

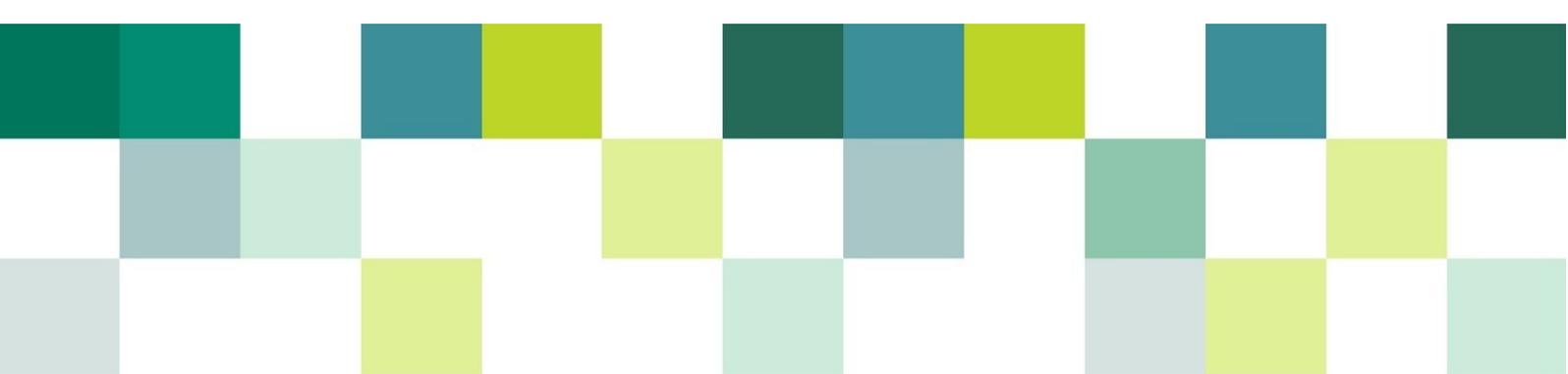


MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Kingston Upon Thames Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Kingston Upon Thames Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers a period from January 2007 to December 2007

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 2008

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. In April 2007 the MPA brought together the custody visiting arrangements managed by the boroughs into one London scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Kingston Upon Thames, 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.

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 a balance of age, gender and ethnicity. 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. The Kingston Upon Thames Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme and has adopted a new constitution to reflect this. This year's annual report covers the period January 2007 to December 2007. This new reporting arrangement brings Kingston Upon Thames in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

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.

Kingston Upon Thames has only one station with a custody suite that operates 24 hours a day; this is situated in Kingston town centre. It is the practice of the panel to make weekly visits to the custody suite. The panel made 41 visits during 2007; this represents an achievement of 79% of the target. The shortfall was due to some problems making visits during the summer months and because the custody suite was closed between 26 and 30 April 2007. Allowing for the temporary closure, the target is 80% achieved. Increased numbers of panel members should prevent a shortfall from reoccurring in the future.

In the majority of cases, no significant issues have been raised by visit reports. There have been a few recurring concerns. One of these is the provision of blankets, which have been in short supply at different times in the year.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the weekdays although there were none at the weekends and the visits made were mostly in the middle of the week. Visits were mostly between 12:00 and 20:00. The panel will therefore aim to make more early, late and weekend visits in 2008.

The number of panel members reduced during the year but was restored to ten members towards the end of the year; this is sufficient to carry out scheduled visits. New recruits have all attended initial training at the MPA. Those who applied to join the panel during the year have in a large part responded to advertisements run in both the Metro and the Evening Standard.

Chairperson's report

Overall, the year has been characterised by much routine on the visiting front but with significant organisational changes that have taken place since April 2007. There was a lot of concern about the changes made to policies and procedures by the MPA and how this would impact on the independence of our role as custody visitors. However, although we lost our much-valued Vice-chair as he was not in favour of signing the MoU and therefore had to resign, the rest of our panel has succeeded in resolving issues/problems through participation and communication, which has led to positive outcomes. The meetings with the MPA and the Cluster meetings have been useful, supportive and effective during the agenda for change.

During the year a couple of our panel members had to leave for personal reasons but Kingston has obviously got a high percentage of kind people wanting to give up their valuable time for the benefit of their community and so these vacancies were filled immediately.

The Panel extends special thanks to George Fry, who is now our panel administrator. He is employed by the MPA and manages the administration tasks for Kingston and four other panels in West London. He is accumulating a deep knowledge of the Panels and I'm sure will be an invaluable source of continuity & professionalism. We look forward to working with him in the years to come.

The Panel also extends thanks to the Sutton ICV Panel for providing cover to detainees originating from the Kingston area whilst the Custody Suite in Kingston was closed temporarily. The good reciprocity of information sharing with the Kingston Community and Police Partnership has continued and the contribution they make towards the community's welfare is appreciated.

We had anticipated news/plans for the proposed purpose built, 30 cell custody suite, which was supposed to be located in Teddington and shared by Kingston and Richmond. Unfortunately, this did not materialise because of strong protests from the public, who were not consulted about the planned location. The failure of these plans has meant that we have to continue with the present arrangements, which is by no means perfect. The custody suite is not ideal but will have to suffice until a new location is identified. Like a number of other boroughs across London the new computer system, NSPIS went live and although doing visits when the system was not working effectively was a bit frustrating and time consuming we like the others managed to overcome the initial teething problems.

Finally, it was very pleasing to realise that some of our efforts in improving the plight of the detainees was noted and acted upon. After instigating the issue of the shortage of blankets and the constructive outcome achieved because of our involvement, we have also managed to make a positive difference to the lives of our detainees and police staff who suffered in silence for many years in the summer months. They now have access to cold water instead of the warm/tepid water in the stifling hot weather, thanks to the partnership working between our panel and the Custody Inspector.

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 races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

According to London Development Agency figures, 84.5% of the population in Kingston upon Thames is white. The borough's largest black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are 'white other' (6.4%), followed by Indian (3.6%), 'other Asian' (2.6%) and other ethnic groups (2.5%). The borough has a significant concentration of Tamil residents in Chessington and Koreans in New Malden. Without measuring the diversity of the panel it is not possible to confirm how well it matches that of the local community, however some panel members have suggested it is apparent that about 30% are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups.

While the population of the borough as a whole is 49% male, the majority of panel members (60%), including the chair, are female.

An equal opportunities policy is operated as far as recruitment is concerned and welcome applications from all sections of the community. It is intended to try to match the diversity of the local community in future recruitment.

The MPA requires visitors to make at least 12 visits a year and it would not be possible to achieve this target and maintain a much larger panel. It is therefore our intention to maintain a pipeline of potential candidates, but to maintain our panel membership at roughly the current level.

Visits to police stations

There is only one custody suite in the borough, in Kingston town centre, that operates full time; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits there.

The majority 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 issues:

- There have been intermittent problems with the supply of blankets at different times during the year. Complaints about this, including those from ICVs, contributed to the introduction of a new facilities contract.
- ICVs noted that the custody suite could get very warm in hot weather. After a series of requests a supply of cold water has been supplied near the custody suite

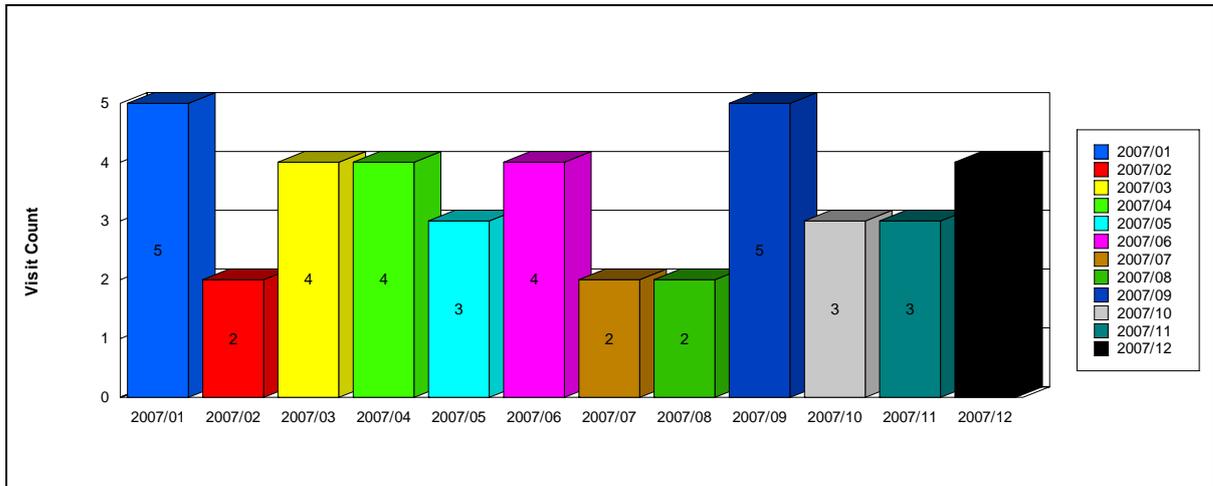
On a positive note, the introduction of the smoking ban in all custody suites has had less of an impact than feared. There has been no call for the supply of nicotine lozenges in use elsewhere.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

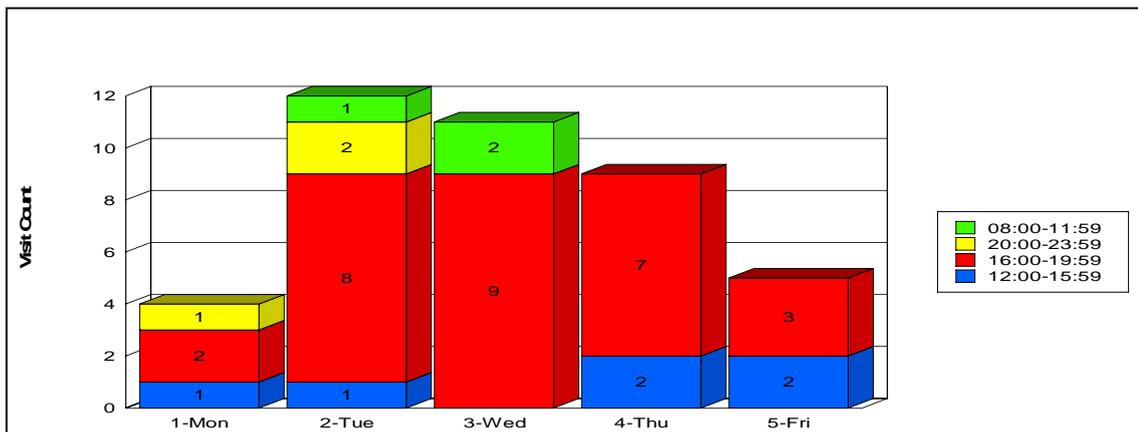
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Kingston	41	79

*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.



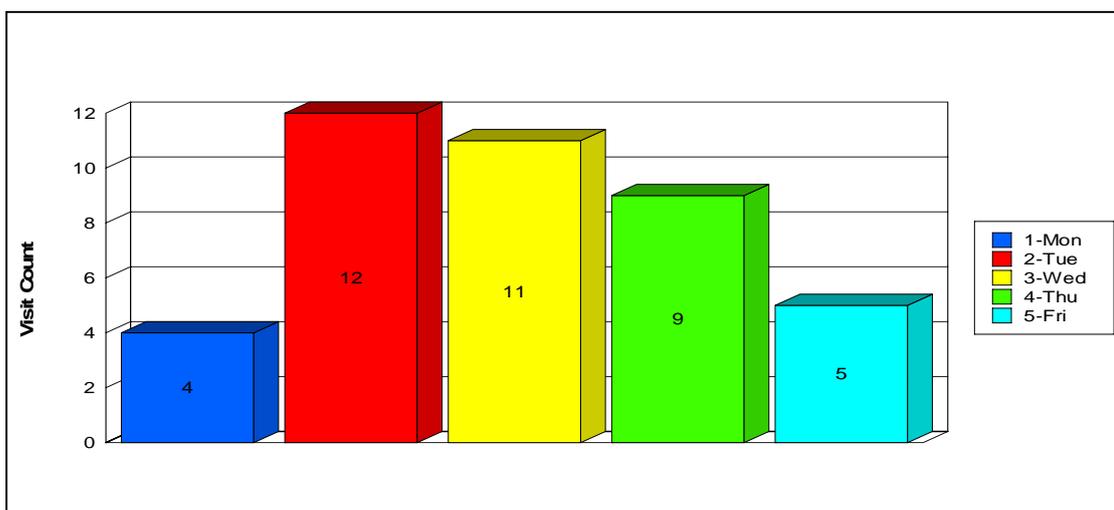
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	3	7
1200 – 1559 hrs	6	15
1600 – 1959 hrs	29	71
2000 – 2359 hrs	3	7
Total	41	100



3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	4	10
Tuesday	12	29
Wednesday	11	27
Thursday	9	22
Friday	5	12
Saturday	0	0
Sunday	0	0
Total	41	100



4. Details of Visits

Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	91	1.5
Detainees who refused to be seen	38	0.6
Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc	28	0.5
Detainees not seen due to language problems	2	-
Other	7	0.1
Total	166	2.3

*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit (DP = detained person)

5. Immigration Detainees and Home Office Prisoners

Category of Detainee	Annual no.
Immigration Detainees noted	47
Home Office Prisoners noted	0
Total	47

6. Combined Total of Detainees and Home Office Prisoners

Annual no.

6179

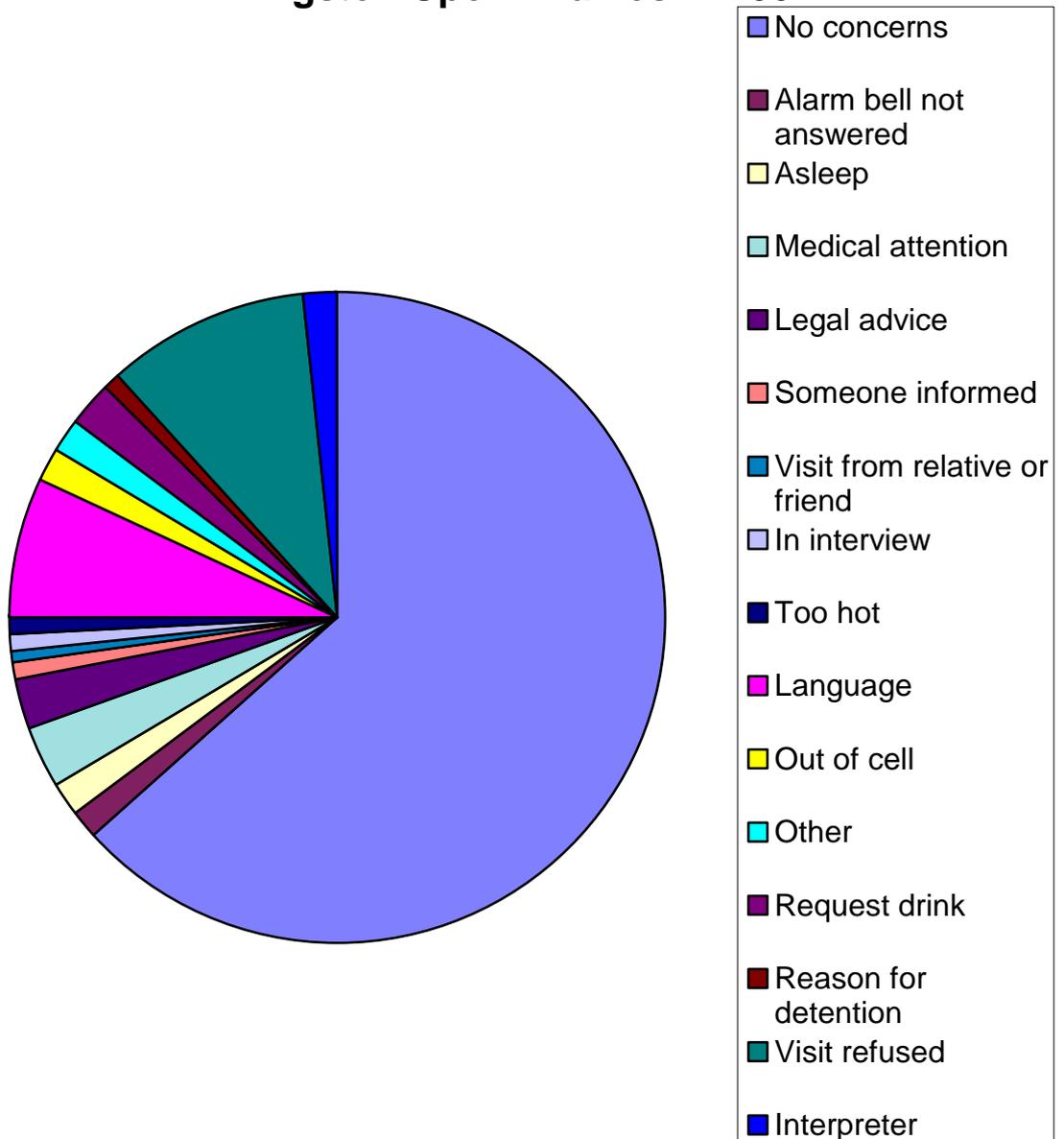
7. Overall detainee total held in Police Custody

Overall detainee total held in
Custody in 2007

Police figures: 6179

8. Details of detainees concerns:

Detainee concerns raised in Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames in 2007:



Plans for forthcoming year 2008

- 1) Aim to reach target of 52 visits per year. To be discussed at Panel meetings so that additional visits can be rota'd in when visits have been missed.
- 2) Vary time of visits in order to provide a better spread. The Panel will aim to make more early, late and weekend visits in 2008.
- 3) Ensure Panel members keep training up to date attending refresher training sessions, and by regular discussion of training issues at Panel meetings.
- 4) Chair and Vice Chair to attend MPA meetings as appropriate and to feed back issues at Panel meetings
- 5) Representative to attend Kingston Community and Police Partnership meetings and to report back at Panel meetings