



Report to BTPA on Independent Custody Visiting Oct - Dec 2008

1. Introduction

This is the fifth report to BTPA's Stakeholder Relations Committee on Independent Custody Visiting (ICV). This report covers the period from October to December 2008.

From the 1st of April 2007, BTPA contracted with the MPA to provide a custody visiting service to three of its facilities in London – Tottenham Court Road, Ebury Bridge and West Ham.

The contract provides for Tottenham Court Road (TCR) to be visited weekly and Ebury Bridge and West Ham monthly due to the reduced throughput of detainees at these facilities. Subsequently it was informally agreed that Ebury Bridge would be visited weekly – this was in response to a direct request from Independent Custody Visitors who did not feel that a monthly frequency provided a sufficiently robust safeguard at Ebury Bridge.

2. Overview for this period

This period has been busy with Initial Training courses held in October & November. Several refresher training courses also took place during this period. Additionally in November we delivered a charring skills training for ICV Chairs, which was well received. We were also able to deliver the first of a rolling programme of Diversity Awareness training, targeting ICV Chairs in the first instance. This was designed and presented by trainers from the MPS's HR unit, who worked closely with the ICV Scheme Manager to tailor the content to fit with ICVs responsibilities. Again evaluations were extremely positive.

A meeting with ICV Chairs was held at the MPA on the 27th October with a speaker from the MPS who explained about the roll out of Operation Herald, focussing on the introduction of nurse practitioners in to custody. This was well attended.

On the 13th October, the MPA welcomed a large delegation from China – a mixture of academics, government officials and human rights officials who were keen to learn more about the ICV scheme and how it operates. China is currently piloting custody visiting in Lioyuan in Jilin province and delegates were keen to learn more about training, recruitment and management of volunteers. This is the 3rd of such visits to the MPA by Chinese delegates since 2006.

The self-introduction pilot in MPS facilities in 4 London boroughs started on 1st October and will run until 31st January. The pilot enables ICVs to introduce themselves to detainees and to directly offer a visit – rather than the escorting officer making the introduction. Other areas that have piloted or implemented the scheme have seen a significant increase in the number of detainees accepting a visit.

Camden is one of the 4 boroughs selected to take part. Following consultation with BTPA, Tottenham Court road was included in the trail from 1st December. It is too early to comment on how the pilot is progressing at Tottenham Court Road, but this should be evident in the next report to the committee.

In early November 20 ICVs from London attended the ICVA national conference in Stratford upon Avon, discussions focussed on improving the custody environment with speakers from the Home Office and HMIC amongst others. ICVA also showcased their new training DVD, which will be available from March 2009.

An Open Evening to provide information on the scheme to members of the public took place at the MPA on the 11th of November. Twenty seven members of the public attended and to date we have received nine applications as a direct result of the evening.

December also saw our annual ICV Christmas social, held on the 27th floor of Empress State building. Chief Executive Catherine Crawford attended, as did several MPA members. Vernon Coaker MP was scheduled to give the opening address, but was delayed with another commitment. Instead an address was made by Alan Brown from the Home Office. However it was much appreciated when Mr Coaker arrived at the end of the evening and was able to thank ICVs in person for their commitment and the valuable service that they provide.

Newsletters were produced in October and December (December one attached).

3. Issues raised by BTPA Stakeholder Committee

No specific issues were raised in this quarter, however the Stakeholder Committee previously requested that some visits take place at the weekend. In this reporting period, only Ebury Bridge has been visited on Saturdays on two occasions. We do encourage *all* panels to vary both the day and time of their visits, however the rota does not prescribe a particular day/time and this is left to the discretion of ICVs undertaking the visits. We will continue to encourage all three panels to ensure that at least some visits fall on a weekend.

The Committee also previously requested more information on why visits were falling short of the target. Although again two visits were missed to both Ebury Bridge and to Tottenham Court Road the majority of visits scheduled were achieved. ICVs are asked to contact us should a problem arise with carrying out a scheduled visit. In three out of the four missed visits, ICVs contacted us to say they had been unable to get hold of their visiting partner, but it was not possible to find a replacement. On one occasion both ICVs appear to have 'forgotten' they were scheduled to visit. However both panels have achieved 84% of their visiting target, which would not give us undue cause for concern.

4. General review of custody visiting in BTP facilities

Facility	Panel responsible	Target visits	Visits made	Difference
TCR	Camden	13 [13]	11	2
Ebury Bridge	South Westminster	13 ¹ [13]	11	2
West Ham	Newham	3 [3]	3	0

NB: Figures in brackets are target number of visits to date of report

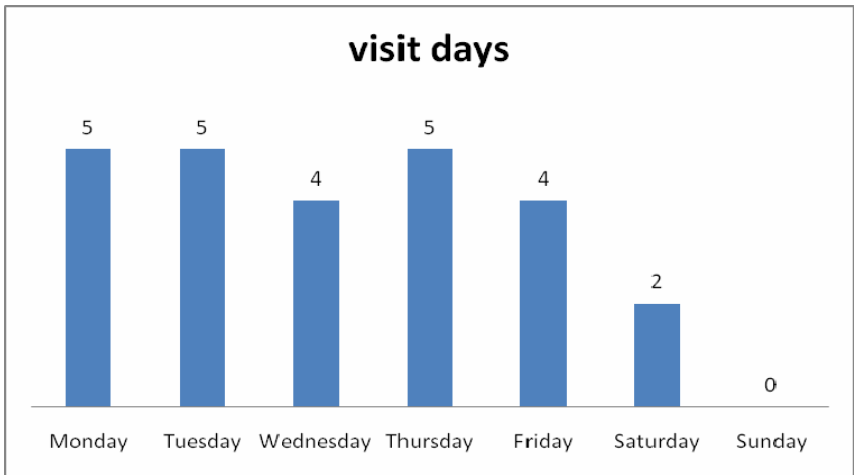
Overview of visits:

Overall, as in previous reports, ICVs have not had occasion to report any significant concerns about the treatment of detainees or the conditions in which they are held in BTP facilities. Where raised, concerns continue to be of a minor, environmental nature, rather than about the treatment of or the provision of rights and entitlements to detainees.

ICVs have not reported difficulty with gaining access to the custody suites during this quarter. Generally, the reports received in this period across all three facilities are very positive and raise few concerns. The most frequently repeated comments concern the helpfulness of staff and the cleanliness of facilities, which continues to demonstrate a positive outcome for BTPA.

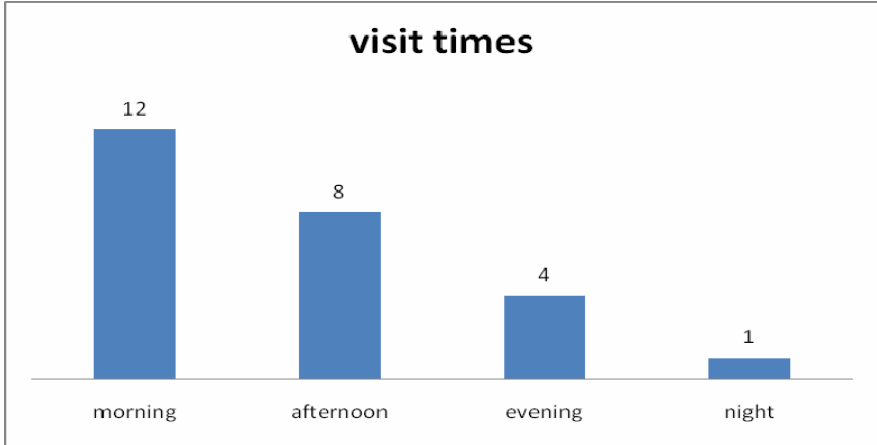
Statistics on visits

Number of visits made by day:

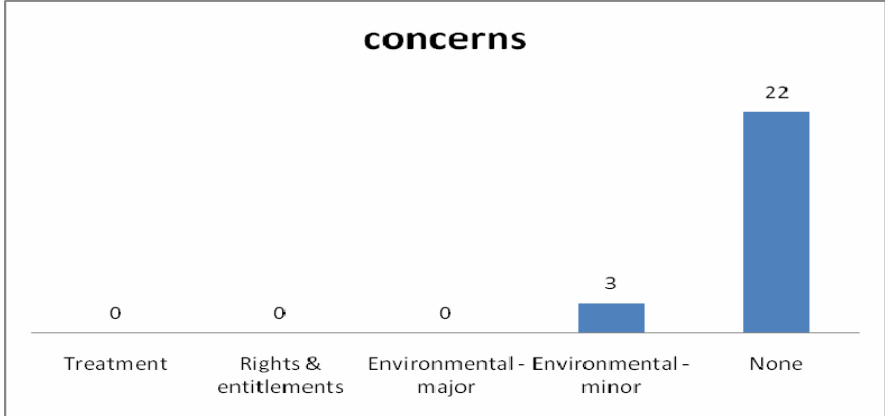


¹ Target as per contract is 3 ie: monthly. This has been informally varied (with BTPA’s agreement) at the request of ICVs as stated in the introduction. No further charge has been made to BTPA for 2008-09 in respect of this variation

Number of visits made by time period:



Type of concern raised:



5. Information on each facility

Tottenham Court Road

Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 54

Number of detainees seen: 33

Percentage seen: 61%

Issues raised:

With 1 exception no issues have been raised in reports received for this period. ICVs have frequently commented on the cleanliness of the station and helpfulness of the custody staff – which is a very positive outcome. The only issue raised was that a custody record seen by ICVs, there was no record of the detainee having seen an appropriate adult or the detainee having been given his rights and entitlements. However the ICVs concluded that this appears to have been a result of ‘a log-keeping error rather than an actual omission.’ No further information has been given, but I assume that the ICVs satisfied themselves that this was not a serious concern.

Special considerations:

Camden is a busy borough with 3 custody suites (2 MPS and the BTP facility), each with a significant volume of detainees in custody. Camden panel have continued to perform better than in earlier reporting periods.

Membership in Camden has stabilised and the panel has 15 members. Two further ICVs are currently being vetted and three applicants are due to be interviewed in the next few weeks. However recruitment remains ongoing as the panel would still benefit from a further increase in members. Ideally, we would like to see the Camden panel increase to 20+ members.

Ebury Bridge

Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 15

Number of detainees seen: 9

Percentage seen: 60%

Issues raised: No issues were raised about the treatment or rights/entitlements of detainees during this period. Only one minor environmental issue was raised concerning floor paint lifting which could result in sharp edges.

Special considerations:

None concerning BTPA specifically, however we are currently considering amalgamating the two existing panels in Westminster to form one Westminster ICV panel. This is due to a reduction in the number of custody suites in the borough, following an internal MPS restructure.

West Ham

Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 0

Issues raised: This is a non-designated facility and it is rare for ICVs to encounter detainees when they visit. Reports received usually speak of empty cells and a clean custody area. In this period no detainees were present on three occasions when ICVs visited. No visits were missed in this period.

Special considerations:

Visits to West Ham are now scheduled on the panel rota for a specific week each month. This appears to have been effective in ensuring that visits are not missed, with the panel achieving their target again this quarter.

In terms of encouraging the engagement of the panel, as suggested in the last two reports, it may also be helpful if the BTP police representative attended the panel meeting occasionally, which does not appear to have happened to date. The police are informed of each meeting and sent the agenda in advance.

6. Additional information

The MPA produces a bi-monthly ICV newsletter which is sent directly to all Independent Custody Visitors. A copy of each edition is sent to BTPA and a copy of the latest edition is attached to this report. All past editions of our newsletter and more information about the scheme, including the ICV Handbook are available on our website: www.mpa.gov.uk/partnerships/icv

7. Upcoming events

We will be evaluating our self introduction pilot in February. We will also be starting to update the ICV Handbook. A further training for ICV Chairs will take place in February and we also anticipate delivering a second Diversity Awareness training.

We will be working with a software developer to develop a new (improved) visits database, which we hope will be ready for use by April.

Beyond that our focus for 2009 will be primarily on awareness-raising amongst Londoners. We hope to develop a radio ad during the first 3 months of the year. We will also be exploring the use of other tools such as Facebook, to reach a younger target audience.

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