

Merton Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

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Introduction

This is the 2009 annual report of the Merton Independent Custody Visitors Panel (ICVP), covering the period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009.

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

- Provide the local community and the Metropolitan Police Authority (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 2009
- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Set out the panel's targets and plans for 2010

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

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 Merton panel 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 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 Merton Borough Commander, but it 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

In my first year as chair, I am pleased to report that there has been an active and positive engagement between the police authorities and the panel.

In our quarterly meetings we are pleased to see regular attendance by the police authorities and comprehensive responses on any issues raised. These meetings and ongoing communication have been vital in keeping this relationship healthy, particularly during the change of personnel in custody. We look forward to continuing this engagement with Inspector Cameron in 2010.

Merton ICVP has welcomed the opportunity to participate in training to give better visibility and understanding of the role of ICVs. The panel was represented by our former MPA coordinator, Sarah Walker. We congratulate Sarah on her new role within the MPA and thank her for her support. I would also like to give special thanks to one of our panel members who attended the training with Sarah.

As chair, I have actively encouraged panel members to visit at unusual times. Panel members volunteer their time alongside a wide range of other commitments, so I am particularly pleased to see that members have taken on this challenge with real enthusiasm. We will continue to ensure that the times and days of our visits ensure that we get a comprehensive insight into the custody suite. In addition, we will refocus our efforts on completing 100% of visits.

On a personal note, I am keen to become more engaged in other groups which will raise the profile of Merton ICVP. I would also like to thank my vice-chair for her invaluable support

As we look forward into 2010, we are keen to digest the full report of the HMIC and HMIP Inspection which has recently taken place and building on the good work done in 2009.

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 objectives of the panel are to make unannounced visits to the custody suite at Wimbledon police station and to check and report on the treatment of people held in police custody ensuring their rights and entitlements are being observed.

In the previous annual report the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2009:

- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
- 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.
- 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 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 2009 the panel made a total 40 visits against the target of 52. This represents an achievement of 77% of the panels visiting target.

A good spread of visiting days and times were achieved in 2009. 14 visits were made between 06:00 and 11:59, 16 visits were conducted between 12:00 and 17:59 and 21 visits were made between 18:00 and 23:59. 2 visits were conducted between 00:00 and 05:59.

Detainee concerns cover a wide range of subjects (see page 13). There were no significant issues raised during majority of visits and any concerns were addressed by custody staff promptly at the time of the visit. There were no recurring issues recorded in ICV reports during 2009.

The panel meets quarterly to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. Merton borough police representatives attend each panel meeting. The officers keep the panel advised of any custody developments at Merton custody suite, within the borough and across the Metropolitan Police Service. During 2009 Inspector Cameron, Inspector Philips, Sergeant Shepherd and Sergeant Lucas liaised with the panel. The panel has an excellent working relationship with the police representatives and would like to thank them for their prompt response to panel concerns and attendance at meetings throughout 2009.

The panel also welcomed Inspector Aubrey from the MPS Mental Health Team to the September meeting. He gave an excellent talk on his role, developments in mental health and the implications of the Bradley Report. The panel are very grateful to him for taking to attend the meeting and thank him for an informative and thought-provoking presentation.

All panel members undertook refresher training modules during the March and December panel meetings. One member also attended Diversity training at the MPA in November 2009.

During the year the Chair, Vice Chair and Panel Members represented the Merton Panel at numerous meetings and events including:

- Meetings of the London ICVP Chairs and Vice Chairs with the MPA
- A meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the South / South-East Cluster of ICVPs
- The London ICV Scheme Summer Social

In 2010 the panel would like to increase community awareness of the ICV scheme within Merton and will seek out new opportunities to achieve this aim.

Membership and Recruitment

All panels must 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.

In 2009 the panel had 8 active accredited members. There are 2 male and 6 female members with varying diversity in age and ethnicity. However, the panel would like to increase its diversity in terms of gender.

During 2009 the Merton panel had 8 accredited members:

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

The target membership for a panel visiting one custody suite is eight members plus one or two people as reserves. This number allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to the custody suite. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month.

The panel finished 2009 with only 8 active members. In 2009 the panel continued its recruitment efforts of previous years. Local recruitment included poster and leaflet distribution, a local radio advert and advertising with Merton Volunteer Centre. Unfortunately the panel membership remained at 8. As a result the panel will continue to try to recruit new members in 2010.

The MPA continues to seek volunteers in Merton and other boroughs across London. 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.

Station Visit Issues

Merton borough has one 24/7 operational custody suite located in Wimbledon Police Station. The custody suite at Mitcham is no longer in operation.

In line with the panels in the rest of London, Merton ICVP aim to visit Wimbledon Custody Suite once a week.

In 2009 there were no major issues or concerns relating to police custody at Wimbledon Police Station. Issues that detainees put to custody visitors, include requests for food, drink, blankets, medical attention or legal advice. When issues were raised with the custody staff they were dealt with promptly and the custody visitors are grateful for the cooperation that police officers and staff have extended to them on their visits during the year.

In the 2008 Annual Report the panel recorded concern around the lack of knowledge and awareness some custody officers had of the ICV scheme. The custody Managers took a number of steps to resolve this issue and the panel have noticed an improvement.

During the year exchange visits were arranged between the Merton and Sutton Panel. This gave custody visitors the opportunity to shadow visits with their neighbouring panel. A number of Merton and Sutton panel members took up the opportunity. Sutton custody suite is a large modern station with a custody suite of 30 cells. By comparison Wimbledon station is older and contains a smaller custody suite of 10 cells. Custody visitors from both panels found it useful to visit in a different custody environment.

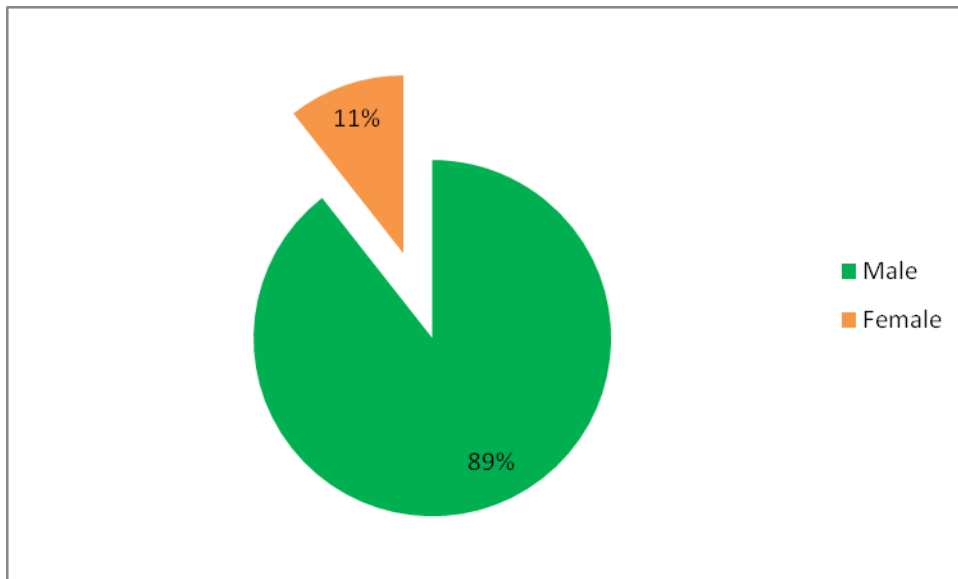
In conclusion the panel is pleased to report that their relationship with custody staff has continued to be positive and overall they are impressed with the standard of care shown to detainees.

Statistical Analysis of 2009 Panel Reports

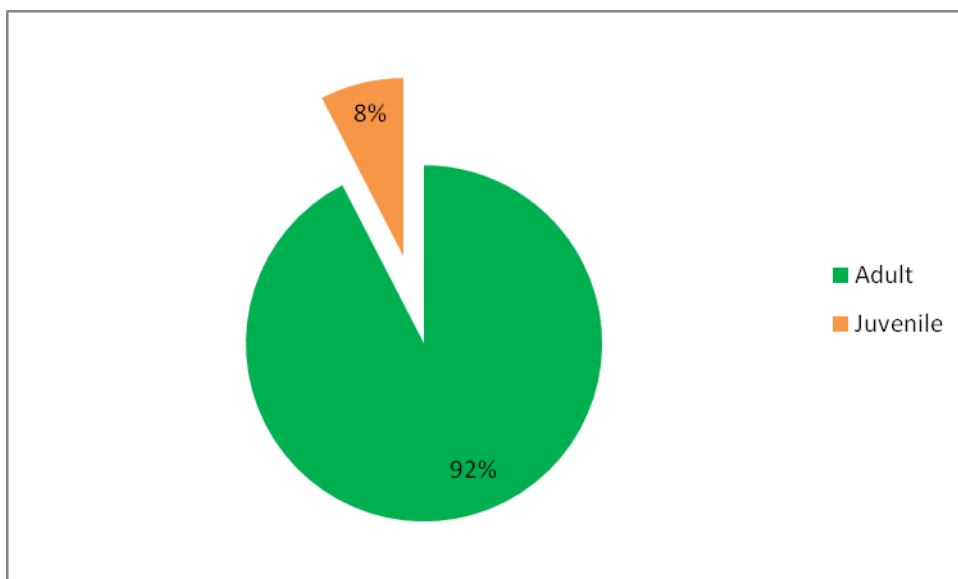
Demographics of detainees in custody during visits

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

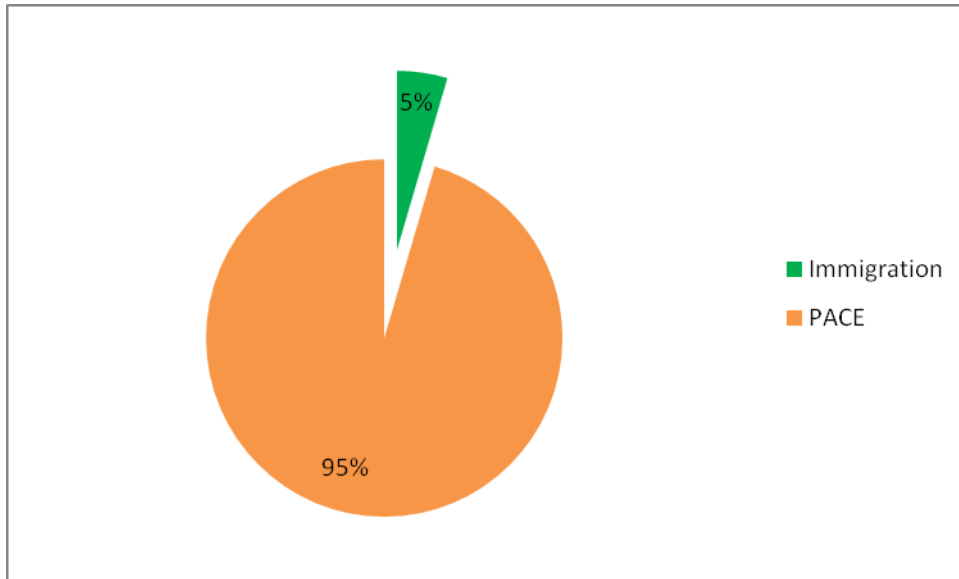
Male/Female



Adult/Juvenile



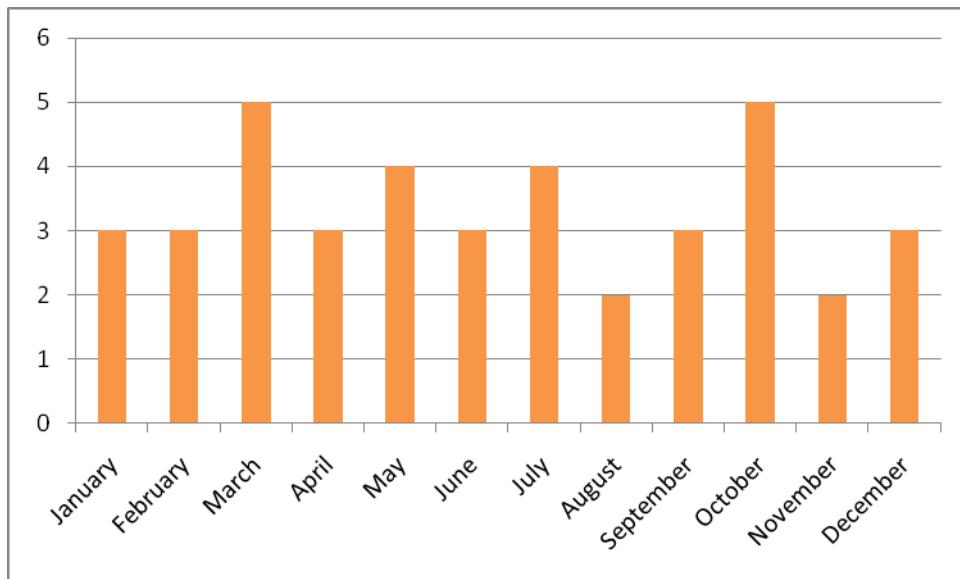
PACE/Immigration/Other



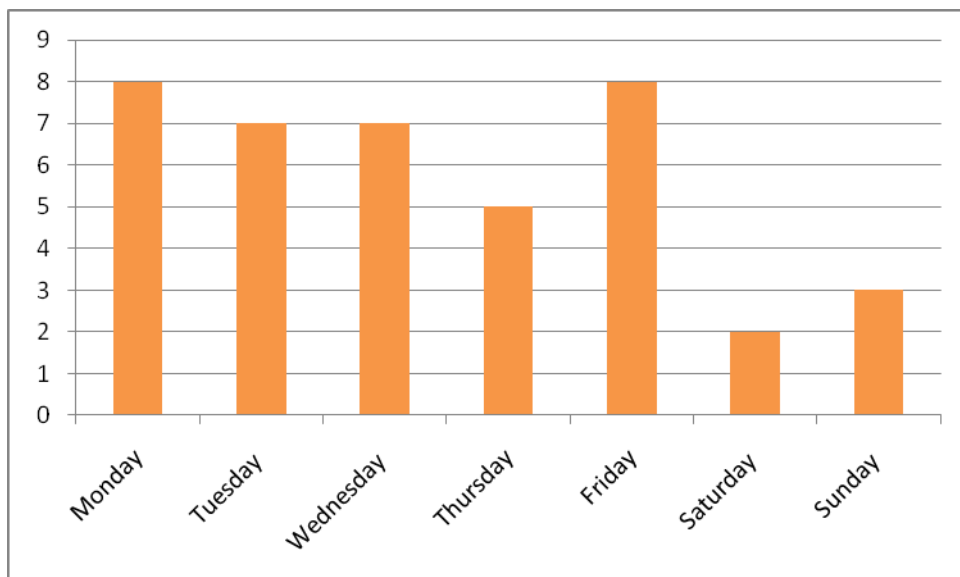
Visit Frequency

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 by Merton ICVP in 2009, by month, day of the week and time period. As the charts show, the panel achieved a good spread of visits meaning that visits could not have been predicted by the police.

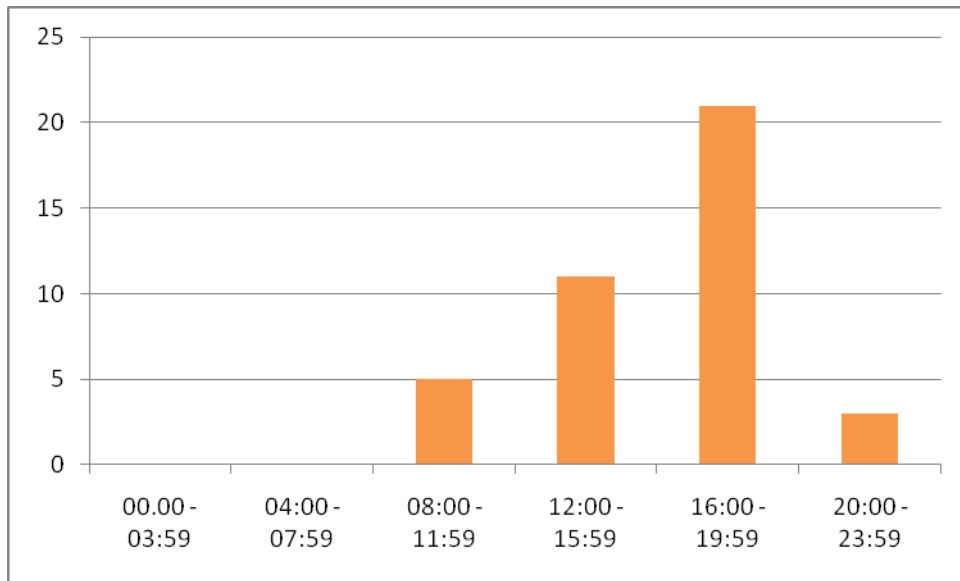
Visits by month



Visits by day



Visits by time period



Targets and Plans for 2010

- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld.
- To increase the number of visits completed, aiming to make one visit per week
- To vary 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 endeavour to attend all panel meetings and to send apologies in advance of missed meetings.
- To ensure that the membership does not fall below current level and if necessary to work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members.
- 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 Sutton.
- To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide an independent custody visiting scheme in London.