



London ICV Newsletter

July 2007

Virtual Court Prototype Trialled in Lambeth and Southwark

Following extensive consultation with stakeholders including the Probation Service, Crown Prosecution Service, Court Service and community groups, a 12 week virtual court prototype has been trialled in Lambeth and Southwark since 29 May.

Using secure video conferencing technology persons charged with an offence could be placed before Camberwell Green Magistrates Court while still at a police station. The virtual court can be used, with the defendant's consent, in all first hearings except those involving multiple defendants, appropriate adults, interpreters, youths or in complex and sensitive cases.

It is anticipated that by using the prototype first appearance pleas could be heard within two or three hours of charge. The virtual court aims to speed up the resolution of cases for victims, witnesses and

defendants by modernising the criminal justice system, improving efficiency and integrating current working practices and IT systems. If successful it could save up to £15 million a year. It could also reduce the need to transport detainees between police stations, courts and prisons, which currently costs Londoner's £45.5 million a year.

The prototype initially operated from Brixton and Walworth police stations with Kennington and Peckham joining after two weeks. Magistrates will continue to conduct proceedings from the courtroom while the defendant, defence and prosecution will participate from specially adapted interview rooms within the stations. Members of the public will be able to watch proceedings from the courtroom.

Participation in the scheme is dependant on the defendants consent. Before making a decision defendants will be

provided with literature explaining the process and will be able to discuss participation in a private consultation with their legal representative or lawyer. Defendants will be able to change their mind at any time before their court appearance. A Virtual Court Officer, independent of the police, will facilitate the virtual court process. Those unwilling to participate will be processed through the criminal justice system in the normal way.

The virtual court concept forms an important part of several government projects and supports existing London Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) and Metropolitan Police Service initiatives including Simple Speedy Summary Justice and Integrated Prosecution Teams.

Following its completion the virtual court will undergo an independent and detailed evaluation alongside further consultation with the local community and stakeholders. It is hoped that this will identify a firm and workable operating model on which to base the future of the virtual court scheme.

Andrew Morley Chief Executive of the LCJB said

"It is not anticipated that the prototype will have an adverse impact on ICV work but the evaluation framework is designed to capture the experience of those who took part in the prototype". He added "Although simple in concept there are a number of procedural challenges. The purpose of the prototype – a UK first – is to address those challenges, test potential benefits and provide a firm workable model for delivery." Avril Jones, Southwark ICVP Co-Chair said "I believe this venture is an exciting vision for the future of a joined up Criminal Justice system. It's less labour-intensive to run for all concerned, and eventually will prove to be a viable alternative within the custody sector."

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Terrorism Suspects - The True Length of Their Detention

The Home Office has recently allowed the publication of statistics, showing the length of time Terrorist Detainees have been held across the UK (excluding Northern Ireland), between 11/09/01 and the end of 2006.

The total arrests under the Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT) in the period 11/09/2001 - 31/12/2006 was 1,166. (Data is still outstanding on 4 cases).

The MPS are currently doing some further analysis of these figures, in order to break down all the periods into day-

Length of Time TACT Detainees Held



- Detention less than 24 hours (504)
- Detention between 1 day and up to 7 days (550)
- Detention over 7 days and up to 14 days (98)
- Detention beyond 14 days (10)

long (rather than week-long or fortnight-long) units. They predict this will show, that most of those detained for more than 24hrs are in fact detained for less than 48hrs, which is not discernible from the data when presented as it is. It

is also hoped it will show how few individuals have been detained for the maximum 28 days.

The MPS can also demonstrate that, in general, the longer a TACT arrestee is detained, the more likely (s)he is to be charged.

Lead Member John Roberts says 'These statistics show that, contrary to an unfortunate but popular misconception, the majority of those detained by police under anti-terrorism legislation are not in fact held for weeks on end. Many, are only held for a matter of hours. The MPA hopes that by releasing this data the MPS can reassure Londoners that it is using its necessary powers of detention in a measured, transparent and appropriate way.'

Cluster Meetings

Quarterly meetings of clusters of ICV panels are part of the new structure for the London scheme. We intend to hold the first cluster meetings from September and your Coordinator will shortly be speaking to panel Chairs to convene

a mutually agreeable time and venue for the first meeting.

Cluster meetings are attended by panel Chairs (and the Vice Chair if they wish to attend) and are designed to provide panels with an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual

concern regarding custody visiting and to share practices and successes with neighbouring panels. They can also provide opportunities for further training and learning, which Chairs can bring back to their panels. Cluster meetings can be

held at the MPA if this is felt to be more convenient – or Chairs can chose to take it in turns to 'host' the meeting in their borough. ICV Co-ordinators will facilitate the meeting.

The ICV Team at the MPA

Following the resignation of Ann Battle and Anne Skinner's decision not to take up her post due to a change in personal circumstances, the ICV team currently consists of six ICV Co-ordinators who are responsible for supporting the London ICV panels. Unfortunately attempts made to recruit staff through the GLA family group did not result

in sufficient numbers of applications to form a viable shortlist, so both posts were advertised in The Guardian on the 27th of June.

In the meantime ICV Coordinators are working hard to ensure that all panels are supported. We have recently made a temporary arrangement for a former local administrator to provide

some support to the Haringey and Croydon panels, working in conjunction with a member of the ICV team. The staff shortage has meant it has not been possible to deliver everything that we had planned in relation to panels, but every effort has been made to ensure that a good level of service has been

maintained. As soon as we have a full complement of staff in place we intend to make further improvements to the service provided to panels. Contact information for the team is provided on the back page, along with information about the boroughs they cover, both permanently and on a temporary basis.

Metropolitan Police Pilot Short Term Holding Facilities

We announced in a previous newsletter that there will be a consultation event at Hendon, where people will have the opportunity to see the prototype of the Short Term Holding Facility (STHF) and to learn more about the new facility.

The ICV Scheme Manager, two ICV Coordinators and the

North Westminster ICV Chair and Vice Chair visited the prototype recently.

The facility is designed to address the high level of minor offenders in the West End area, in particular Oxford Street, and aims to fast track their processing time.

Although only 5 cubicles are illustrated below, it has been decided that the STHF will consist of 7 holding cubicles each approximately twice the size of a phone box. They have a glazed door

and side panel so detainees will be visible at all times and the cubicle will contain a fixed bench to enable the detainee to sit or stand.

The STHF will also have an FME room, interview rooms, solicitors room and an administration area.

It is hoped that a pilot of the STHF will be open by December 2007, and should last for 18 months. The effectiveness of the facility will be evaluated after this period.

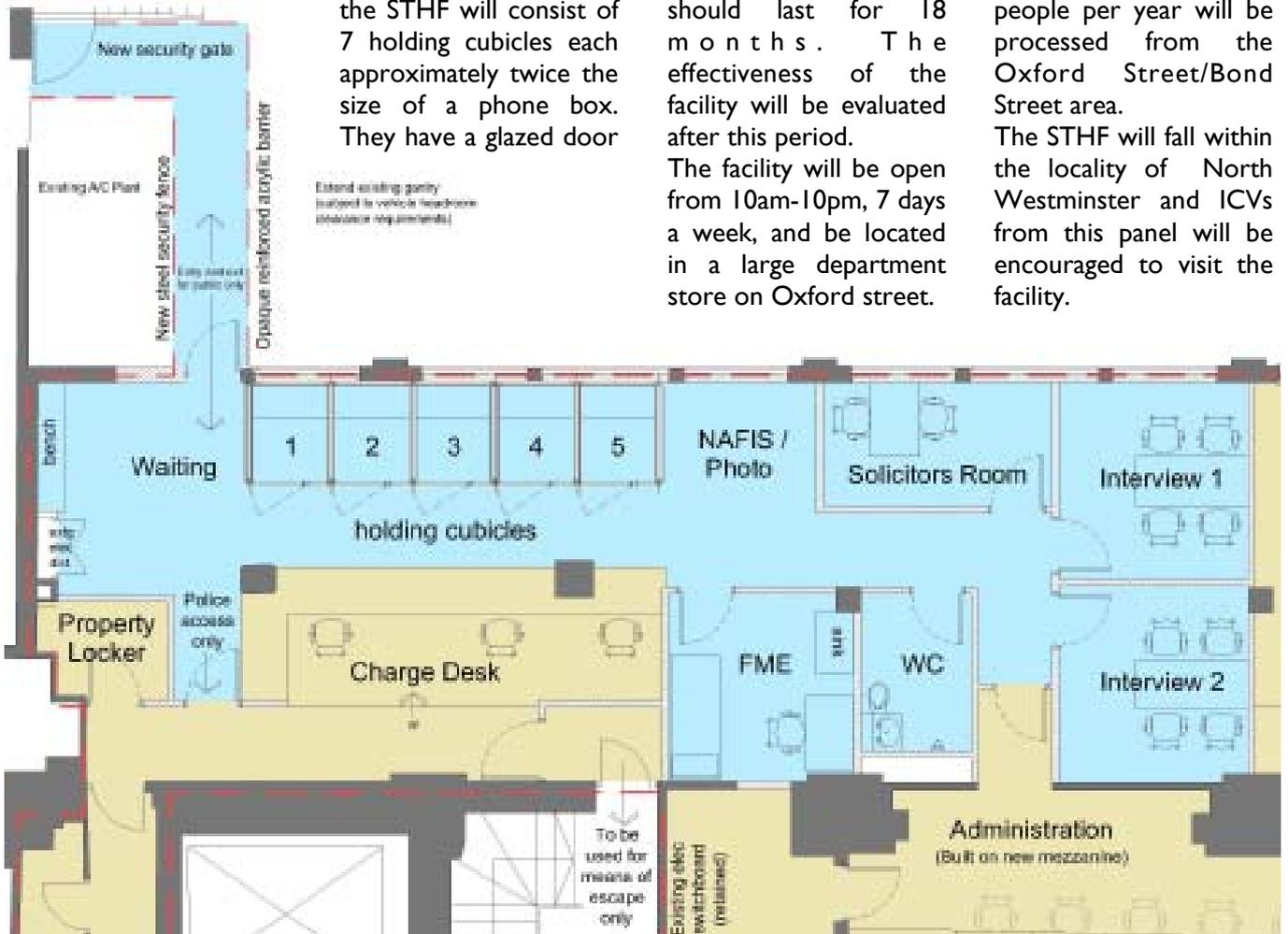
The facility will be open from 10am-10pm, 7 days a week, and be located in a large department store on Oxford street.

Vulnerable detainees such as juveniles, or those with mental health issues etc will not be held there.

The processing time for detainees will be a maximum of 4 hours and detainees who are not processed within this time frame will be transferred to Marylebone station.

It is estimated that approximately 5000 people per year will be processed from the Oxford Street/Bond Street area.

The STHF will fall within the locality of North Westminster and ICVs from this panel will be encouraged to visit the facility.



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Jennifer (jennifer.ankrah@mpa.gov.uk or **07768 902 575 / 020 7202 0096**) - Kensington & Chelsea, North Westminster, South Westminster (Plus Greenwich & Haringey).

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Sarah (sarah.walker@mpa.gov.uk or **07768 868 055**) - Croydon, Lambeth, Merton, Southwark, Sutton (Plus Lewisham).

Building Collapse Drama in SW1!

People arriving at the MPA building in Dean Farrar Street at the beginning of June may have noticed the progress of building work being carried out to Queen Anne's Chambers opposite. Few would have realised that this was unauthorised.

At about 4.15pm on 12 June, tons of bricks and masonry descended in a thunderous cascade crashing to the street below and throwing up a choking orange cloud to roof level. Alarmed MPA staff members quickly organised a head count under the direction of senior managers. Miraculously, all were safe and accounted for; although staff members including our own Emma Nuttall had walked past the building moments before it collapsed.

During the two weeks that followed ICV team members worked from home or other remote locations; they were able to perform some or most of their role and continued to support their panel meetings. The MPA building was finally declared safe on 2 July but visitors should note that Dean Farrar Street remains closed at Tothill Street while crews complete work to Queen Anne's Chambers.

Recent Changes to the London ICV Scheme

We have had 90% of ICVs return their Memorandum of Understanding with a 100% rate of return from 16 panels. The majority of ICVs in the majority of panels have returned their MoU and will be continuing to volunteer as independent custody visitors in London, which represents good news for detainees. The MPA would like to thank all our ICVs for their renewed commitment and hard work in ensuring that the conditions in which detainees are held are inspected and for the valuable part that ICVs play in ensuring that detainees are treated in accordance with their rights and entitlements.

Report Forms...

The completion of report forms in some cases is still lacking in vital statistical information. Please can all ICVs check and sign the report forms before handing them over to the police, or posting to the MPA, to ensure the details about each detainee has been recorded fully.

ICV Reference Group

We will shortly be contacting all ICVs to invite expressions of interest in joining the new ICV reference group.

The reference group is designed to put in place an effective and productive mechanism for the MPA to gather a range of opinions from ICVs on various aspects of the London scheme. We would welcome input from new ICVs, as well as more experienced panel members and we hope to achieve a good mix in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. The reference group will consist of up to 20 ICVs and communication will predominantly be through group email to afford maximum flexibility for those involved. More detailed information will be provided with the invitation.

Meeting of Chairs with the MPA...

The next meeting with ICV Chairs will take place in September at the MPA. We are currently arranging a date for this and will inform Chairs as soon as possible.

