

Report to BTPA on Independent Custody Visiting Jan - Mar 2009

1. Introduction

This report covers the period from January to March 2009.

BTPA has 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. In addition, from 1st March, it has been agreed that the facility in Hammersmith will be visited once a month.

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

The reporting period for this report is somewhat shorter due to the change of committee date and as such only covers up to w/c 23rd March. Generally this period has been fairly busy with Initial Training courses held across two evenings in January/February & on Saturday 14th March. A cluster refresher training course also took place during this period, alongside several 'in panel' refresher sessions.

In February we delivered a new version of the chairing skills training for ICV Chairs which had originally been run in November 2008. On 16th March we delivered the second of a rolling programme of Diversity Awareness training, again targeting ICV Chairs. 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. Evaluations from all trainings held in this period have been positive.

The MPA has commissioned a radio advert to promote and raise awareness of the ICV Scheme in London. This will be aired on Choice FM during w/c 23rd April and will direct listeners to the (newly re-launched) MPA website via the URL "icvlondon". We will be monitoring hits on the website via this route. The text of the ad can be viewed on our website.

The MPA's ICV recruitment poster is also now being displayed on the Community TV service in Richmond, with further sites being investigated.

In February the ICV team worked with a photographer to create some images which can be used to promote the ICV Scheme. Using a mothballed facility and with the kind co-operation the MPS in Southwark, shots were taken of ICVs 'conducting visits' with other volunteers acting as detainees. Some of the images created will be used

to develop new marketing materials for the scheme. At the end of February the MPA’s website was also re-vamped and some of the images taken can be viewed there on the ICV pages.

The self-introduction pilot in MPS facilities in 4 London boroughs formally concluded on the 31st January. To re-cap, the pilot enabled ICVs to introduce themselves to detainees and to directly offer a visit – rather than the escorting officer making the introduction. Camden was one of the 4 boroughs selected to take part. Following consultation with BTPA, Tottenham Court road was included in the trail from 1st December. The pilot has been evaluated (excluding TCR as this started 2 months later) and it has been agreed that it will be extended for a further period and that 8 boroughs will be invited to participate. Should any of the boroughs selected have a visited BTP facility, we will consult BTPA about whether they wish this facility to be included in the pilot.

A newsletter was produced in February and another newsletter is currently under production for April. (February attached).

3. Issues raised by BTPA Stakeholder Committee

No specific issues were raised in this quarter. In terms of issues previously raised, in this reporting period (to date), only Ebury Bridge has been visited on a Saturday. We continue to 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.

The Committee also previously requested more information on why visits were falling short of the target. Unfortunately during this period several visits were missed across all three facilities. ICVs are regularly reminded to contact us should a problem arise with carrying out a scheduled visit. In four out of the six missed visits, ICVs contacted us to say they had been unable to get hold of their visiting partner – however this did not always happen before the visit period expired. Replacements were sought where feasible, but it can be difficult to arrange a replacement at short notice. We were also notified that an ICV was unwell and therefore unable to carry out a visit. We will continue to stress the importance to ICVs of ensuring visits are not missed. It is particularly disappointing to note that West Ham which requires only 1 visit per month remained unvisited during February.

4. General review of custody visiting in BTP facilities

| Facility | Panel responsible | Target visits | Visits made | Difference |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------|------------|
| TCR | Camden | 13 [12] | 9 | 3 |
| Ebury Bridge | South Westminster | 13 ¹ [12] | 9 | 3* |
| West Ham | Newham | 3 [2] | 1 | 1 |

**Visit scheduled for week 29/12 – 4/1 was carried out on 29th Dec, therefore excluded however due to period covered this could be counted against their target, reducing missed visits to 2*

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

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

Overview of visits:

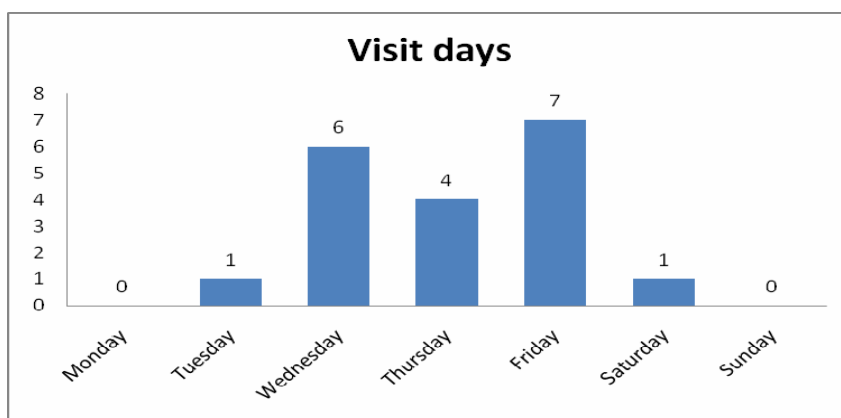
As in previous reports, ICVs have not had occasion to report any major concerns about the treatment of detainees or the conditions in which they are held in BTP facilities. Where raised, concerns generally continue to be of an environmental nature, rather than about the treatment of or the provision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

However it may be interesting for committee members to note that on quite a few of the report forms for this period ICVs have recorded that communication with detainees has been difficult as they do not speak English. This has been noted for PACE detainees as well those held on behalf of the immigration service - in both Ebury Bridge and TCR. ICVs can only look at a detainee's custody record with their consent and the committee may wish to consider facilitating ICVs use of Language Line or a translator in situations where ICVs have concerns, but are not able to speak with the detainee due to communication difficulties.

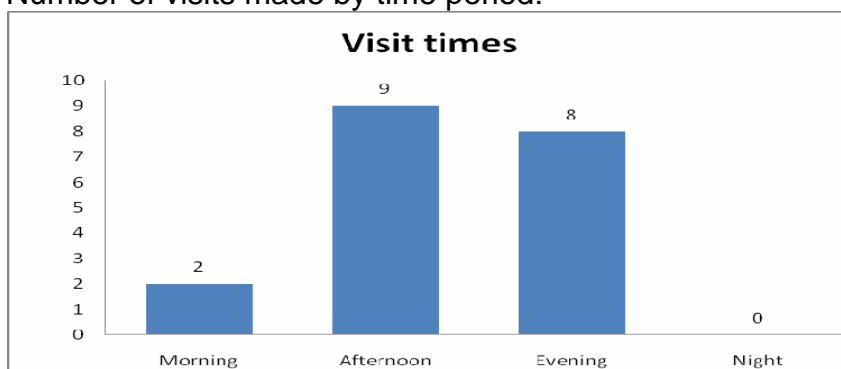
ICVs have not reported difficulty with gaining access to the custody suites during this quarter. Generally, the reports received in this period across all three facilities remain very positive and raise few concerns. Again, the most frequently repeated comments concern the helpfulness of staff and the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

Statistics on visits

Number of visits made by day:

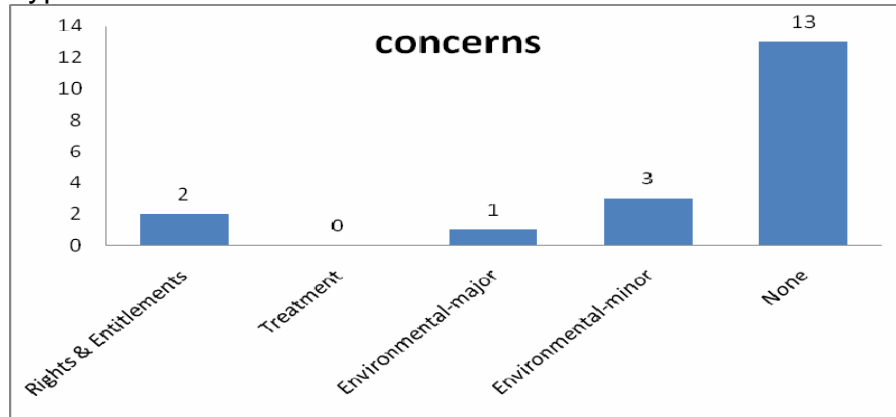


Number of visits made by time period:



Morning = 05:00 -12:00; Afternoon = 12:00 – 17:00; Evening = 17:00 – 20:00; Night = 20:00 – 05:00

Type of concern raised:



5. Information on each facility

Tottenham Court Road

Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 32

Number of detainees seen: 22

Percentage seen: 68%

Issues raised:

Apart from the issue of many detainees not speaking/understanding English, only two issues were raised in this period. One concerned a detainee complaining to ICVs about the length of time he had to wait to see an FME. The other concerned a detainee having been returned to their cell with their shoelaces left on. They had been removed by the time the ICVs visited. No further information was provided about this incident, so it is unclear whether a risk was presented as a result. ICVs continue to comment on the cleanliness of the station and helpfulness of the custody staff.

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. During this reporting period unfortunately three visits were missed as a result of ICVs not contacting each other in time. I remain hopeful that performance will improve further as membership strengthens.

Membership in Camden has now grown significantly and the panel is up to 19 members, with a further five applicants awaiting interview. It looks likely that we will be able to achieve our target of 20+ members for Camden panel within the next couple of months.

Ebury Bridge

Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 21

Number of detainees seen: 6

Percentage seen: 28%

Issues raised: No issues were raised about the treatment or rights/entitlements of detainees during this period. In terms of the environment, issues were raised about

damp, general state of repair and cleanliness of Ebury Bridge. It was also reported that the FME room was left unlocked and that the sharps box needed emptying.

Special considerations:

Discussions with the Westminster panel Chairs concerning the amalgamating the two existing panels in Westminster, to form one panel have not resulted in the amalgamation of the two panels. We may re-visit this option at a later date.

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 the occasion when ICVs visited.

Special considerations:

Visits to West Ham are now scheduled on the panel rota for a specific week each month, however unfortunately the panel missed a visit in February.

Engagement with the police has improved significantly with a BTP police sergeant in attendance at the last several panel meetings. The Inspector also attended the panel's AGM in February, which was appreciated by panel members. Panel members now have the phone number of the custody suite which they have started to use to try to ascertain whether detainees are present before they visit.

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 working with a software developer to develop a new (improved) visits database. This has been subject to delay, however we still hope to have a new database will before the summer.

One of our key focuses for 2009 will continue to be raising awareness of the ICV Scheme amongst Londoners. We are continuing to explore the use of other tools such as Facebook, to reach a younger target audience.

Report Author: Kerry McClelland, ICV Scheme Manager