

Southwark Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report
2009

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Introduction

This is the 2009 annual report of the Southwark Independent Custody Visiting 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 Southwark 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 objectives 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 Southwark panel attend Peckham and Walworth Road 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.

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 Borough Commander for Southwark, 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 has been an interesting one for the panel, with a number of changes introduced by the MPA. Our membership numbers have been at full strength for the first time in many years. Several of our members are new to not only the panel but also to custody visiting. Most panel members undertake about two visits per month, covering two very busy stations at Peckham and Walworth and occasionally Southwark. It is our aim that each station will receive at least one visit per week throughout the coming year.

In general, during our visits, the panel has found that detainees are treated well within the provisions of the law and that police in Southwark demonstrate high standards of professionalism and commitment in their work. We have found that we are welcomed at the custody suites by the police at all levels. We feel that our input and observations as independent members of the public are valued and beneficial.

The panel met once per month except for August in 2009 and we were joined by representatives of the MPS stations and custody areas. Our thanks go to Inspector Leverett, Inspector Martin, Inspector Barton, Superintendent Blanchard and Chief Inspector Wilshire for their attendance and prompt and efficient responses to issues and enquiries raised at panel meetings.

Finally I would like to thank all the panel members who have been involved in visiting during 2009. Their enthusiasm and commitment is exemplary and this essential service to our community would not be achieved without their dedication and support.

Cheryl Stepton
Southwark 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 objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to the custody suites in Southwark 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 each custody suite in Southwark borough.
- Holding monthly panel meetings
- Increasing public awareness of the London ICV Visiting Scheme.

Visits

In 2009 the panel made a total of 72 visits against the target of 104. This represents an achievement of 69% of the panels visiting target. 38 visits were made to Peckham and 34 to Walworth

A good spread of visiting day was achieved in 2009. However, fewer visits were conducted on Sundays than other days. 11 visits were made between 06:00 and 11:59 and 15 visits were conducted between 12:00 and 17:59 and 46 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 2009.

The panel would like to thank the five members of the Bexley Panel who visited with Southwark during 2009 while the panel was short of members.

Meetings and events

In 2009 the panel held monthly panel meetings to discuss concerns raised on visits, administration issues and to share experiences. Panel meetings are not held in August. A police representative attends each meeting. Throughout the year Inspector Leverett, Inspector Martin, Inspector Barton and Chief Inspector Blanchard attended meetings as the police representatives. All officers kept the panel advised of developments at Southwark custody suites and within borough. The panel would like to thank them for their attendance at meetings throughout the year. The panel would also like to thank guest speakers who attended meetings throughout the year. Inspector Aubrey gave a thought provoking and informative presentation on mental health issues and implications of the Bradley Report at the September panel meeting. PC Sarah Barnes gave a interesting presentation on the Youth Triage System at the November meeting. The panel greatly appreciated them giving their time to attend the meetings.

Panel 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.

Southwark has a population of approximately 267,750. According to DMAG¹ figures 38% of the population of Southwark 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.

Recent diversity monitoring has allowed the panel to consider how well it reflects the community it represents. According to available figures 60% of the panel belonging to a BME group and 40% are from the white community. 58% of the panel are male and 42% are female.

The panel completed 2009 with the following accredited members:

Name

Cheryl Stepton (Chair)
Philippa Millward (Vice Chair)
Kese Boateng
Kevin Browne
Patrizia Campisi
Omolara Daniel
Fernando Grace
John Guntrip
Kofoworola Jacobs
Avril Jones
Natalia Northon
Ibidunni Oyenuga
Yusuf Sadiku
Francisca Ubogagu
Rachel Walsh

The panel finished 2009 with 15 active members.

Three members decided to take sabbaticals from custody visiting in 2009. The panel would like to thank them for their committed service to the panel and the local community. The panel looks forward to welcoming them back to custody visiting. Six members left the panel in 2009. We thank them for the time and effort they dedicated to the panel and the local community and wish them well for the future.

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.

In 2009 the panel continued its recruitment efforts of previous years and five recruited new members and achieved its target membership by end of 2009. The panel would like to thank Bexley panel members who completed additional visits with the Southwark ICVP whilst the panel recruited their new members. The panel are grateful for the help and support from Bexley ICVP.

Station Visit Issues

The panel aims to make weekly, unannounced visits to each operational custody suite in Southwark. Southwark has two 24/7 operational custody suites in Peckham and Walworth Road Police Stations. The custody suite at Southwark Police station is only used as an overflow from other stations, for serious public disorder and special operations. Therefore the panel only visits Southwark Custody Suite when it is in use.

When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them. Visitors do not wake detainees if they are asleep, but they will usually 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.

The Southwark panel is pleased to report that they have had no serious concerns about the treatment or conditions of people held in police custody in Southwark borough. On occasions when the panel have found problems – such as a dirty cell or a detainee requesting a blanket or food the visitors have raised the issue with the officers on duty and the issue is usually resolved promptly.

However, the panel would like to see detainees held in custody for long periods of time routinely offered a shower. Detainees do not seem to be aware that they need to ask for a shower if they want one, and when they do ask sometimes there is not the staff available to facilitate it. The panel would also like to see detainees offered more than one blanket in periods of cold weather.

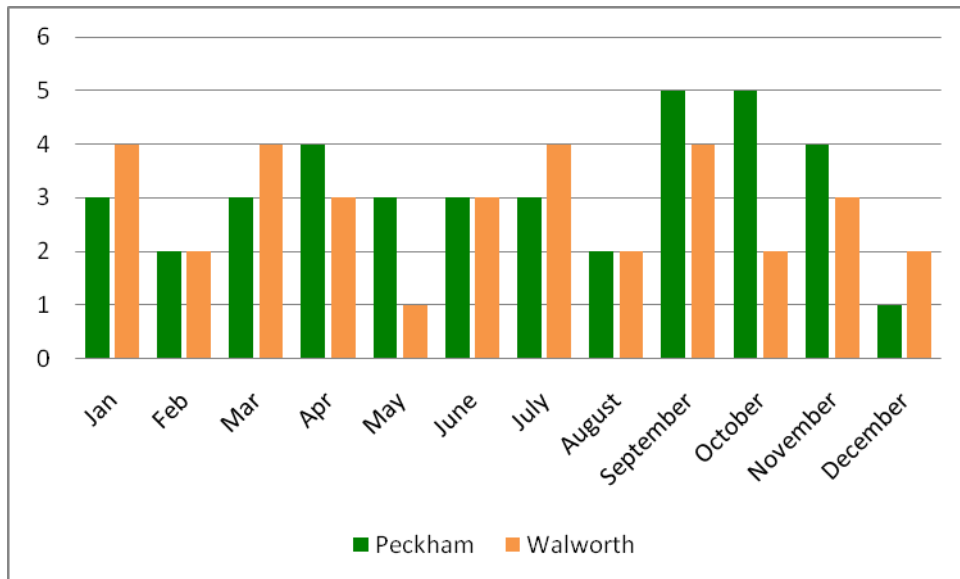
Overall the panel is impressed by the standard of care shown to detainees and the professional attitude of Custody Officers and Staff. The panel also has an excellent working relationship with the police representatives, Inspector Leverett and Inspector Barton. The panel is grateful for their diligent and prompt responses to any issues raised.

Statistical Analysis of 2009 Panel Reports

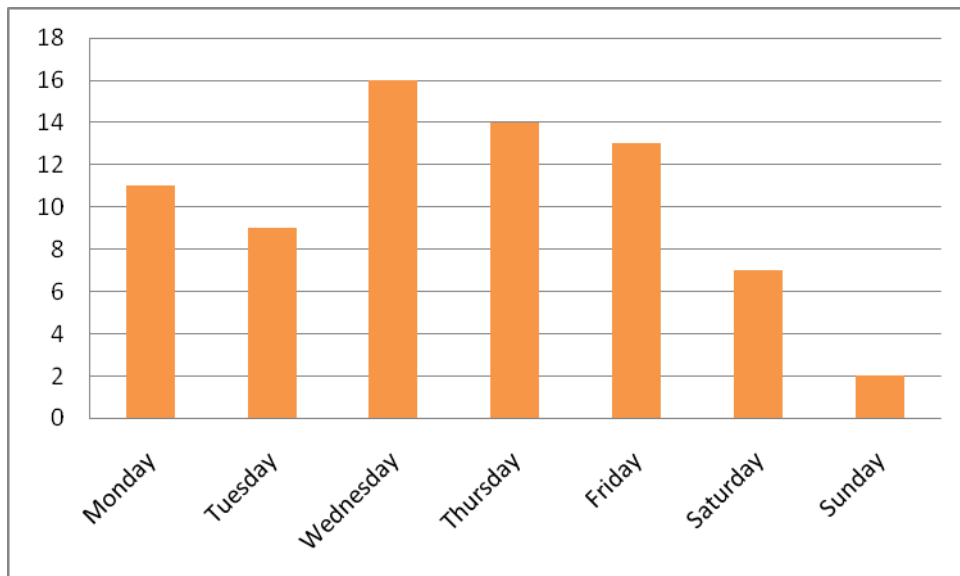
Visit Frequency

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 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.

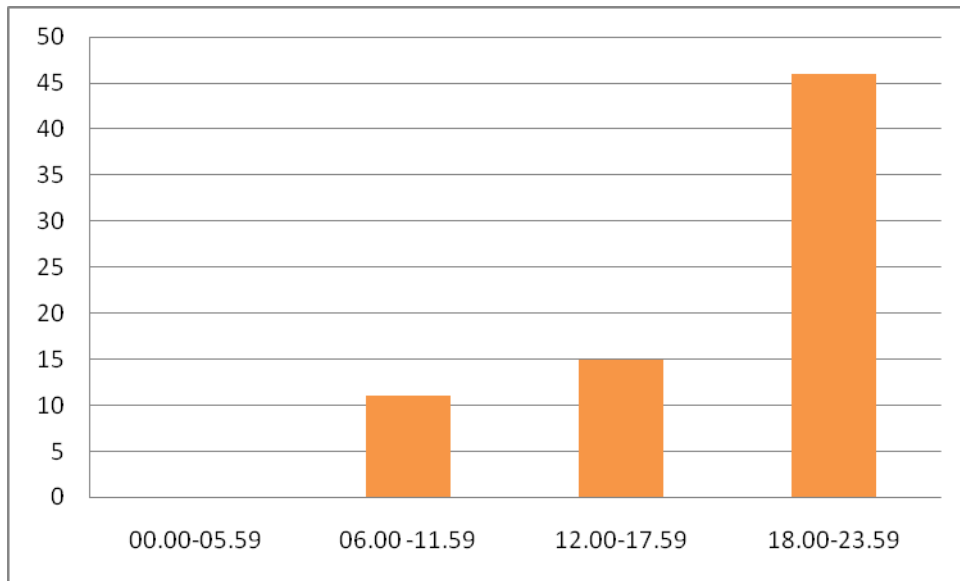
Visits by month



Visits by day



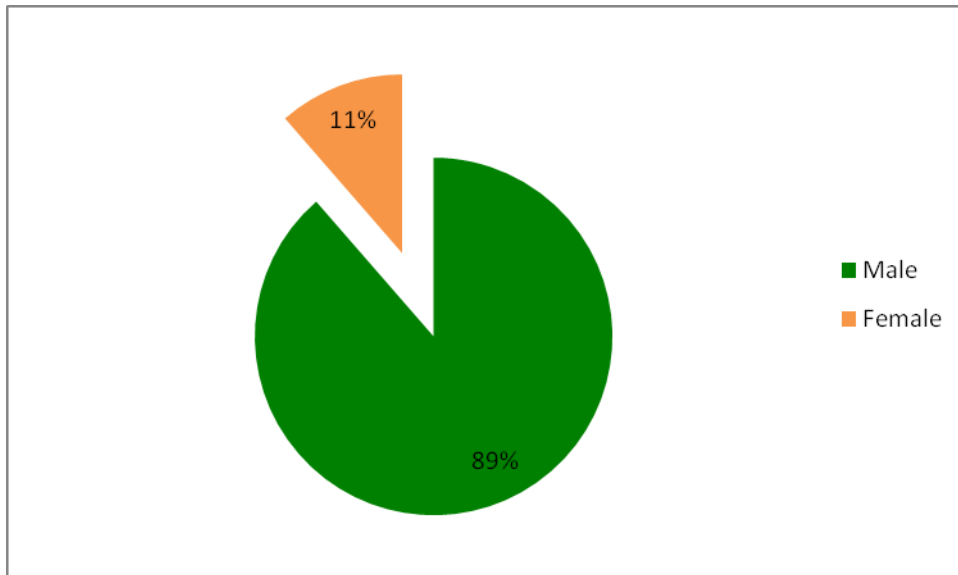
Visits by Time Period



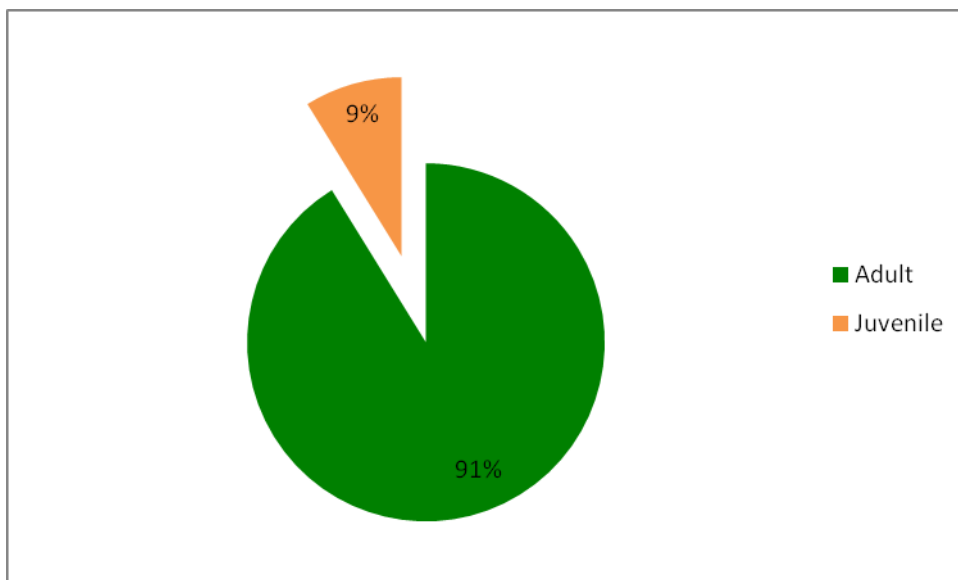
Demographics of detainees in custody during visits

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

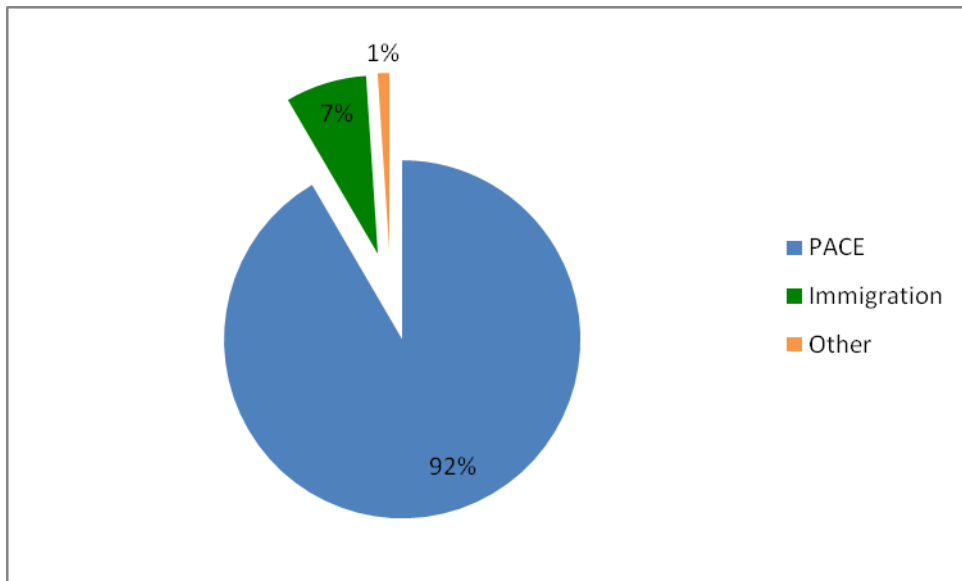
Male/Female



Adult/Juvenile



PACE/Immigration/Other



Targets and Plans for 2010

1. 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.
2. To make one visit a week to each custody suite
3. To vary the days of the week and times of visits to get an accurate picture of the Custody Suite.
4. To endeavour to attend all panel meetings.
5. To work with the MPA on the recruitment of new members; to ensure that the membership remains above a minimum of 17 volunteers and ideally reflects the community served by the Panel.
6. To ensure that new members undertake MPA initial training and that experienced members undertake refresher courses.
7. To promote and raise awareness of the London ICV Scheme within Southwark.
8. To continue to assist the MPA to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent custody visiting in London.