

**Brent
Independent Custody Visitors
Panel**

**Annual Report
2009**

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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Brent Independent Custody Visiting Panel covering the calendar year January to December 2009.

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 2010

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 report brings Brent in line with other panels in the London ICV Scheme and will contribute to a compendium annual report to be produced in 2010.

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.

Although visits are reasonably well spread throughout the week, there is an unaccounted decrease on Tuesdays and Sundays. Whilst there is also a reasonable spread in terms of the time-slots of visits, the total lack of early morning visits must be addressed. However with improving membership the panel undertook substantially more visits in 2009, conducting 76% of scheduled visits compared with 63% in 2008. An encouraging 47% of those in detention accepted the invitation to a visit and were spoken to. Of the remaining detainees who weren't available, by being out of the cell or refused the visit offer, most were where possible visually checked during visits. 70% of detainees were held under PACE, 4% were immigration and just 3% 'other'.

The Brent ICV panel has continued to play a full and active part in ensuring that the rights, entitlements and interests of detainees in Brent are upheld. In the majority of cases throughout the year there were no significant detainee concerns reported. The very few issues raised were, as reported by the panel, responded to promptly, appropriately and professionally by the custody staff. The number of detainees who accept visits continues to suggest that the verbal introduction of visitors is such that it encourages detainees to engage during a visit. Apart from detainee concerns other issues raised once again largely related to matters of cleanliness/ hygiene and FME attendance. The panel reported that custody staff continue to take a pro-active approach in flagging up such matters.

The panel has continued to engage, primarily through the chair and vice-chair, in ICV cluster meetings, and ICV chairs' meetings and is also represented at the Borough Custody users Forum. The panel continues to make a positive contribution to the efforts to build confidence between the community and police by attendance at, and reporting to, the Brent Community Safety Board (CSB).

Members have embraced on-going learning through a series of in-panel training modules and presentations.

During 2009 the panel noted and commented upon the introduction of the revised FME service and CCTV monitoring within custody. Following concerns first highlighted during 2008 the panel decided in April 2009 to formally express concern regarding the plight of those detainees in custody with mental health issues, in particular the length of time involved in the process before any assessment is undertaken and the impact their detention has on the service that custody staff can provide. To date this remains an on-going issue with the membership.

The panel were also delighted to be involved with Officers and local and national organisations in the production of a formal local Borough Policy regarding facilities and measures for Muslim Detainees when in police custody.

Chair's report

Some wines are based on their year others by region, 2009 was a good year for the Brent ICV primarily because the panel has stayed committed and efficient in the execution of their duties with a discerning eye. The diverse panel now encourages a healthy relationship with custody in relation to any detention issues despite if they are of a sensitive nature.

The protocol we have adopted is one of inquiry and resolve in the custody suite which then leaves no need for updates at our panel meetings, this then enables time for refresher sessions hosted by our Administrator James Tate that keep members on their toes and more vigilant on their visits.

For the year 2009 our visits were up by 10% and have risen primarily through simple 'communication without guilt'. We all agreed if you cannot make a visit just pass on the information and someone else can carry the torch for that week. The issue regarding fit for detention is still an issue, a letter has already been sent signed by the Vice chair and myself we await the outcome from the authorities.

Custody seems to be busier than it has been in recent years however the Custody Officers find quite creative strategies to insure that we are assisted and given the necessary information expediently. The introductions now by Officers/DDOS to the detainees are delivered from memory with slight changes, others are read from the card, for those who have neither we prompt them and they welcome our comments.

The police have been very supportive this year in their updates and have been at all of our meetings when I think back to previous years this a great shift.

Objectives for the coming year Brent ICV
Raise our visit to 90%
Resolve the issue of 'fit for detention'
Have more social events with the panel

Finally as always we are only as good as the components that make us, Brent ICV members still give the most precious gift their 'time' because they believe in each moment they better the life of a detainee feeling vulnerable. It is clear that the residents of Brent are fully behind their continuous devotion from the comments and emails I receive from them.

We sadly saw the departure of Chief Inspector Taff Thomas to greener pastures but his influence, nature and ambition is firmly etched on the soul of the panel. Finally I end on a tale of hope I received a call from the police requesting if I could make a visit to a station as one of the detainees had been tasered. This was an exemplary act of good practice and transparency from the Metropolitan Police when you considered the manner they were perceived in only ten years ago.

Great work

Faisal Abdu'Allah
Chair Brent ICV

Recruitment and membership

At the beginning of 2009 Brent panel had 13 members. Although the number of members at the end of 2009 had only increased to 15 the commitment and enthusiasm of the newer membership was reflected in better attendance at meetings and an improving visit performance. Recruitment will continue in 2010 until membership reaches its optimum number of 17 ICVs.

No members left the panel, although one remained on a long term period of sabbatical absence throughout the year.

Panels are expected to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA. The MPA expects all panels to adhere to the its 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.

In June 2008 a diversity monitoring exercise was carried out across the scheme which sought to identify which, if any, of the 6 common threads of diversity (age, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and disability status) are under-represented. The purpose of this was to ensure the MPA was fulfilling its statutory responsibility in ensuring that no specific communities were denied access to membership of the scheme. As in all public bodies, disclosure of such information is voluntary but a healthy 67% of members provided responses. The results illustrated that although panel diversity doesn't form an exact match to the demographic breakdown of the borough, as identified by census figures and projections, no applicant was denied access to membership of the Brent panel on the basis of status as documented in their diversity response. This remains the case.

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. Following continued successful recruitment the overall membership of the panel continues to be healthily diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.

The panel continued to be represented at meetings of the cluster of west London panels and members also embraced the ongoing learning modules developed to be delivered at panel meetings.

Members of the Brent ICV Panel 2009

Faisal Abdu'Allah

Aisha Ama Ashanti

Augustus Benjamin

Peter Brown

Claire Crawford-Hector

Paul Earle

Francis Eniola

Alloysius Frederick

Cathal Griffin

Nick Jaikaran

Nicholas Kari

Peter Osuhon

Sophia Randeree

Sabrina Senior

Rupert Smith

Leona Sydney (on sabbatical)

June Walker

No Members resigned or retired in 2009

Data from panel visits to police stations 2009

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

Number of Visits

Station		No. of visits 2009	2008
Wembley	52 weeks	44	35
Kilburn	52 weeks	36	28
Total 104		80 (76%)	63 (61%)

Visit times

Time slots	No. of visits 2009	2008
0000 – 0600 hrs	0	0
0600 – 1200 hrs	20	12
1200 – 1800 hrs	20	16
1800 – 0000 hrs	40	35
Total	80	63

Visits Days

Days	No. of visits 2009	2008
Monday	13	9
Tuesday	8	3
Wednesday	16	11
Thursday	19	12
Friday	11	16
Saturday	10	10
Sunday	3	2
Total	80	63

Visit and detainee details June – December 2009*

Total number of detainees at visits inc .those out of cell or in interview etc	298
Nos . seen	143
Nos. Refused	30
PACE detainees	211
Immigration detainees	13
Other	9
Home Office	2
Male	205
Female	30
Adult	213
Juvenile	22

* A new database was introduced wef 01.06.09, unfortunately at time of publication not all the information for the preceding period 01.01.09 – 31.05.09 was available

Aims and plans for 2010

As the principle aim of custody visiting alters little over the years – the building and maintaining of confidence between the community and its police service – so the Panel's aims and objectives are likely to change little year on year. The aim persists to continue to provide a professional custody visiting service, maintain performance and illustrate to the people of Brent that should they, or their family members, find themselves in police custody in Brent they can be assured that members of their community take an interest in their wellbeing. To those ends the plans for 2010 are as follows:

- To continue to ensure that the rights, entitlements and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA as appropriate.
- To make a total of 104 visits to the Brent custody suites and any extra visits considered necessary as a result of special circumstances. To visit stations where Brent detainees may be accommodated should the Brent suites be closed.
- 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.
- 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 ensure that all new recruits receive local and MPA training. To encourage continuous learning through panel discussion, ongoing learning modules 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 CSB 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.