

Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

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Introduction

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

The report covers the period from 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2010.

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 2011

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 scrutinize 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 Newham, 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.

Chairperson's report

In the period covered by this report the Newham Independent Custody Visitors Panel has worked hard in their role, in order to secure the accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, and hopefully bringing police and communities closer together. It is hoped that this annual report will aid in the task of providing the community with information about the work the Panel has carried out on its behalf during the year 2010.

The Panel itself presently comprises of 14 active members with a further two on agreed periods of absence. All Panel members are unpaid volunteer members of the local community who collectively work in tandem with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to try and improve the facilities available to detainees, and to ensure their rights under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) are being met. The role of an ICV is to address the needs of detainees such as the provision of clean cells, clean bedding, appropriate food and washing facilities etc. We have found that on the whole the police welcome our input as independent members of the public, and try to help resolve any issues reported by ICV's in order to get problems sorted out.

Our weekly visits have continued to be carried out to Forest Gate and Plaistow police station and monthly visits to the British Transport Police (BTP) custody suite at West Ham. Although a few visits were missed during the course of the year due to a shortage of Panel members I am pleased to report that on-going recruitment has proved to be a success and the Panel's performance has improved as enthusiastic new members have joined. No major issues have arisen from our visits to the above three custody suites, and any problems have been dealt with promptly during our visits by the Custody Sergeants and then followed up and reported back to the Panel by the Custody Inspectors at both the MPS and BTP stations. All three custody suites continue to be run to a high standard, whereby they are maintained and detainees are recorded to be treated fairly and receive their rights in accordance with the requirements of PACE.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all current Panel members for their hard work and dedication and their professional attitude with which they carry out their visits and attend Panel meetings. My thanks also go to the police staff and officers at the three stations we visit for their continued help, support and assistance despite often being under pressure from the increasing demands of the custody suite. Lastly I would like to thank the MPA for overseeing the ICV scheme and for providing the training and support through their Coordinator, to enable us to perform our community role.

Bushra Khan
Newham ICVP Chair.

Aims and achievements

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 specific aims and objectives were set out for 2010. The panel aimed to carry out a weekly visit to its two MPS custody suites and one monthly visit to the BTP suite at West Ham. Of this target the panel managed to carry out 71%. This has fallen since last year but may be attributable to the instability of the panel in terms of membership and people taking sabbaticals.

Visits took place across the week and at various times of the day, however the most popular times were after 12 noon till 6pm and on Fridays and Saturdays. This is largely the same as large year and one of the aims of the panel was to spread visits more evenly throughout the week, while some efforts were made to do this, it is still the most popular time.

In 2010 interim reports were introduced between meetings and this built upon the level of communication between the panel and the police. The interim report was introduced in order to bridge the more lengthy gap between meetings and ensure feedback from the police is timely. The panel met every quarter in 2010 and most meetings were well attended by the panel and police.

Membership remains strong and 2010 saw a number of new members join the scheme, helping to increase membership and in turn improve visiting levels. The panel as a whole also took part in refresher training modules with their Coordinator during panel meetings and had a presentation from Newham DIP.

The panel had some difficulty in terms of stability of staff at the Custody Suite, with the Custody Manager of the borough retiring in 2010 and a new Custody Manger being brought in who was only in post for a short time before being moved elsewhere. The panel however now have a new Custody Manager and despite the changes the relationship between the custody manager and panel members remains effective with strong communication links and is strongly supported by Newham MPS Officers. It is hoped these links will remain positive and beneficial, and that a physical presence at meetings will increase with the implementation of a new BTP Custody Manager.

Panel meetings were held monthly at Newham Town Hall and the venue continues to satisfactorily facilitate the monthly panel meetings.

The Panel is represented at meetings of the Newham Police and Community Forum. The Chair and Vice Chair, or a representative, also attends the MPA London ICV Chairs.

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.

Recruiting volunteers to the Newham ICV panel has not proven overly difficult and the panel has maintained a good number of visitors throughout the year. At the end of 2010 the Newham panel had 14 accredited and active members, with a further two on periods of agreed absence. There is also another person going through the vetting process.

The panel is operating increasingly well with a steadily increasing number of visitors. The optimum number of members is 17 and it is hoped that this quota shall be maintained in 2011 when the person awaiting security clearance joins.

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy. The active panel comprises of seven men and six women with varying diversity in age and ethnicity.

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough at Newham; the panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Forest Gate and Plaistow and once a month to the BTP station at West Ham. For a period of almost two months Plaistow Station was closed and Barkingside was used as an overflow, although this station is out of the Borough the panel still made visits to this station while it was in use.

The majority of reports have not raised any significant issues that required the attention of the MPA. However, there have been a number of recurring issues that have been raised on occasion. Fortunately no significant issues have been raised in 2010 that have required high level intervention and ICVs have been well received and accommodated by Custody Staff.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Forest Gate* (and Barkingside)	37	71%
Plaistow*	37	71%
West Ham**	8	67%
Total	82	71%

*Annual Target is 52 visits

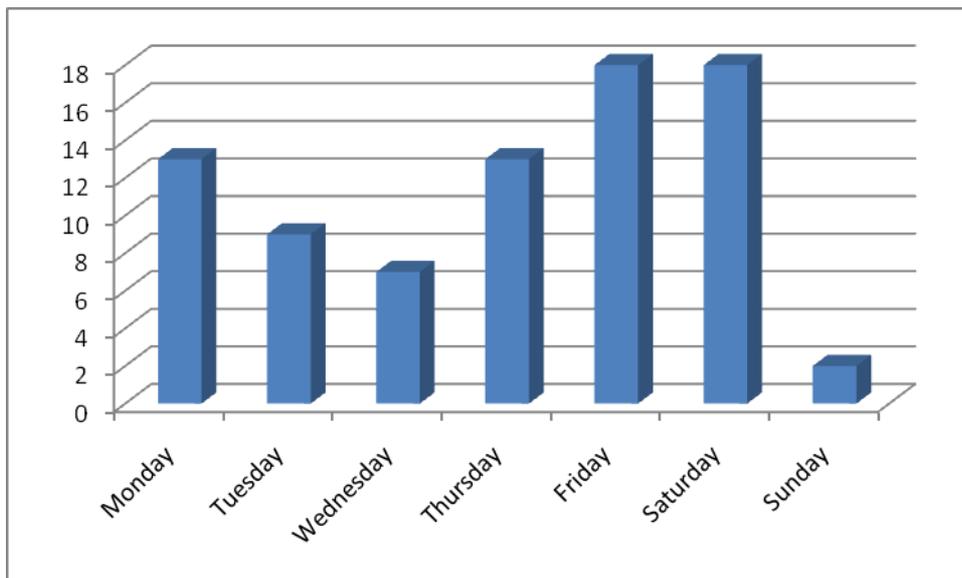
** Annual Target is 12 visits

For a period of six weeks Barkingside was used while Plaistow was closed, during this time four visits were undertaken to Barkingside, however, for the purpose of this report those are included under Plaistow.

2. Time and days of Visits

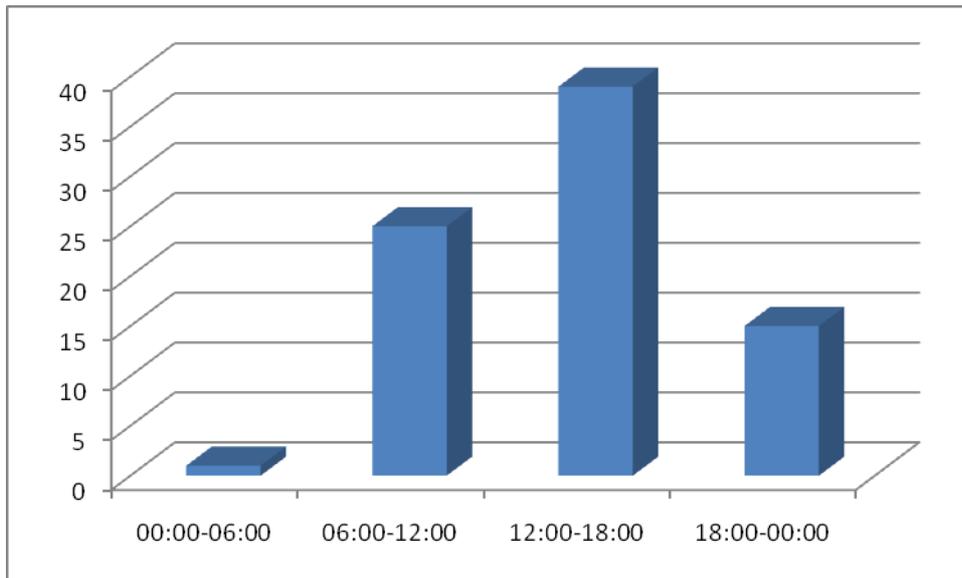
Day's visits were conducted

As can be seen from the graph below, the most popular days for ICVs to do visits were on Fridays and Saturdays, the least popular day being Sunday.



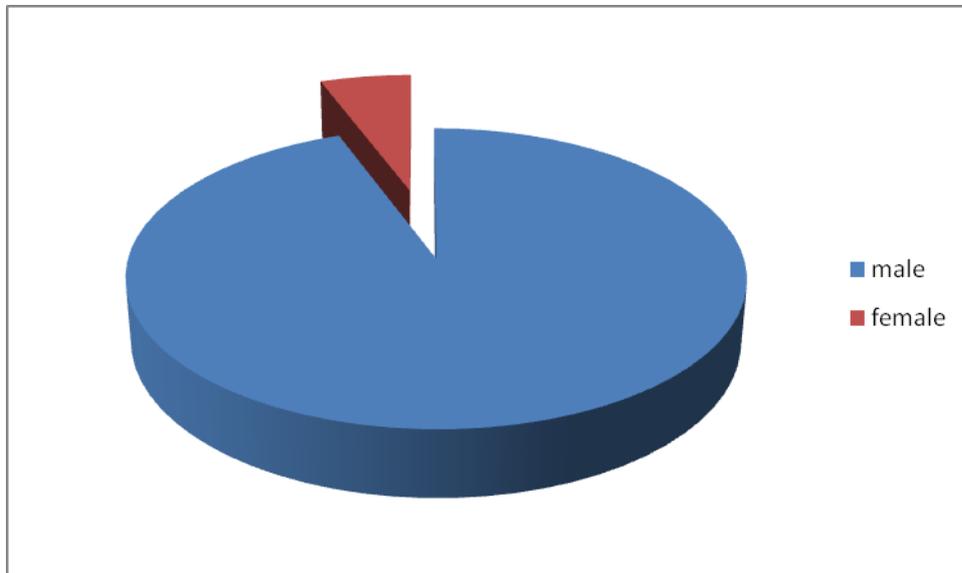
Times throughout the day visits were conducted

As can be seen from the graph below, the most popular time for visits to be conducted was afternoon to early evening.

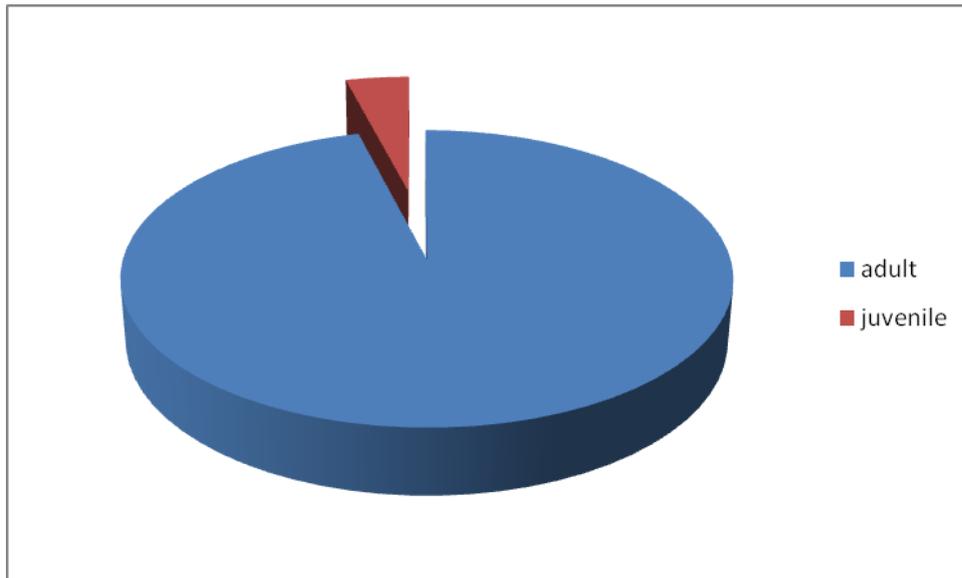


3. Demographics of Detainee

As the pie chart below demonstrates, the vast majority of those held in custody in Newham were male

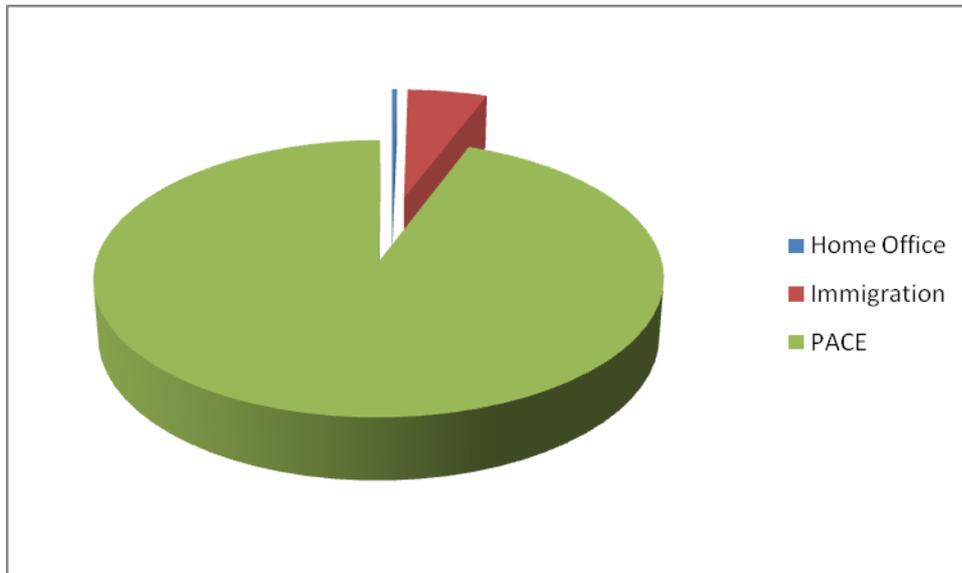


The pie chart below demonstrates that the vast majority of those held in Newham were adults (over 18).



4. Categories of detainees

As the pie chart below shows a significant number of those being detained were held under PACE, with a much smaller number being held under immigration. There was only one detainee held under Home Office.



5. Visit concerns

When visitors speak to detainees they record any concerns that detainees raise with them.

Visitors do not wake detainees if they are asleep, however they will usually check through the wicket in the door to check that all looks well in the cell. Visitors check concerns raised by detainees against their custody record (where permission has been gained from the detainee to do so), and will bring matters 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 visit and only more major or more complicated concerns are discussed at a meeting of the whole panel.

Over the course of the year there have been very few concerns raised by detainees being held in stations in Newham, those that have been raised over the year include requests for food, drink, blankets and telephone calls. These are often brought to the attention of staff by ICVs and dealt with whilst the visitors are still present at the station. The issue of blankets is one that is raised across all the boroughs and is being addressed.

PLANS FOR THE FORTHCOMING **YEAR 2011**

Targets:

- To increase the number of visits made to both Forest Gate and Plaistow by visiting both once a week, and one a month to West Ham (BTP).
- To complete visits more equally throughout the week and the day
- To maintain panel membership of 17 (as stipulated by the MPA) active members.
- To build on existing links with the Police.
- To continue with refresher training in panel meetings and to have presentations from external agencies.
- To build and maintain links between the panel and the local Community Engagement Group.
- To raise the profile of the panel and scheme across the borough through wider circulation of the annual report and publicity materials and giving presentations to other community groups.