



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Hounslow Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2008



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Introduction

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

The report covers a period from January 2008 to December 2008

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 2009

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 Richmond as part of the London ICV scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Hounslow, 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 panel made a total of 81 visits against a combined target of 110 visits; this represents an achievement of 74% of the target. This result is disappointing for the panel following as it does the excellent results for 2007. The shortfall is partly accounted for by changes in the panel membership; one experienced and active member left the panel and others have suffered from illness some of which has been long-term.

Fewer early morning or night visits were made during 2008; the panel had aimed to increase these during the year. The proportion of late evening visits did however increase while remaining numerically similar to 2007.

Although the Chair attended a refresher cluster-based training evening during the year, refresher training modules have yet to be delivered during panel meetings as had been the intention. The Chair also attended a cluster meeting of Chairs and Vice-Chairs which included a presentation from the Hammersmith and Fulham Drug Intervention Programme.

The panel has members from many of the diverse communities of Hounslow and probably comes quite close to representing the make-up of the local community; the latest population projections suggest that this is 59% white and 37% Black or Asian*.

During the year the MPA conducted a diversity monitoring exercise. Completion of the forms was voluntary and the amount of data for the scheme as a whole exceeded the target. At 50%, returns from Hounslow panel members were slightly fewer however. It is only possible to fully report based on these data. The panel has more men (9) than women (5), whereas the current population prediction* is that men and women are represented roughly equally. The panel has members from at least three faiths. The results of the monitoring show Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) members comprise 29% of the panel; however the apparent representation may be as high as 43%.

*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.

Chair's report

It is fair to say that 2008 has been a less eventful year, in terms of changes to organisation and procedures, than was 2007. In my last report I described the change of control from the London Borough of Hounslow to the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA). These arrangements are now established and allow myself and Vice Chair a degree of contact with other London panels through Chairs' and Cluster meetings. A regular Newsletter keeps panel members up to date with developments and the Coordinator continues to provide the panel with useful insights into custody visiting.

It has however been a disappointing year in one sense, because of the fall in the number of visits we managed to complete. This was partly due to the illness of some panel members and partly due to us losing one of the more active members of the panel; some of this dip in performance was however due to some panel members not completing visits that were scheduled.

During the last half of the year the panel ceased the monthly visits to Brentford, which was being used under Operation Safeguard; Operations Safeguard is where low-risk prisoners normally on their way between court and prison, are held at designated police stations. This was to help focus the panel's efforts on Hounslow and Chiswick custody suites, where PACE* detainees are held. Operation Safeguard did in any case cease in October 2008.

Relations with Hounslow police continue to be good. We have been pleased to have both Chief Inspector Kyte and Inspector Boyer attend panel meetings at different times during the year. The police have been able to provide reports on matters that ICVs have raised; these have been circulated in time for meetings, enabling the panel to give proper consideration to the police responses.

Last year I listed three areas of regular concern relating to the conditions in which detainees were kept: the supply of blankets, the temperature of cells and washing facilities. I am glad to say that these are no longer a regular source of concern. In the case of the supply of blankets, there was however a short period of cold weather at the end of the year when blanket supply again became erratic.

I would like to record, with thanks, the names of the people who were members of the Hounslow ICV panel during 2008:

Vivienne Cox (Chair)
Meenu Dhiri (Vice Chair)
Alice Devine
Khaqan Jabbar
Peter Jackson
Kim Lawrence
Basil Mann

John Mellor
Samuel Ofosu-Siaw
Andy Parker
Hussein Qureshi
Aftab Siddiqui
Jane Sidery
Dalip Bhamra

*Police and Criminal Evidence Act; detainees that are visited are mostly held under the provisions of this act.

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.

As stated earlier (please see Aims and Achievements), the panel has members from many of the diverse communities of Hounslow and probably comes quite close to representing the make-up of the local community; the latest population projections suggest that this is 59% white and 37% Black or Asian*. There are more men than women panel members which does not conform to the even split that might be expected. The panel age profile is a reasonable match for the local community while being slightly older; there are one or two more members in the over 45 category and the same number fewer aged 25-45.

The panel remains at 14 members in total; this is despite losing two members of the panel during the year. Two new members have been recruited (although one only took up post in January 2009). Both new members are fully accredited and have received Initial Training; one has now completed his probation period.

*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.

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Chiswick and Hounslow Police Stations operate full time custody suites. Brentford police station has been used exclusively under Operation Safeguard for the majority of 2008; this is the operation under which prisoners on remand and other low-risk prisoners are held in police custody suites dedicated for that use. The Operation was ceased on 30 October, however the panel had ceased to visit Brentford in June because of illness and the difficulty being experienced meeting its PACE* commitments

As well as weekly, unannounced visits to Hounslow and Chiswick, the panel schedules a further visit to Hounslow. The majority of visit 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. Issues with the supply of blankets that were a concern last year have largely been resolved; however there was a short period at the end of the year during the cold weather when there was a temporary supply problem.

Hounslow police have continued to be responsive to ICVs requests and to any issues they have raised. Officers attend panel meetings and provide reports in advance of panel meetings on matters that have been brought to their attention.

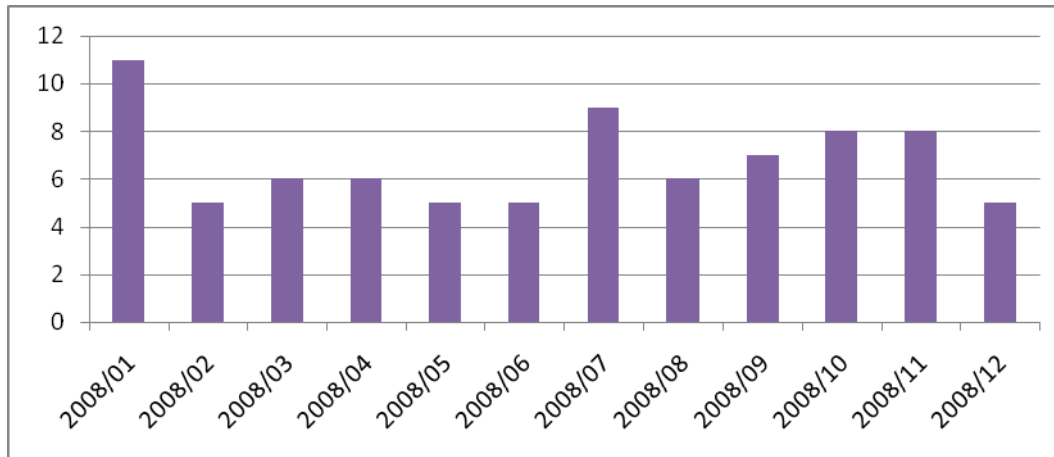
*Police and Criminal Evidence Act. The panel's main purpose is to visit detainees held at Hounslow and Chiswick under the provisions of this Act.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

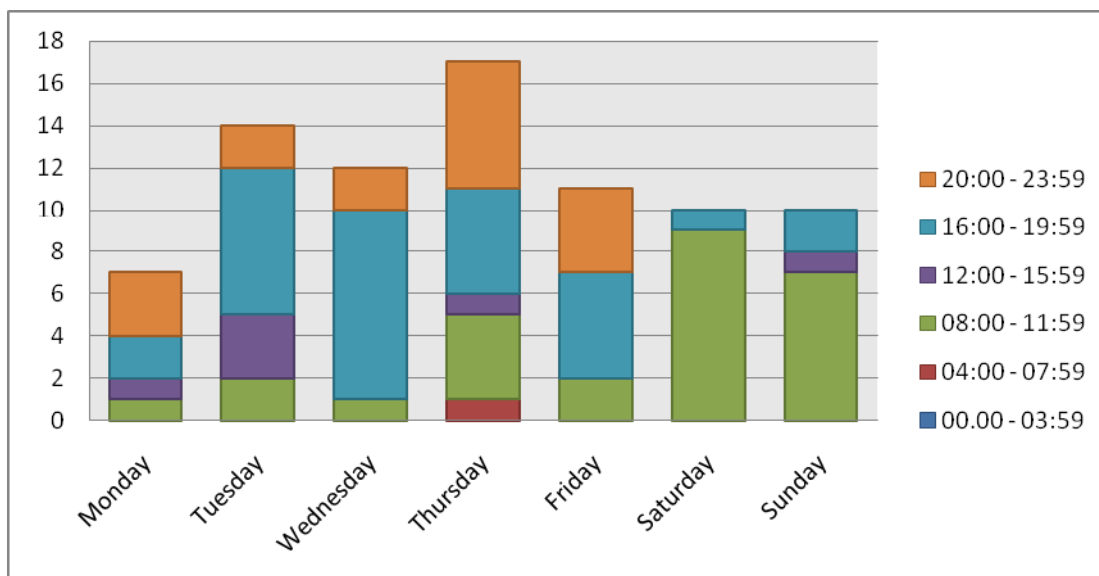
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Hounslow	43	83
Chiswick	33	63
Brentford	5	83
Total	81	74

*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite. Visits to Brentford ceased in June 08



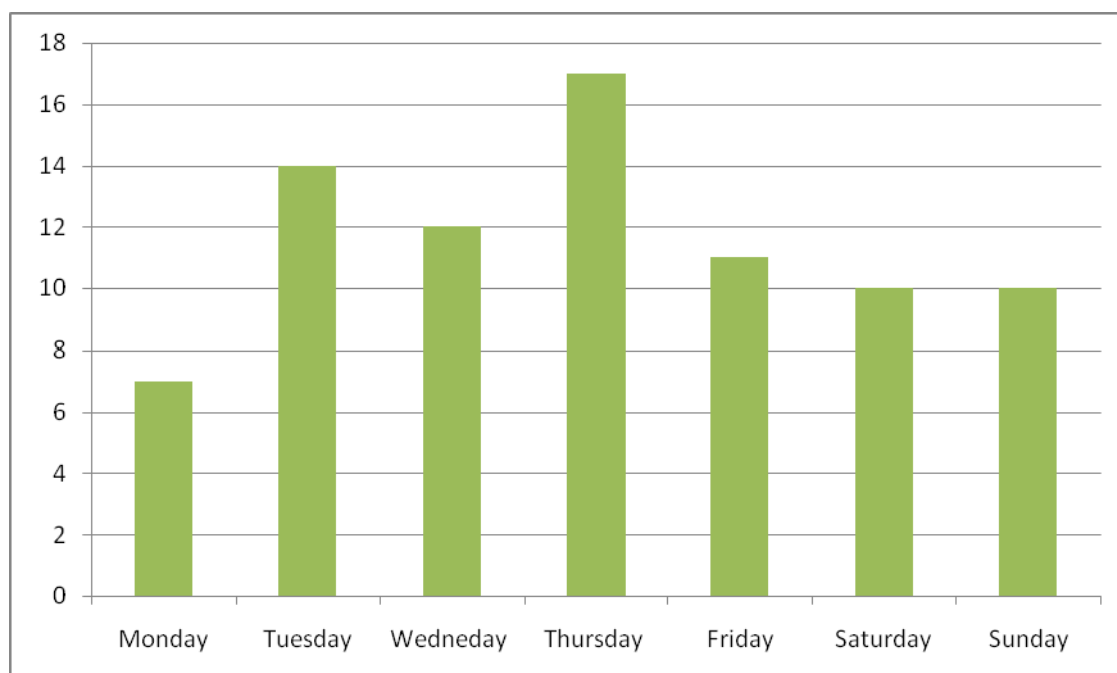
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	1	1
0800 – 1159 hrs	26	32
1200 – 1559 hrs	6	8
1600 – 1959 hrs	31	38
2000 – 2359 hrs	17	21
Total	81	100



3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	7	8.3
Tuesday	14	20.2
Wednesday	12	14.3
Thursday	17	20.2
Friday	11	13.1
Saturday	10	11.9
Sunday	10	11.9
Total	81	100



4. Details of Visits

Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	124	44
Detainees who refused to be seen	85	30.1
Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc	42	14.9
Detainees not seen due to language reasons	6	2.1
Other	25	8.9
Total	282	100

*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit

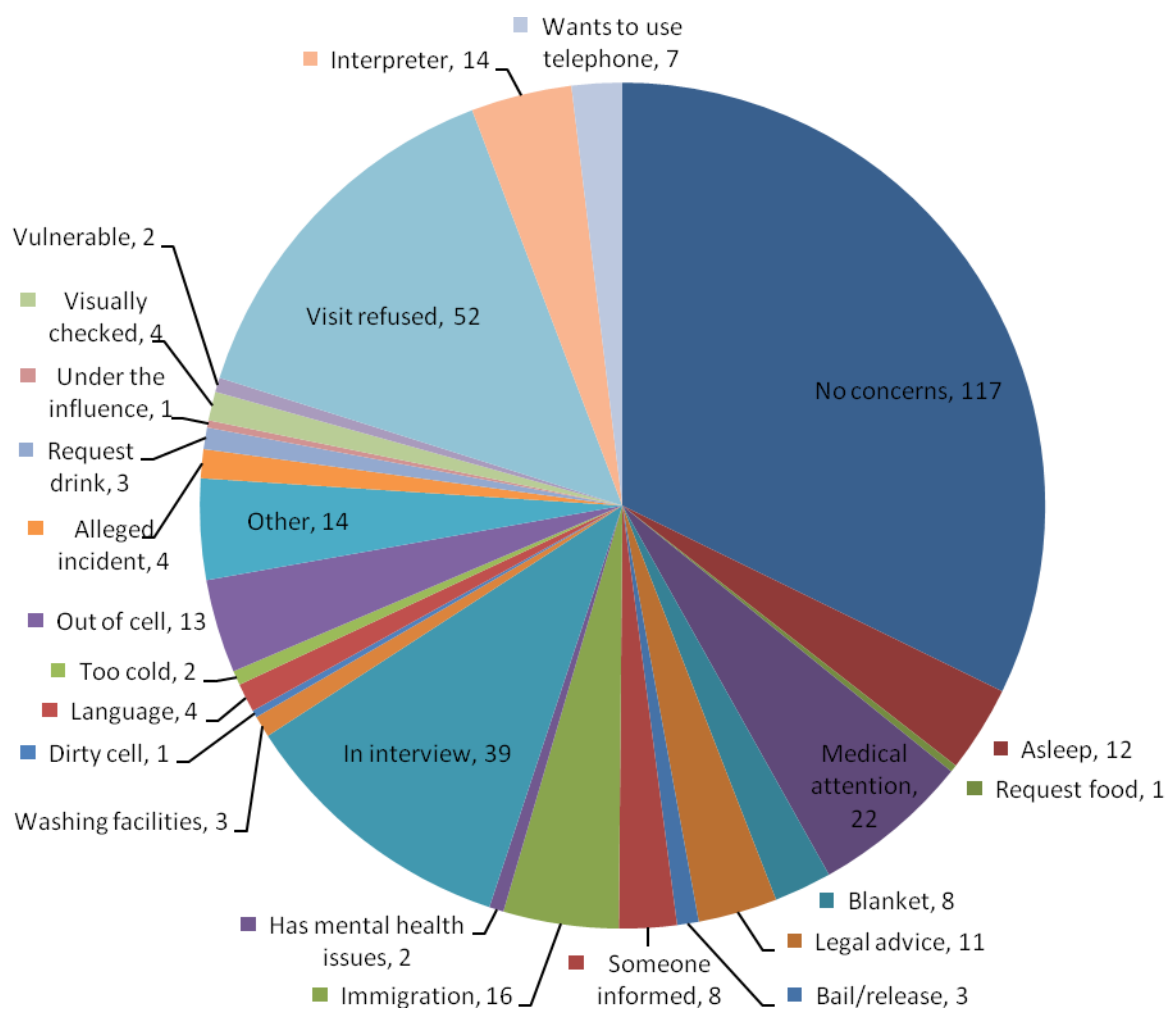
5. Immigration detainees and Home Office prisoners

Category of Detainee	Annual no.
Immigration Detainees noted	170
Home Office Prisoners noted	343
Total	513

6. No of detainees by type

		% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2008	9317	100
Immigration detainees included	170	1.82
Home Office prisoners included	343	3.68
Total immigration and Home Office prisoners included	513	5.5

7. Details of detainee concerns:



Plans for forthcoming year 2009

- To make a total of 104 visits to the two custody suites in the borough, of which 52 will be to each of Hounslow and Chiswick, with the possibility of additional visits to Brentford if it is brought back into use for any reason.
- To vary the time of visits in order to maintain or improve upon the pattern achieved during 2008.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or 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, with training items being regularly scheduled at panel meetings for this purpose.
- 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.
- To continue to measure the diversity of the panel's membership and to attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the age, gender and ethnic diversity of the Borough of Hounslow.