

Wandsworth Independent Custody Visitors Panel

Annual Report 2009

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Introduction

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

The report covers a 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

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 2009:

- 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

The panel made 84 visits to stations during 2009. This represented 81% of the target. Of these, the bulk were undertaken midweek (Tuesday to Thursday the days went most visits were undertaken – 49) and between 18:00 and midnight (also 49). The two earliest visits were at 00:17 and 01:54 and the two latest at 21:40 and 22:53

Detainee concerns were generally as expected with most frequent as follows. The FME service and health issues, delays in receiving legal advice, delays in having someone informed of detention or phone calls to family, requests for food/drink and opportunities for washing. Detainees frequently needed the services of an interpreter.

Panel membership now stands at 17 which is the optimum number for a panel visiting two 24/7 stations. The plan to recruit younger members was successful with 3 new ICVs in their twenties. The MPA continues to monitor the diversity in the ICV scheme. However, the information for Wandsworth is not complete and no meaningful comparison can be made with the borough at large.

Chairman's report

The past year saw a number of changes to the ICV Panel, especially towards the latter part of the year. Our thanks go to Caroline Roberts who stood down as Chair in October after many years of excellent service. Caroline will be continuing as an ICV, as will our continuing Vice Chair, Sandra Roach and they will both be able to share her considerable experience with us, especially as we have four new ICVs who have joined us this year. We are pleased to have recruited some younger members this time.

With the implementation of MetForward we lost our panel Co-ordinator, George Fry in October (thanks to George for his work on our behalf) and we now have the services of Tony Hawker.

Relations with the police have continued to improve, and there has continued to be a police presence at the majority of panel meetings, there have been a few blips as Custody management has been "shared" between Insp Martin Wild and Insp Janet Stokoe who was on sick leave for some of 2009.

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 the officers mentioned for their help and support. They have both been very responsive in following up on issues raised by members of the panel.

The problems associated with the physical provision of custody in Wandsworth are unlikely to be resolved another year on due to budget cuts. The possibility of shower facilities in Battersea now seems impossible. The power failures at Battersea over 2009 have also been a cause for concern.

2010 will see more changes to the way we operate due to the number of official meetings being reduced to 4, but I'm sure all our panel members will continue to be vigilant and raise concerns between visits if required. Meeting attendance will be more important than before as we will have fewer opportunities to discuss issues as a group

My thanks go to all seventeen 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.

Liz Carboni
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 have been three new recruits to the panel and one transfer to the panel from Tower Hamlets. This means that the panel is at the optimum size (17) for the visiting workload it has. Three of the four newcomers to the panel are of the younger age group of 18-30 which has changed the balance in the panel slightly in terms of age.

The population of the borough as a whole is 48% male and 52% female. The majority of panel members (12), including the Chair, are female. The panel tends to be predominantly made up of members in the two older two age brackets 45-65 (7) and 65+ (5). There are now 4 in the 25-45 age group and one member is under 25 years old.

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 as an overflow facility. The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Wandsworth and Battersea police stations. During 2009 a total of 7,893 detainees were held in Wandsworth custody suites. During the times of the visits by ICVs 415 detainees were held. Of these, 302 were offered visits and 180 accepted.

There were few major concerns voiced by the detainees interviewed. Of all detainees who accepted a visit (180), 125 had no concerns, complaints or comments about their treatment while detained. The main issues/requests most reported by detainees and resolved by ICVs were: requests for an FME or other general health concerns (23); requests for a solicitor, interpreter or appropriate adult (27) and several had worries that no one had been informed of their detention. The remaining concerns and requests centred around detainees not receiving food or drink, blankets and washing opportunities. There were also records of conversations with detainees which just noted facts about their detention and were not complaints as such. Also, on occasions, ICVs also provided detainees with reassurance that problems already raised were being dealt with. The majority of all contacts with detainees were resolved to the satisfaction of the ICVs at the time of the visit and no further action was required.

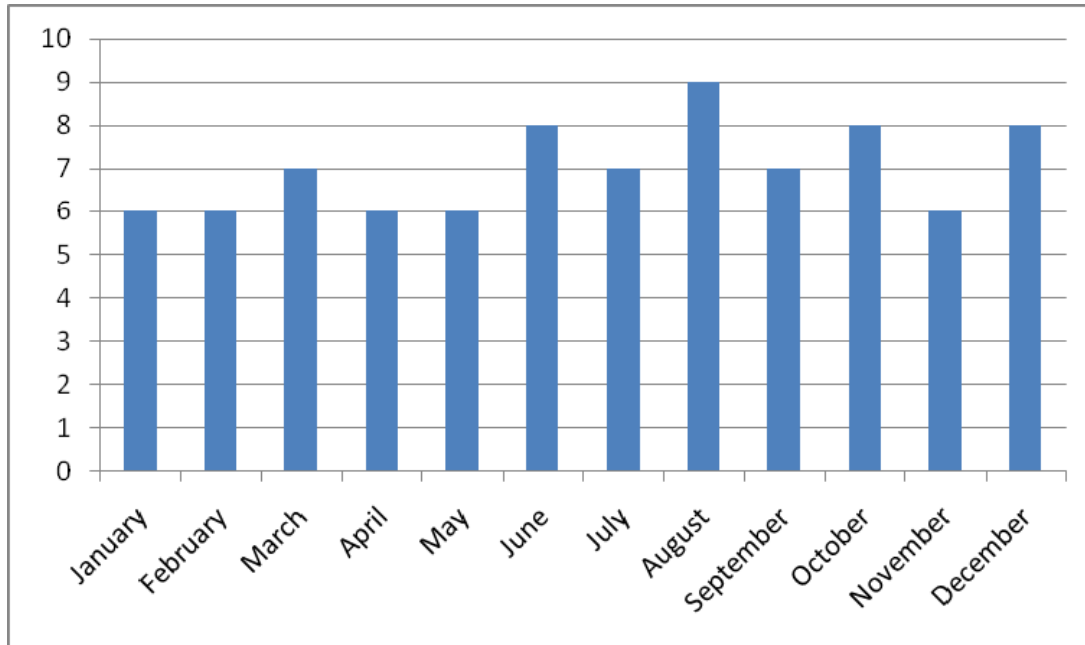
More serious matters or ones that could not be resolved at the police station were escalated for discussion at the panel meetings. The majority of reports (63) had no matters requiring a police response. Those that did could be broken down as follows.

- General concerns about the built infrastructure and temperature control. These almost exclusively concerned Battersea station which is a Victorian building. However, the temperature at both stations can be unpredictable. A tendency to be over hot at Wandsworth and cold at Battersea causing cells to be closed. Also, visits were abandoned because of power failures at Battersea Station.
- The FME service and the general health of detainees. This featured on 8 visit report forms and concerned delays in detainees seeing a doctor, mental health assessments being made or worries about a health condition reported by the detainee.
- Delays in access to the custody suite. There were several occasions when ICV pairs were not admitted to the custody suite promptly when arriving at the stations. Also, it was mentioned that some officers encountered did not know anything about the ICV scheme and were unaware of the ICV role.
- The removal of detainees by the immigration service. There were several requests for information on when immigration detainees were removed from police cells.
- The comfort of detainees. This included requests for showers, blankets, fresh air and the opportunity to contact friends and relatives.

Data from panel visits

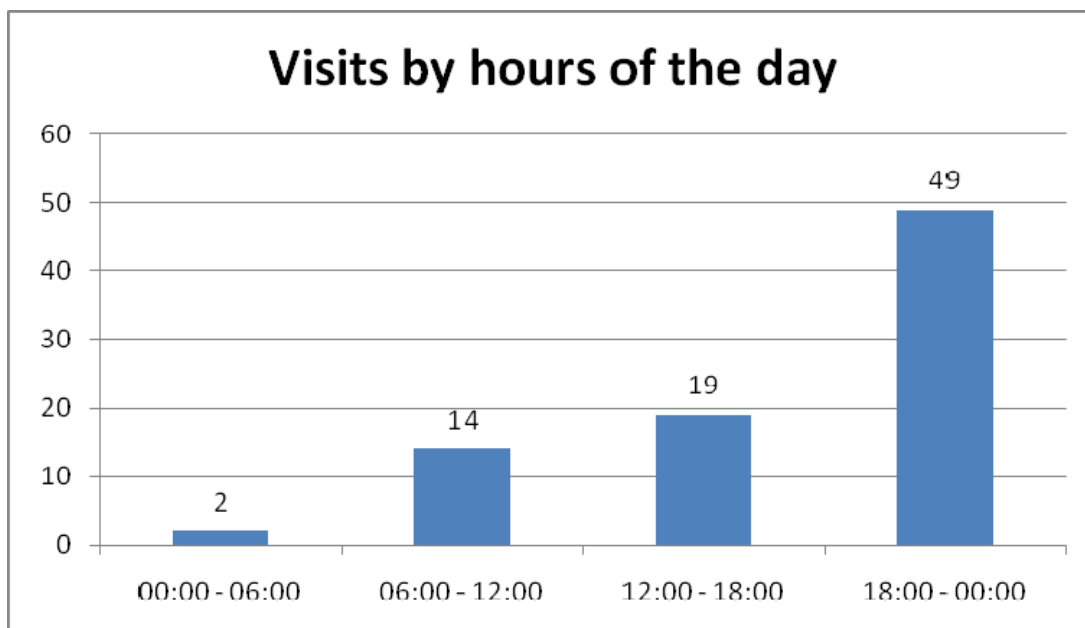
1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target
Wandsworth	43	82
Battersea	41	79
Total	84	81

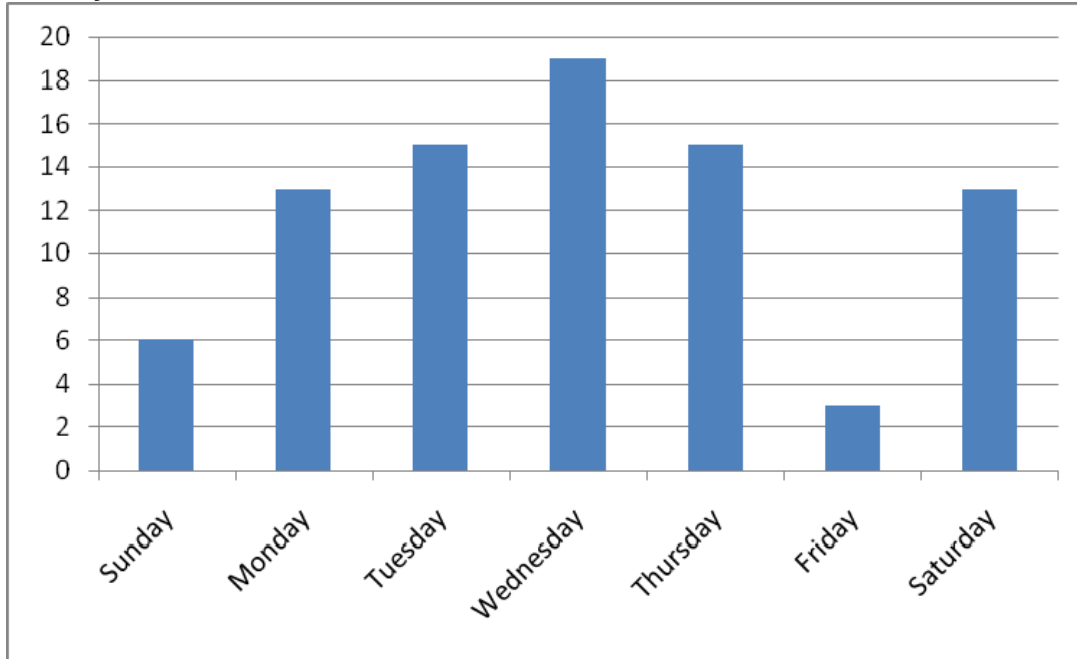


2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no	% of all visits
00:00 – 06:00 hrs	2	2
06:00 – 12:00 hrs	14	17
12:00 – 18:00 hrs	19	22.6
18:00 – 00:00 hrs	49	58.3
Total	84	



3. Days of Visits



Breakdown of detainees at the time of the visits

Total in custody	Offered a visit	Accepted a visit	Refused a visit
415	302	180	122

	Adult	Juvenile	Total
Male	319	42	361
Female	46	8	54
Total	365	50	415

Detainee by type

PACE	Immigration	Other	Total
395	16	4	415

Plans for the forthcoming year 2010

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

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- 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, for example through shared training
- 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