



City of London

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

Annual Report

May 2015

Foreword

The City of London Independent Custody Visiting scheme has had a very successful year. Our Panel Member from the Police Committee, Vivienne Littlechild has become a well-established member of the ICV panel and has discharged her duties effectively. She has been a strong advocate for the detainees. Our three new ICV members are now fully trained and have provided a fresh and innovative approach both in terms of their contribution to our Panel meetings and during their custody visits. The Panel continues to operate at full strength.

The City Police Force main custody suite is located at Bishopsgate Police Station. The second custody suite at Snow Hill Police Station is now used, as an alternative resource or as an overflow facility. Snow Hill was recently used in March 2015, while there was major maintenance work at our main custody suite. However, the target of visiting Snow Hill at least four times a year is no longer required by the Police Committee – because Snow Hill is rarely used.

Our working relationship with the custody staff has been largely cordial, although, we had a short period of disruption to some of our visits – when the national security threat was raised in the autumn of 2014. The new ICV national standards have however been recently adopted by the Force. This will help clarify the Force's and our roles and responsibilities. I will also be part of the training programme for new custody staff in 2015-16 – which will help strengthen the Force's understanding of the crucial role we play.

This year, we achieved over 90% of the scheduled visits to the Bishopsgate custody suite and have continued to ensure that our visits correspond with the peak periods. The ICV Panel has been monitoring the times of all visits made alongside the level of usage within the Custody Suites. We effectively spread our visits over the whole week (7 days a week) however increasing the number of visits between midnight and 6am remains a challenge – although we intend to make further “in roads” in delivering on this target in 2015-16.

We have been kept up to date about the police accommodation review and the proposed plans for a new custody facility. We welcome the Force's offer for us to help shape these new facilities and await details of the consultation arrangements from the Force.

Many thanks to my fellow custody volunteers for their hard work this year and I would also like to thank the City of London police officers for enabling us to successfully carry out our responsibilities in 2014-2015.

Peter Tihanyi
Chairman
ICV Panel

Welcome to the 2014-15 annual report of the City of London Independent Custody Visiting Scheme.

The Court of Common Council, as the police authority for the Square Mile, has a responsibility for securing an efficient and effective police service in the City of London and holding the Commissioner of the City of London Police to account. Under paragraph 51 of the Police Reform Act 2002, the City of London is required to have in place an Independent Visitors Scheme.

Independent custody visiting schemes have been around since the 1980s following the Lord Scarman Report and became mandatory in 2003. The Scarman Report recommended a system of independent unannounced inspection of detention arrangements in police stations by local community members. Custody Visiting Panels remain a vital important means

of securing police accountability for the local communities they serve.

City Visitors are volunteers who give up their free time to provide independent scrutiny of the treatment of those held in police detention and the conditions in which they are held. They play a vital role in bringing together police and communities closer together and enhancing public perception of police procedures and practice in relation to custody.

We would like to thank all the City's Visitors for their commitment to the Scheme. The Police Committee fully appreciates their hard work and dedication to the Scheme and the contribution this makes to the overall confidence the community has in the City of London Police.

Henry Pollard
Chairman
Police Committee

Vivienne Littlechild
ICV Panel Member
Police Committee

Introduction

THE CITY OF LONDON INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME (ICV SCHEME)

The purpose of this report is to give an account of the work of the City of London ICV Scheme in the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. It aims to:

- report on the Panel's performance;
- provide the local community and the Police Committee with information about the visits made and what they have revealed about the treatment of detainees;
- set out issues and concerns that the visits have raised; and,
- set out the objectives for the 2015/16.

The City of London Corporation, in its role as the police authority for the City of London, has a statutory duty to have in place an independent custody visiting scheme. The operation of the Scheme is the responsibility of the Police Committee.

Independent custody visiting is governed by a range of legislation and guidance including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 and Home Office Codes of Practice and National Standards.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are members of the local residential and business community who volunteer to visit police stations unannounced to check on the treatment and welfare of people held in police custody. They must:

- be over 18;
- be independent from the police force and the police authority; and,
- have no direct involvement in the criminal justice system.

The City of London ICV Panel currently consists of 10 visitors who visit the custody suites at Bishopsgate Police station once a week. Programmed visits to Snow Hill custody suite (an overflow facility for Bishopsgate) were stopped in late 2013. However, visits were made to Snow Hill again in March 2015, because of temporary closure of Bishopsgate custody suite due to major maintenance work. A member of the Police Committee attends the quarterly Panel meetings and representatives of the Force attend for part of the Panel meetings so that any queries or problems that have arisen out of custody visits can be addressed. The meetings are supported by staff from the Town Clerk's department.

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS

Visits are always made in pairs, and are unannounced. The objective of all visitors is to monitor and report on the treatment and conditions of individual detainees and to check that their rights and entitlements have been upheld.

During their visit, ICVs are escorted by a custody officer or gaoler at all times. Every detainee being held is offered the opportunity to speak with the custody visitors, but may choose not to. Visit interviews are carried out within sight, but out of hearing, of the escorting officer. Strict rules of confidentiality apply so that detainees are identified by their custody numbers only, and the details of what visitors see and hear are treated as confidential. ICVs are not concerned with any alleged offence and maintain their independence and impartiality at all times. They do not provide advice to detainees; they are there to look, listen and report on conditions in custody at the time of their visit.

After every visit, custody visitors fill out a report form recording details of the visit. The information about the visit in the form includes details of problems that were resolved immediately and those that required further action. Copies of the reports are provided for the Commander of Operations, the appropriate Chief Superintendent, and the Scheme Administrator on behalf of the Police Committee. The ICV Panel will follow up and discuss at the next review meeting any concerns that cannot be resolved during visits. If necessary, more serious issues can be highlighted directly to the Police Committee.

PANEL MEETINGS

The quarterly Panel meetings allow Visitors to discuss each visit and any issues that have arisen. In addition, short update or information sessions are often included on each agenda so that Visitors are kept up to date with any national developments concerning the custody environment. Topics discussed this year included:

NHS Commissioning of Police Related Healthcare – The Government has proposed the transfer of commissioning responsibility for Police Related Healthcare from the Home Office to the NHS from 2015 onwards. The NHS National Commissioning Board (NCB) has become responsible for healthcare provision in Police Custody Centres. The NHS Commissioners now work in partnership with local Forces to ensure the requirements of the Police, NHS and, most importantly, service users are met.

This year, the Panel has continued to provide a close watching brief with regard to these developments. They want to ensure that there is no deterioration in the quality of the service delivered and that the service becomes more targeted to meet the needs of the detainees. Visitors are satisfied with the current health care provision provided to the detainees.

Custody visit throughputs – The Panel has been successful in ensuring that their spread of visits are more appropriate to the usage levels in the custody suites at particular times. They have monitored the times of all visits made alongside the level of usage of the Custody Suites. The analysis shows that the timing of visits reflects the level of Custody Usage.

As agreed last year, the Panel began undertaking visits during the Midnight to 6am slot to ensure 24 hour coverage. One visit was undertaken during this slot in 2014-15. The Panel aims to undertake at least two visits annually - during the Midnight to 6 am slot in 2015-16.

Access Rights to the Custody Suite – The Independent Custody Visitors remain satisfied with the access rights arrangements adopted as the agreed standard at the ICV panel meeting in November 2013. These arrangements are as follows:

The visitors will on arrival at the front desk be let into the station and be allowed to proceed to the area outside the custody suite. This would be without delay, unless unavoidable, due to the front office staff being temporarily unavailable. Front office staff will then contact the Custody Sergeant and let them know that the ICV is on their way to the suite and once the Custody Sergeant has judged it is safe for them to enter, they will be allowed access.

However, the recent introduction of more robust access arrangements (in response to the increased security threat) has resulted in our new ICV's having difficulty in accessing the suites - because they do not carry the recognised Police ID. This meant that some visits did not go ahead. This problem was further accentuated by the vetting arrangements – which slowed down the ID processing times significantly. There is a need to revisit the current arrangements for the vetting of new volunteers in 2015-16.

The Force has recently agreed to adopt the new national ICV standards produced by the ICVA. These standards clearly set out the roles & responsibilities of the ICV, their practices and the appropriate working arrangements with the Force. This standardises arrangements and will improve the custody officers understanding of the role of the ICV.

Snow Hill Police Station Custody Suite – Representations were made by Vivienne Littlechild (the Police Committee ICV SIA representative) to the Police Committee in 2013 to remove the 2010 Police Committee target of visiting Snow Hill at least four times a year. This change was made because the custody suite was used so infrequently resulting in a large number of unproductive visits. It was agreed not to include Snow Hill visits in future rotas from early 2014 onwards. Visits were made to the custody suite in March 2015 as it was being used while maintenance work is being done at Bishopsgate.

Coverage for Major Events – The Panel agreed to increase the number of custody visits undertaken during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. A trigger mechanism, similar to that already in place at Snow Hill, was agreed where the Force notified the Corporation if any marked increase in custody requirements did occur. From 2012-13, the ICV Panel agreed to introduce the system for increasing coverage for other future events when it was appropriate. There was no need to increase the number of custody visits to cover for major events in 2014-15.

The Panel however felt there should be closer communication with the Force during these major events – as it tends to be a more pressurised & stressful environment in custody. Panel Members need to be clear about the Force's expectations of them during these busier times, but they also need to ensure that their independence is not compromised.

In addition to the points above the Panel have raised a number of other issues with the Custody Manager

- 1) **Repairs & Maintenance – Time lag & Maintaining Investment** - The Panel raised a number of concerns about the time taken to institute repairs to the cells. This has been a persistent concern for the last few years. The Force has always responded rapidly to the concerns raised by our visitors – quickly rectifying problems. The Force is replacing the current CCTV contract in 2015 to improve the service provided.

Recently, Members have sought assurance from the Force that the appropriate standard and condition of the custody suites are maintained and that the necessary level of investment continues to be provided. They are concerned that the custody suites may become neglected during the transition period – whilst the new custody suites are being built at Wood Street Police Station. There have been concerns raised about the wear & tear in about half of their visits in 2014-15

Outcome – The Force will continually review the arrangements to try to maintain the improvement in response times and will keep the condition of the custody estate to meet the required national standards.

- 2) **Future Custody Suite arrangements** – The Panel has discussed the implications of the Police Accommodation Review on the future Custody arrangements. They have offered to provide input into the shaping of the new custody service.

Outcome – The Force has agreed to draw on the Panel's knowledge and experience to help shape the design of the new custody suites and Panel Members are now waiting to be given the consultation details.

Visit Statistics

During 2014/15 a total of 47 visits were undertaken. The following tables look at the nature of these visits in greater detail.

NO OF VISITS

Station	Target No of Visits	Achieved	% of Target
Bishopsgate	52	47	90
Snow Hill	0	0	0
Total	52	47	90

DAYS OF VISITS

	No of Visits	%
Monday	2	4
Tuesday	8	17
Wednesday	3	6
Thursday	13	28
Friday	8	17
Saturday	8	17
Sunday	5	11
Total	47	100

TIME OF VISITS

	Bishopsgate	Snow Hill
00.01 – 06.00	0	0
06.00 - 12.00	19	2
12.01 – 18.00	17	1
18.01 – 00.00	7	1

DAYS OF VISITS / TIMES – COMBINED

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
00.01 – 06.00							
06.00 -12.00	2	5		3	2	5	4
12.01 – 18.00		3	2	5	4	3	1
18.01 – 00.00			1	5	2		

NO OF DETAINEES VISITED

	Total number of detainees in Suite at time of visit	No of detainees offered visit	No. of detainees accepted visit
Bishopsgate Q1	43	27	23
Bishopsgate Q2	22	19	16
Bishopsgate Q3	46	28	20
Bishopsgate Q4	29	18	17
Snow Hill Q1	0	0	0
Snow Hill Q2	0	0	0
Snow Hill Q3	0	0	0
Snow Hill Q4	12	7	7
Total	152	99	83

ISSUES AND CONCERNS ARISING FROM VISITS

This list of issues and concerns reflects the range of issues that have been raised by detainees in the City of London in the last year and, in addition, other issues which have been reported by ICV Panels elsewhere for which there has been a nil return in the City of London.

	Bishopsgate	Snow Hill
No of Total Visits	43	4
Report Form with no matters requiring a police response	13	0
Comments individual officers - Positive	5	0
Comments individual officers – negative	3	0
Infrastructure / furnishings / fittings/out of service	19	5
Cleaning, tidiness and general hygiene - positive	5	0
Cleaning, tidiness and general hygiene - negative	2	0
FME Service and FME room	3	0
Perceived risk to detainees?	0	0
Procedures not followed	2	0
Rights and entitlements seemingly delayed	1	0
Periodic checks (15, 30 minutes) not maintained	0	0
Personal hygiene requests– (showers, washing etc)	0	0
Requests for food and drink	0	0
Temperature and availability of blankets	5	1
Requests for literature	0	0
Requests for phonecalls	2	0
Other	1	0

2015/16

The City of London ICV Panel wants to ensure that it meets its objectives in scrutinising the custody arrangements in the City of London. It has set itself the following targets for 2015/16:

- to increase the number of visits to at least 95% of target;
- to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of the ICV Panel;
- to undertake at least two visits per year between the hours of midnight and 6 am.

- to ensure that the ICV membership is representative of the communities it serves

Conclusion

The City of London ICV Scheme provides an independent check on the treatment of detained persons. Through the dedication of the volunteer visitors, an appropriate level of scrutiny of the Force is achieved on which the Police Committee and the community can rely.