

Committee:	Date:
Police	Wednesday 20 May 2015
Subject: Independent Custody Visiting Scheme Annual Report	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	For Information
<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>This report completes the requirement to update Members on the progress of the City of London's Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme, presenting the Panel's Annual Report and informing Members of some of the recent issues raised by the ICV Panel in relation to custody provision in the City. Issues raised at the Panel meetings over the past year include access to the custody suites, the response times for repairs and maintenance work and how best to time their visits.</p> <p>Recommendation: Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. The existing Independent Custody Visiting Scheme has been operational, in its current form, since November 2007. As part of the Scheme, Members agreed at your meeting in May 2009 that a regular report would come to Committee on an annual basis, and this report fulfils that requirement.

Visits to the Custody Facilities

2. Members will recall that Custody Visitors make unannounced visits in pairs to custody suites to monitor and report on the treatment and conditions of individual detainees on an entirely independent and confidential basis. They are there to look, listen and report on conditions in custody at the time of their visit, and report what they see through to the Force and the Committee. The City Visitors have all been trained in conjunction with the Independent Custody Visiting Association.
3. The visits take place on a weekly basis for Bishopsgate Police Station as agreed in the Scheme. Each visit is recorded by the two visitors who complete a short form covering any issues for concern following meetings with the detainees.

Copies of each completed form are then sent to the Divisional Chief Superintendent, the Scheme's Administrator in the Town Clerk's Office, and the Commander for action if necessary.

4. Meetings of the ICV Panel continue to take place on a quarterly basis and are attended by all Custody Visitors together with representatives from the Town Clerk's Department and the City Police, as well as the Committee's representative Mrs Vivienne Littlechild.
5. The Panel then reviews the record of visits since the last meeting and is able to ask detailed questions of the representatives of the Force with custody responsibilities about any issues which concern them. Finally, the Panel considers more general aspects and the administration of the Scheme such as the visit rota and availability. Your officers would like to record their thanks to Chairman Peter Tihanyi for his contribution to the Scheme over the past year.

Panel issues in 2014/15

6. This year the Panel has produced its sixth Annual Report, which is attached at Appendix A. This reports on the Panel's performance over the last 12 months, provides information about the visits made and issues raised as a result and, finally, sets out the Panel's objectives for 2015/16. Issues raised at the Panel meetings include the following:

- a. **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 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 appropriate Police ID. This has meant that some visits did not go ahead. This problem was further accentuated by the vetting arrangements – which slowed the ID processing times down 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 ICV Association). 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.

- b. **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 will continue to be provided. They have concerns that the custody suites might become neglected during the transition period – whilst the new custody suites are being built at Wood Street Police Station. Their concerns are clearly illustrated by the significant number of references made with regard to maintaining the fabric of the custody suites in their visitors' reports (referenced in over 50% of their reports).

- c. **Healthcare Provision** – the Panel continues to take a great interest in the way healthcare is provided and will continue monitor the arrangements in the coming year.
- d. **Custody Usage** – the Panel receives regular data from the Force on the usage of the Custody Suites and compares this against the timing of their visits on a regular basis so as to ensure that the timing of future visits better reflects the usage of the Custody Suites. The Panel has therefore tried to ensure that the spread of visits are appropriate to the volume of usage at particular times. 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 have agreed to undertake two visits annually - during the Midnight to 6 am slot in 2015-16.
- e. **Coverage for Major Events** – Following the Olympics and Paralympic games, Visitors agreed to undertake a greater number of visits during future major events, when 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 within the custody suite. Panel Members stressed the 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 and that they are not prevented from visiting the detainees.

- f. **Police Accommodation Review** – The Panel has been kept up to date with the review and the proposals for a new custody facility. They welcome

the Force's offer to the Panel to help shape the new facilities and now await details about the consultation arrangements from the Force.

Legal Implications

7. In accordance with Section 51 of the Police Reform Act (2002), the City Corporation is required to have in place an Independent Visitors Scheme.

Community Strategy & Other Significant Implications

8. The ICV Scheme supports the 'safer and stronger' aspect of the sustainable Community Strategy.

Conclusion

9. The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme is now well established and the Panel is pleased to present its annual report to the Police Committee. Further updates on this Scheme will continue to be provided to Members on an annual basis.

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