visiting target.

A good spread of visiting times was achieved in 2009. However, fewer visits were conducted on Sundays than other days. 26 visits were made between 06:00 and 11:59, 54 visits were conducted between 12:00 and 17:59 and 41 visits were made between 18:00 and 23:59. No visits were conducted between 00:00 and 05:59. Although detainees have a right to eight hours undisturbed rest it is important that a small number of visits take place between these times to ensure the panel checks on the running of the custody suite at night. The panel will aim to vary the timing of visits more in 2010.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects and in the majority of cases there were no significant issues raised. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that have been recorded in ICV reports (see page).

Panel members have continued to donate, books, magazines, Bibles, Korans and prayer mats for detainees throughout 2009. These are given out to detainees by custody staff following proper risk assessment.

Meetings and events

In 2009 the panel held monthly panel meetings to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. A police representative attended each meeting. Inspector Huitson attended meetings until August 2009. Since September 2009 Inspector Morag Palmer has attended panel meetings. Both officers kept the panel advised of any developments within the Lambeth custody suites and of any wider borough issues. The panel would like to thank them for their attendance at meetings throughout 2009.

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

- Meetings of the Lambeth Community and Police Consultative Group
- Meetings of the London ICVP Chairs and Vice Chairs with the MPA
- Lambeth County Fair
- The Independent Custody Visiting Association Conference
- The MPA Summer Social

The Chair and Vice Chairs have also spoken about the ICV Scheme and the role of ICVs at numerous police training events throughout 2009. These have had very positive feedback from the police and the panel hopes to continue attending these in 2010.

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

Membership and 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.

Lambeth has a population of approximately 283,879. According to DMAG¹ figures 38% of the population of Lambeth belongs to a black and minority ethnic group (BME) and 62% belong to the white community. The gender figures show the population is 51% female and 49% male.

Optional diversity monitoring has allowed the panel to consider how well it reflects the community it represents. According to available figures the panel is broadly representative of the borough in terms of race and gender. 31% of the panel belonging to a BME group and 69% from the white community. 8 members of the panel are male and 9 are female.

The Lambeth panel completed 2009 with the following accredited members:

Name

Jane Warwick – Chair
Raymond Whitaker – Vice Chair
Nick Cosin – Vice Chair
Joseph Akano
Lucy Bannister
Ed Brydson
Pauline Burrell
Justin Champion
Alistair Edwards
Shemi Leira (on sabbatical)
Regina Mambu-Small
Laura Mortimore
Aleksandra Osiniagova
Amy Owen
Sandra Prosper
Emily Wickham
Mark Wood

In 2009 the panel continued its recruitment efforts of previous years and through these efforts the panel recruited 8 new members. The panel will continue its recruitment efforts in 2010 with the aim of achieving its target membership

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.

The target membership for a panel that visits 3 custody suites is around 24 members plus additional members as reserves. This number allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to the 3 Lambeth custody suites. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month.

Station Visit Issues

There are three custody suites in Lambeth. These are located in Brixton, Kennington and Streatham police stations. The panel aims to make weekly, unannounced visits to each custody suite.

When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them. If the detainee is asleep the visitor will usually not wake them, but they will visually check the detainee through the wicket in the door. Visitors check concerns raised by detainees against their custody record (where the detainees give permission for them to do so), and will bring the matter to the attention of the police if they remain concerned about any aspect of the detainee's treatment or welfare. Most minor concerns can be resolved during the course of the visit and only more significant concerns or more complicated issues will be discussed at panel meetings.

Most 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 recurring issues of concern.

Jane Warwick has continued to attend information events held on a five weekly basis at Gipsy Hill Police Station to give talks on the ICV scheme and the history of it's formation. Other members of the Lambeth Partnership also attend. The talks have been very well received by the officers and the police and it is intended that they should continue throughout 2010.

The panel would like to find more detainees making use of shower and washing facilities during 2010. Detainees do not seem to be aware that they need to ask for a shower or wash if they want one, and when they do ask are sometimes told that there are not the staff available to facilitate it. The panel would like to see all detainees held overnight being offered a shower.

The panel continue to be concerned about the detention facilities at Streatham custody suite. Streatham custody suite does not have shower facilities. In accordance with a Home Office direction the police must provide detainees with a bowl of water to wash in the cells. The panel believe that this is not satisfactory and will continue to monitor the facilities at Streatham.

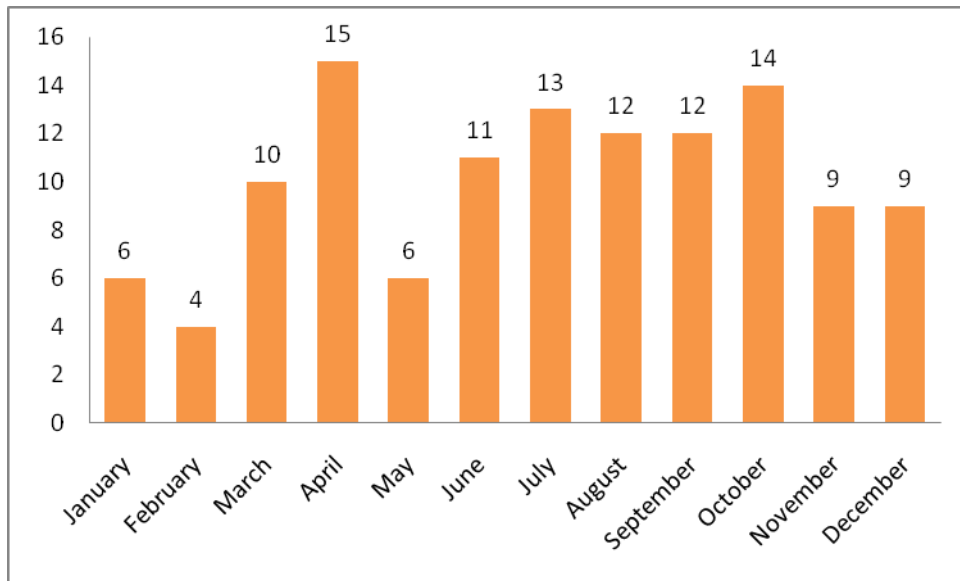
Despite these issues overall the panel is impressed with the Officers in the Division and the standard of care shown towards detainees. The panel has an excellent working relationship with the police representative, Inspector Palmer, and is grateful for her prompt responses to the issues raised.

Statistical Analysis of 2009 Panel Reports

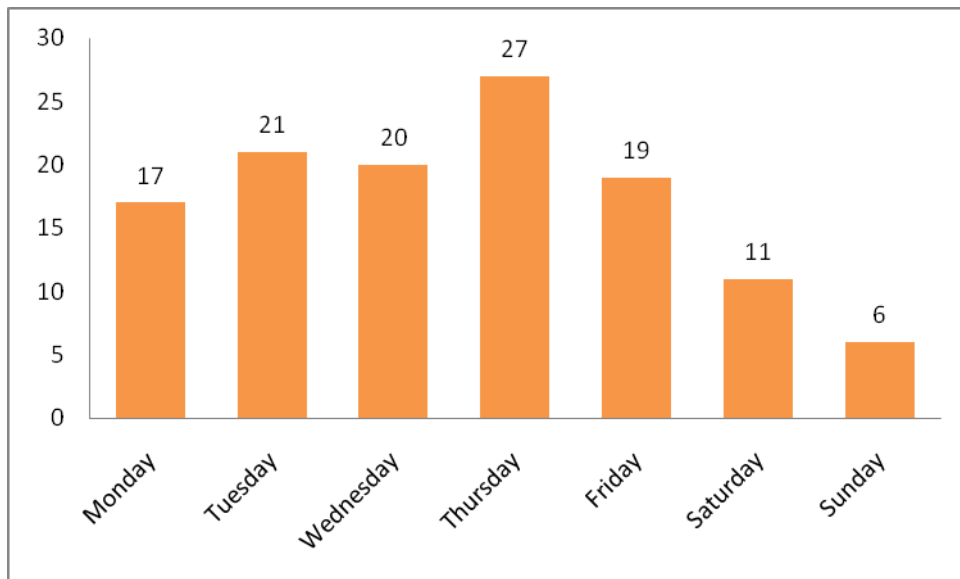
Visit Frequency

Independent Custody Visits are unannounced and the panel's intention is to avoid visiting in a predictable pattern. The following charts display the number of visits carried out at Lambeth custody suites in 2009, by month, day of the week and time period. As the charts show, the panel achieved a good spread of visits. However, the Panel will aim to do more late night visits in 2010.

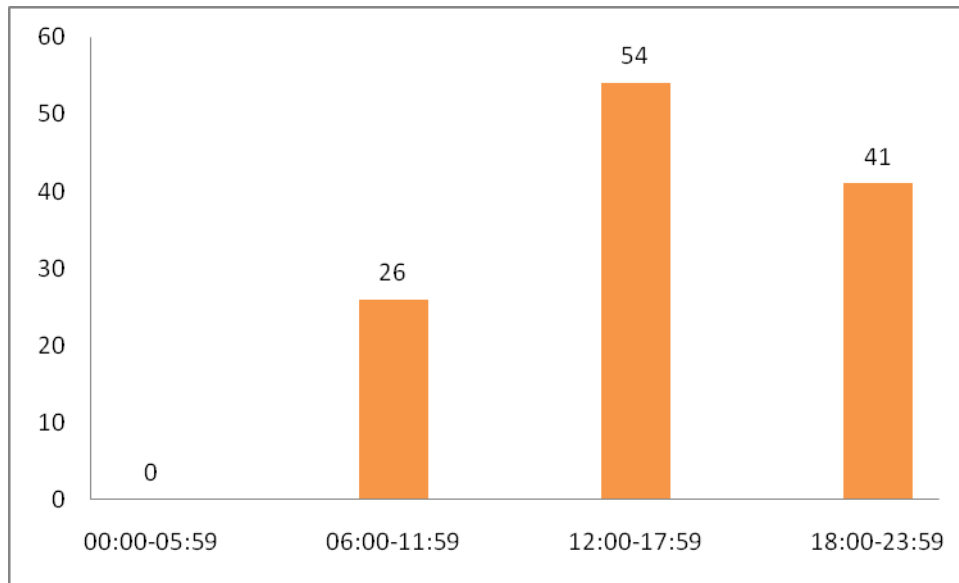
Visits by month



Visits by day

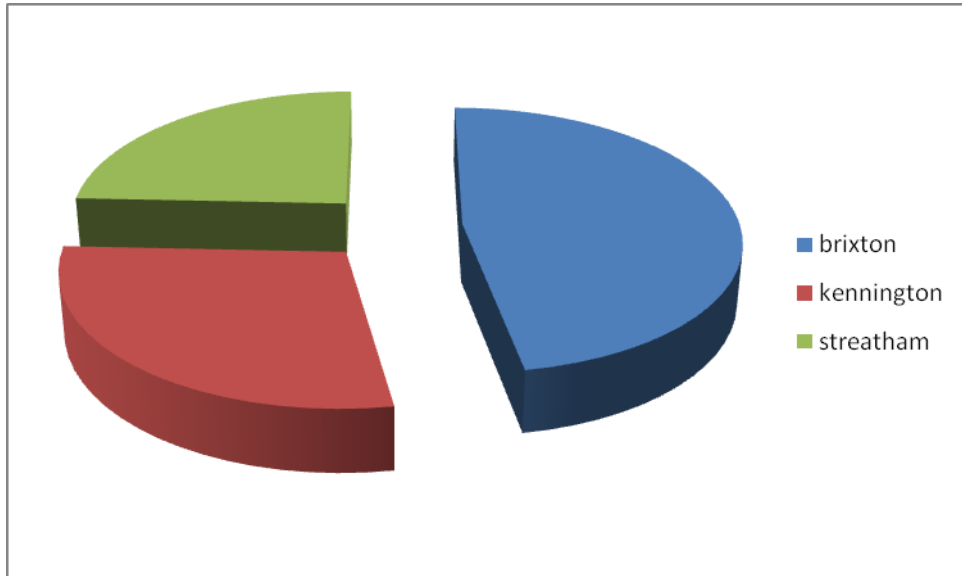


Visits by Time Period

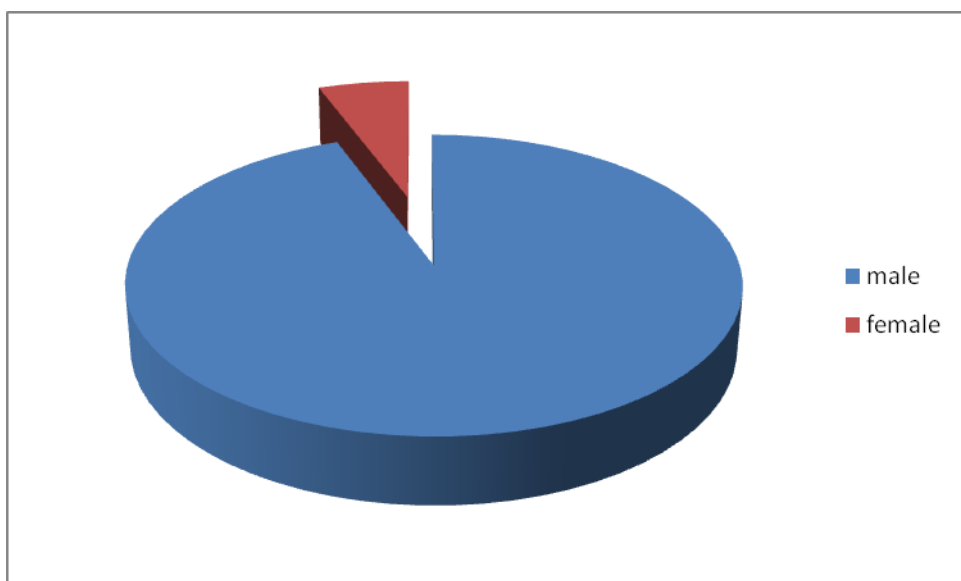


As can be seen from the pie charts below, the majority of those held in custody in Lambeth during 2009 were male, adult (over the age of 18 years) held under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 PACE).

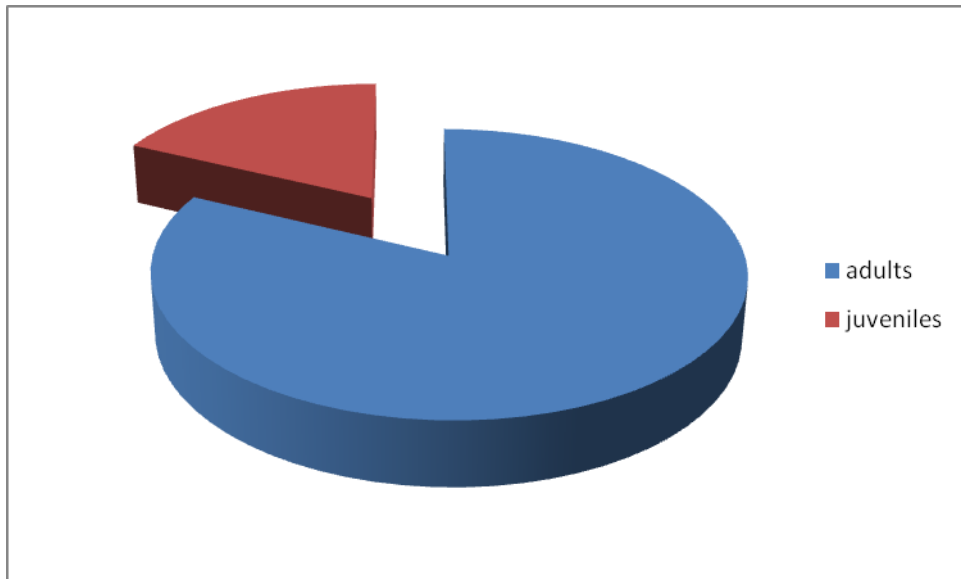
Percentage of detainees seen



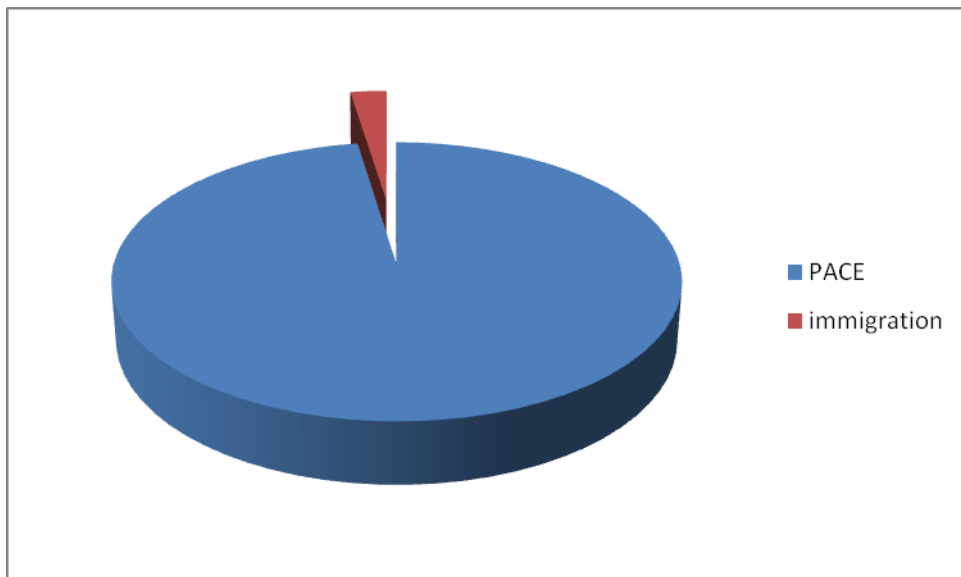
Gender made up of detainees



Age make up of detainees

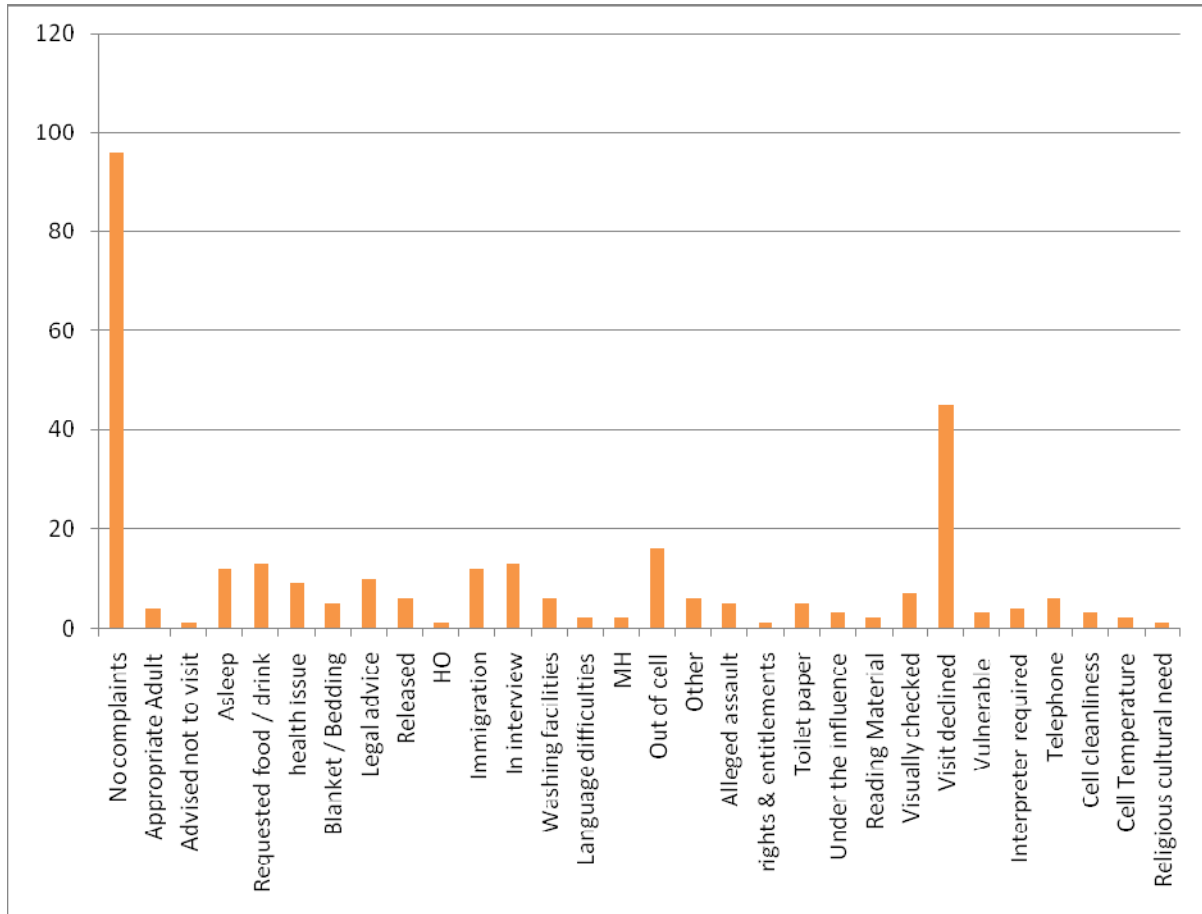


Type of detainee



Detainee Concerns

The chart below shows a summary of concerns raised by detainees during visits made to Lambeth station in 2009.



Targets and Plans for 2010

1. To continue to ensure that the rights and entitlements of detainees are upheld.
2. To ensure each station receives 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 continue to monitor the provision of washes in all of custody suites
5. To endeavour to ensure regular attendance at panel meetings by all ICVs, or an apology beforehand if absence is unavoidable.
6. To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; to ensure that the membership increases and ideally reflects the community served by the Panel.
7. To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
8. To increase Panel member input into the training of all custody staff.
9. To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Lambeth.
10. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.