Metropolitan Police Authority

Report to BTPA on Independent Custody Visiting October to December 2009

1. Introduction

This report covers the period from 1st October to 31st December 2009 and is a record of visits carried out by the MPA ICV Scheme on behalf of BTPA and the issues identified. The delivery of the service and this report are in line with the contract agreed from 1st of April 2009.

The contract covers the delivery of a custody visiting service for 4 BTP custody suites at Tottenham Court Road (TCR), Ebury Bridge, West Ham and Hammersmith.

2. Overview for this period

The MPA formally confirmed its restructure plans on October 1st and the team responsible for delivering the London ICV Scheme was significantly affected. The requirement to deliver a model which would enable the MPA to continue to fulfil its statutory requirement with fewer resources was the focus of the ICV Team's work in the last quarter of 2009. The new model was announced to a meeting of ICV panel chairs on November 4th and all ICVs, MPS and BTPA were informed in the following days. Although there will be changes to the way the MPA ICV Team delivers the service to the volunteers, the role of custody visiting will not change. All MPS 24/7 custody suites will continue be subject to unannounced visits by volunteers every week, as will those BTP custody suites the MPA is contracted to visit.

Despite the team focus directed at the development of a new delivery model 3 training sessions for new ICVs took place in September and October, and a diversity awareness training session for ICVs was delivered in November. ICV Coordinators also continued to deliver modular training to individual ICV panels as part of their regular meetings. This reflects the scheme's continued commitment to develop and improve the knowledge, skills and professionalism of the custody volunteers.

ICVs attended the Independent Custody Visitors Association national conference in November along with 2 members of the ICV Team. The theme of the conference was 'The safety and dignity of those in police detention'.

The self-introduction pilot, whereby custody visitors, rather than the escorting custody officers, introduce themselves to detainees, was completed on December 31st. A review of the pilot will be carried out in the first quarter of 2010 whereupon a decision will be made whether this will be rolled out across all panels. Until that review is completed those panels who took part in the pilot will decide locally whether they wish to continue self-introduction or revert to escorting officer introductions based on their local experience. BTPA will, of course, be kept up to date on any further developments.

Specific BTP custody suite developments include the continued decanting of Ebury Bridge detainees to Hammersmith; the change of status of the West Ham custody

suite to a designated suite meaning that, although there are no plans to increase the frequency of visits, ICVs are more likely to encounter and interview detainees; the opening of the BTP custody suite at Wembley Park station on or around December 31st and advance notice to the MPA of the planned opening of a 20 cell custody suite, London North, in Caledonian Road, London N1 in the summer of 2010.

ICV newsletters were produced in October and December (copies attached) and the next issue is due in February.

3. Issues raised by BTPA Stakeholder Committee

The Committee asked that FME performance, with particular regard to delays in arrival at the custody suite, be monitored. Although performance under the FME contract arrangements introduced in 2009 continues to vary, those boroughs which have a BTP suite have not reported serious concerns over performance or delays. The TCR suite voiced concern about securing the FME service late at night. This will be raised at the Camden ICV panel meeting in March and the information fed back to the MPS Custody Directorate by the MPA. A Medical Director was appointed to the FME service in autumn and it is hoped this well result in improved governance and performance.

ICV Coordinators continued to encourage visitors to try and spread their visits across all days and timeslots

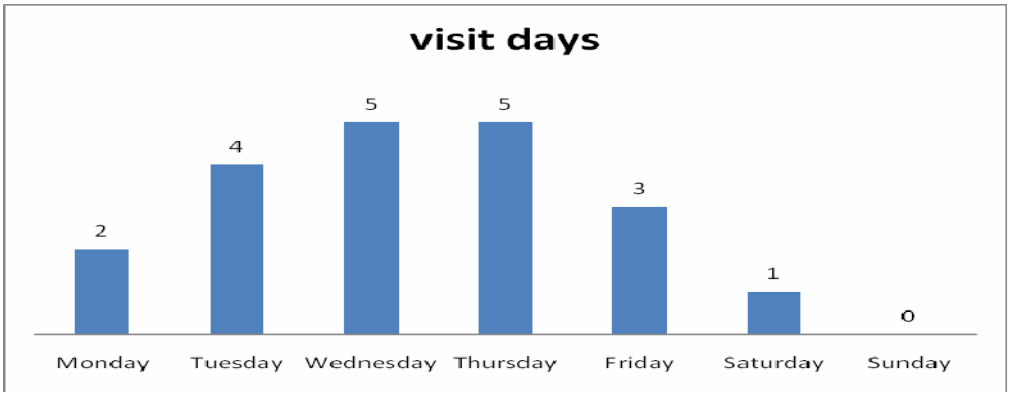
4. General review of custody visiting in BTP facilities

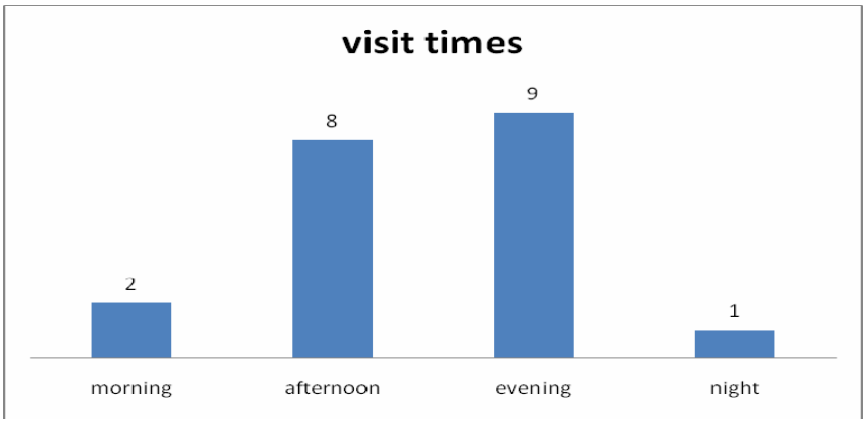
Facility	Panel responsible	Target visits	Visits made	Difference
TCR	Camden	13	9	4
West Ham	Newham	3	2	1
Hammersmith	H&F & South Westminster	13	9	4

Overview of visits:

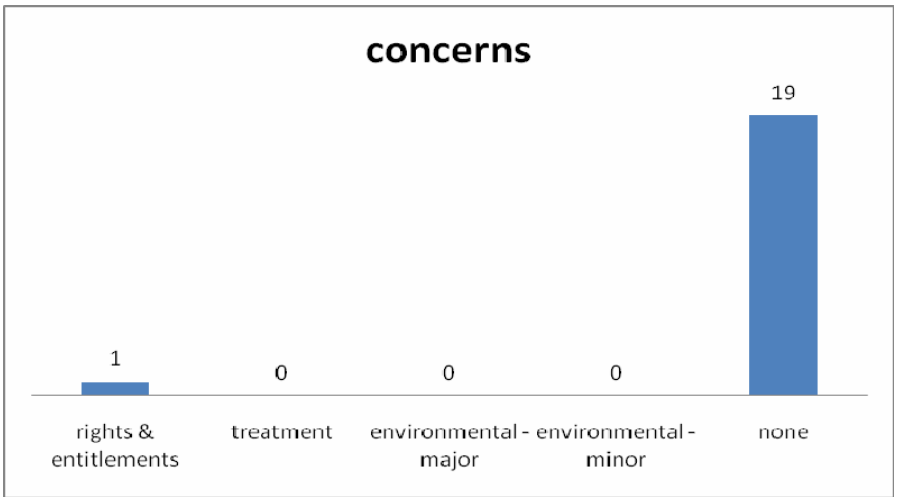
No serious concerns about the treatment or welfare of those held in BTP custody suites were raised, either at the time of custody visits or borough panel meetings, during the last quarter of 2009. As the table below indicates, even the number of minor environmental concerns is reduced perhaps reflecting ongoing improvements in cleaning and management of the custody area.

Statistics on visits





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



5. Information on each facility

<u>Tottenham Court Road</u>
Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 36
Number of detainees seen: 19
Percentage seen: 53%

Issues raised:
ICVs commented on the cleanliness of the facility and the helpful staff. The only concern raised was the mention by staff of occasional difficulty in securing the services of an FME. No specific concern or detainee was mentioned.
Special considerations:
A number of Camden ICVs were ill during this period resulting in several missed visits to both MPS and BTP facilities. ICVs commented that the number of detainees in interview at the time of the visits was the reason a smaller percentage of those being held were seen.

<u>West Ham</u>
Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 2
Number of detainees seen: 1

Percentage seen: 50%

Issues raised: Although now a designated facility there was only 1 detainee present on each of the 2 visits carried out. The cleanliness of the suite was commended and no concerns were raised.
Special considerations:
None

Hammersmith
Number of detainees at facility during ICV visits: 17
Number of detainees seen: 12
Percentage seen: 70%

Issues raised:
The only potentially concerning issue was the time delay between relevant detention time and the Notice of Rights and Entitlements being signed for in the case of 2 detainees. Custody staff assured the panel that these were signed for following the visit and the panel await an explanation for the delay.
Special considerations:
Communication difficulties resulted in a disappointing number of missed visits but the percentage of detainees seen on the visits remains reassuringly high.

6. Additional information
The ICV Scheme continues to report and communicate its work through a regular newsletter, reports to the MPA Community Engagement and Citizen Focus Sub-committee at meetings which are open to the public, and on the MPA website.

www.mpa.gov.uk/partnerships/icv

7. Upcoming events
Initial training sessions for new ICVs will take place in February 2010 and a further Diversity Awareness session delivered in March.

Brent ICV Panel will commence visits to the BTP Wembley Park custody suite on its opening in February. The visit schedule will be monthly for the first 6 months, to enable the panel to increase its membership. The panel will then visit weekly.

A revised ICV Handbook will be issued in February following a review carried out in 2009. A copy of the amendments will be issued to existing ICVs and the new handbook issued to new volunteers. A copy of the amendments will be sent to all stakeholders.

The ICV Team will monitor the effects of the changes made in the delivery of the scheme. The aim is to focus on awareness raising but there will be contingencies to address any potential performance and membership issues.

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