Metropolitan Police Authority

Report to BTPA on Independent Custody Visiting October 2011

1. Introduction

This report covers the period from 1 July to 30 September 2011 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 1 April 2009.

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

2. Overview of visits

The visit performance, i.e. the number of visits conducted compared to the number scheduled, has stabilised at a high level. This reflects an understanding by ICV panels that visiting BTP custody suites is now an integral part of the panel's work.

Of the 82 people detained at the time of custody visits, 40 were spoken to by ICVs. This is a lower percentage than the average across the scheme but the mitigating factor is that a number of the visits were conducted in the late evening or early morning when many of the detainees would be asleep. In such cases ICVs would make visual checks. Absence from the cell for the purpose of interview is the other common reason why a detainee may not be spoken to.

At Caledonian Road six of the eleven visits identified no concerns that required a police response, though among the general observations were comments about gaps in custody staff awareness of the visiting process and a number of cells out of use.

Of those concerns raised, three were about medical care for detainees, one of which also included some concern over inaccurate custody records. One concern was about the air conditioning and the other a minor concern regarding the supply of personal property bags. The Islington ICV Panel is one of the most experienced and thorough in the London Scheme and on reviewing the concerns around medical care has recognised that a more succinct reporting of their concerns may assist the police in providing more valid responses. The panel was satisfied with the police responses provided on the visit summary form (Appendix 1) other than that raised on July 10, however they were happy with the assurances given by the inspector at the panel meeting that processes would be put in place to ensure custody records were accurate.

The siting of CCTV cameras in strip search rooms will be challenged again by the Islington panel at the next meeting. One of the ICVs has identified that the practice appears to contradict a (draft) BTP SOP.

Only one of the ten visits to Ebury Bridge resulted in a concern, this being about the visiting process rather than any issues around detainee welfare or conditions. The panel is happy to await a full response to this concern. General observations noted were very positive regarding both the conditions in the suite and the conduct of the staff.

The issue of a cell buzzer not working was the only issue raised on two of the 12 visits to Tottenham Court Road. Again, positive comments about conditions and staff were made and the observation about the lack of cleanliness on the visit of August 7 was acted upon very promptly by the custody sergeant.

The only concern raised on the six visits to Wembley Park was about the intercom not working, presenting some access problems for ICVs. The inspector has responded by circulating the custody desk telephone number in order to facilitate prompt access.

There were no detainees present for the visit to West Ham and no concerns.

A summary of all visit reports received is attached as Appendix 1.

3. Statistics on visits to BTP facilities

Facility	Panel	Target visits	Visits made	Difference
Caledonian Rd	Islington	13	11	2
Ebury Bridge	Westminster	13	10	3
TCR	Camden	13	12	1
Wembley Park	Brent	6	6	0
West Ham	Newham	3	1	2
Total		**48**	**40**	**8**

4. Additional information

- An initial training session was delivered over two evenings in September as part of the induction process for new ICVs. A further diversity training session was delivered in July as part of the ICV Scheme's objective to upskill all visitors and ensure they uphold the scheme's commitment to equality and diversity. These sessions continue to be over-subscribed and well attended. Ongoing learning in the form of a number of refresher training modules is delivered at each panel meeting. (Appendix 2)
- There continues to be a healthy turn-over of panel membership. Recent pan London adverts resulted in 83 expressions of interest in joining the ICV Scheme, including those boroughs with BTP custody suites. Active recruitment has been a major factor in the improved visiting performance to BTP custody suites in the last two quarters.
- The London ICV Scheme hosted a conference in September the theme of which was a change in emphasis in visiting to a more dignity and human rights focus.
- A centralised management of MPS custody, along with local shared services initiatives, is likely to see shared custody provision across a number of

borough police services. These changes will necessitate a review of the management of the ICV Scheme in order to ensure the continuation of a visiting service to all police facilities where detainees may be held. The only borough containing a BTP custody suite likely to be affected in the short term is Newham. The panel will continue to fulfil its requirement to visit West Ham.

- A review is underway of the documentation ICVs view, including the likelihood of some guidance around Prisoner Escort Release forms (PERs).
- As reports came in on Monday 8 August that disturbances seen over the weekend were continuing and spreading to several boroughs, the ICV team contacted every ICV panel in London and requested extra visits. This was to ensure that misunderstanding, or misrepresentations, regarding the treatment of the large numbers being detained by police, could not further inflame community tensions. Within 48 hours almost every custody suite in London, all fully occupied, had been visited by members of the community and verbal reports relayed to the ICV Team and back to the community. Many custody visitors had already carried out extra visits ahead of the request by the ICV Team; such is their commitment to their communities and their recognition of the important part this issue can play in maintaining confidence between the community and the police.
- The picture that emerged from ICVs was that custody staff across London, including those in BTP suites where assistance was given to accommodate MPS detainees, carried out their duty of care towards detainees very professionally in the face of enormous pressures. Of the very many detainees spoken to none complained about their treatment in custody and indeed several were not only complimentary about the treatment they received, but thankful that members of the community were there to ask.
- A social event for ICVs will take place at City Hall on December 12. The aim is to show recognition and appreciation for the commitment and effort displayed by the volunteers of the ICV Scheme over the year. Presentations will be made to long-serving ICVs.

5. Summary

The development of the service delivered by the London ICV Scheme to BTP continues. The scheme now conducts over 65% more visits than when the service commenced. The findings are consistently reassuring. Few concerns are raised by detainees or ICVs about the treatment of those being held; the conditions under which people are detained are generally good and the service and attitude of custody staff frequently commented on in the most positive terms.

There have been some teething problems in those custody suites recently opened or refurbished, both in staff awareness of visiting procedures and some of the facilities but these tend to be anomalies which are promptly acted upon.

The majority of detainees seen by London ICVs are in the Caledonian Road and Tottenham Court Road custody suites. Both of these are visited by experienced and thorough ICV panels and both have been satisfied with the way their concerns are addressed.

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Appendices;
1 Summary report of visits to BTP custody suites
2 London ICV Scheme list of refresher training modules
3 October 2011 issue of the ICV Newsletter