



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Brent Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Brent Independent Custody Visiting Panel covering the calendar year January to December 2007.

The purpose of the report is to:

- Evaluate the panel's performance
- Provide the local community and the MPA with information about the panel's activities and visits made
- Set out issues and concerns that have arisen
- Set out the objectives for 2008

The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) is an independent statutory body which exists to ensure that London's police service is accountable for the services it provides to people in the capital. The MPA has 23 Members who scrutinise and support the work of the police. The MPA promotes equality and diversity within the police service and is working in partnership to ensure all those who live and work in the capital are treated fairly and with respect.

The MPA has a legal obligation under the Police Reform Act 2002 for a custody visiting scheme to operate in its area. In April 2007 the MPA brought together the custody visiting arrangements managed by the boroughs into one London scheme. The scheme has the full support and cooperation of the Commissioner and the Borough Commander for Brent, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration, providing a team of MPA staff to support the panels.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from within the community. The MPA is responsible for recruiting, selecting and appointing all custody visitors and tries to ensure a balance of age, gender and ethnicity. Successful applicants to the scheme are given training in all aspects of the ICV role and responsibilities. Custody visiting is governed by a range of legislation and guidance including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 as well as Home Office Codes of Practice and National Standards. The Brent Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme. This new reporting arrangement brings Brent in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

Aims, achievements and developments

The aims and objectives of the panel are laid out in the Home Office Codes of Practice, the National Standards governing Independent Custody Visiting and the MPA ICV Handbook.

The primary objective of the panel is to make unannounced visits to police stations in the borough to check and report on the treatment of detainees in police cells to ensure their rights and entitlements are being observed. This is achieved by;

- Making a total of 104 visits. One visit per week to both of the 24/7 custody suites in the borough, endeavouring to vary the time of visits.
- Maintaining panel membership to ensure an equitable share of the visit workload.
- Ensuring members continue to learn from their experiences and contribute to building confidence between the police and the community in line with the original aims of the scheme.

The number of visits conducted compared to the target is disappointing. Mitigating factors may include low numbers of active visitors due to illness and other commitments placing the burden on too few members. The membership of the panel falls short of the optimum number and therefore lacks the resilience to cope when members become unavailable.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the week, though days toward the end of the week seem to be preferred with 70% of visits taking place in the days Thursday to Sunday. Members may want to consider varying time slots as 57% of visits were carried out on the evening between 4 and 8 pm. A very encouraging 59% of those in detention were either spoken to or visually checked during visits. 83% of detainees were held under PACE, 10% were immigration and 7% 'other'.

In the majority of cases, there were no significant issues raised. However, the number of detainees who declined a visit suggest that the introduction of visitors may need to be reviewed. There is also the ongoing London wide issue of immigration detainees. Though not great in number they do present particular challenges in terms of language and duration of detention.

After changes to the governance of the London ICV scheme on April 2nd the MPA carried out a London wide recruitment campaign throughout 2007 in response to membership issues on many panels. The number of applications to Brent was disappointing, pointing to a need for more local recruitment initiatives. No new members joined the panel in 2007 and 1 member left. Several applications were received toward the end of the year, 2 of which were successful at interview and await vetting clearance.

At the end of the summer Brent ICV panel took the decision to meet every two months instead of monthly but as poor attendance became an issue towards the end of the year this is to be reconsidered in 2008. The workload of visits remains reasonably well shared among members. Meetings are attended by both the Inspector and Chief Inspector responsible for custody in Brent and the police are robustly challenged over concerns found during visits. The attendance of the Borough Commander at the July panel meeting to inform members of a 'death following police contact' illustrates the recognition the police now have for the role of the panel in retaining the confidence of the community. The panel vice-chair is also vice-chair to the Brent Community Safety Board which is the primary forum by which the public of Brent can influence and be consulted by the police.

Chair's report

My first year as chairman of the Brent ICV has seen major shifts in the process of detainment. The primary changes were the manner in which information is stored in the paperless system, giving more confidentiality to detainees, and the change in the layout of the custody suites. Brent's demographic has shifted significantly. This has been reflected in the spread of nationalities and reflected in the difficulty encountered in conversing with some detainees.

Through our meetings some important issues have been raised and initiatives suggested, in particular the recommendation that the panel is given an opportunity to be on a 6 hour watch and be 'the eyes and ears' of the custody Sergeant on a rota for a 24 hour period, suggested by Chief Insp. Taff Thomas. I think this could prove effective in cementing trust and transparency with the Brent Police team.

Our visits were down this year but a number of factors contributed the panel's performance. Demanding work and family commitments, and some illness among members all played a part, however the core of the panel have to be commended with carrying the continued burden of visits with some ICVs doing two visits a week. We have commenced with a local recruitment drive where by I have attended the local colleges as a part of an enrichment initiative, and in the same class have introduced the rationale of the Brent ICV and the importance of custody visiting to an 18-30 age group.

As I come up to the end of an enjoyable year as Chairman I have some specific aims for the panel for 2008 to compliment the general aims mentioned at the end of the annual report;

1. To have a panel of about 15 strong that is reflective of new demographic of Brent.
2. Instruct the 24 hour watch
3. To increase visibility of custody visiting by presenting the work of ICV to local groups and colleges on a regular basis and increase the media profile of the Brent panel
4. Ensure more effective lines of communication between ICV visitors
5. Encourage social events for ICVs to show that their commitment to the welfare of the Brent residents is appreciated.

I would like to thank the Brent police for their swift response when there was a death in custody in 2007 and also for the great seminars on cash seizure and arrest techniques. Finally, I must thank my ICV team who have been steadfast and resolute through adversity and laughter.

Faisal Abdu'Allah MA (RCA) FRSA

Recruitment and membership

Since April 2007, panels have been asked to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA. The MPA expects all panels to adhere to the MPA's equal opportunities policy, recruit new panel members from all sections of the community and actively foster good relations between people of different races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

According to London Development Agency figures Brent is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London. It is one of only two boroughs where non-white groups (55%) represent a greater proportion of residents than white groups. The gender figures show 52% female and 48% male. Brent has a young population with 25% being in the 0-19yr age group and 37% in the 20-39yr age group.

The membership of the panel is diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity but not broadly representative of the borough as illustrated above. It should be noted that specific records of the 6 common threads of diversity (age, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and disability status) are not recorded. Application packs sent to potential new ICVs contain a diversity monitoring form but, as in all public bodies, disclosure of such information is voluntary.

The MPA requires visitors to make a minimum of 12 visits a year and, as visits are made in pairs, the optimum number of visitors on a panel is 9 for every 24/7 custody suite. The Brent membership of 11 ICVs affords the panel no real resilience to cover periods of unavailability. In such circumstances, and allowing for a natural turnover of members, Brent panel would benefit by implementing local recruitment drives. Any profile raising measures would be in useful in raising public awareness and attracting more applicants.

Members of the Brent ICV Panel

Faisal Abdu'Allah

Aisha Ama Ashanti

William Austin

Leslie Bryan

Francis Eniola

Alloysius Frederick

Cecilia Gabriel

Anita Jakhu

Peter Osuhon

Rupert Smith

Leona Sydney

Members who resigned or retired in 2007

Florrie Leo

Data from panel visits to police stations

Figures have been validated where possible but are subject to anomalies in report forms. Detainees are assumed to be PACE and assumed to be 'seen' where such info is missing..

1. Number of Visits

Station	No. of visits conducted
Wembley	25
Kilburn	22
Total	47

2. Visit times

Time slots	No. of visits conducted
0000 – 0359 hrs	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	9
1200 – 1559 hrs	0
1600 – 1959 hrs	27
2000 – 2359 hrs	11
Total	44

3. Visits Days

Days	No. of visits conducted
Monday	4
Tuesday	4
Wednesday	6
Thursday	11
Friday	9
Saturday	4
Sunday	9
Total	47

4. Visit duration

	No. of visits conducted
Less than 30 mins	16
30 – 60 mins	29
60 – 90 mins	2
90-120 mins	0
More than 120 mins	0
Total	47

5. Visit and detainee details

	No.
Total number of detainees at visits	295
PACE detainees	246
Immigration detainees	30
Other	19
Total	295
Detainees seen	175
Total throughput of detainees in Brent	11,365

Aims and plans for 2008

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2008 are as follows:

- To continue to ensure that the rights, entitlements and interests of detainees in Brent are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA.
- To make a total of 104 visits to the Wembley and Kilburn custody suites and any extra visits considered necessary as a result of special circumstances.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread and in particular to ensure that at least one visit is conducted at every time slot listed in the data section. (pp8)
- To continue to work with the local police to develop a better understanding of issues that affect detainees, custody staff and ICVs as well as the wider policing issues that affect the Brent community
- To take part in local and London wide recruitment drives with the purpose of increasing membership of the panel and endeavouring to ensure it represents the diversity of the Brent population.
- To ensure that all new recruits receive local and MPA training. To continue to encourage learning through panel discussion and refresher training sessions.
- To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, the London ICV Conference and shared training and resources if appropriate.
- To attend and report to the Brent Community Safety Board as a means of informing the community of the panel's work and the conditions affecting those who find themselves in police custody in Brent.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.