



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Hammersmith and Fulham Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Hammersmith and Fulham Independent Custody Visiting Panel.

The report covers a period from January 2007 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 visits made including the treatment of those held in custody
- 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 make sure that London's police are accountable for the services they provide 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 Hammersmith and Fulham, but is independent of the police. The MPA holds overall responsibility for the scheme's management and administration; a member of MPA staff is responsible for supporting the panel.

Prospective custody visitors 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 a custody visitor's 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. This year's annual report covers the period January 2007 to December 2007. This new reporting arrangement brings Hammersmith and Fulham in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

Chairperson's report

Welcome to the annual report of Hammersmith and Fulham Independent Custody Visitors Panel.

Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) are volunteers from the local community who monitor the situation of people in police custody. They have a general right of unannounced access to custody areas of police stations at anytime of the day or night.

The scheme was introduced in the mid-1980s following a recommendation in Lord Scarman's report into the 1981 Brixton riots. Since then panels have evolved throughout the United Kingdom as an important means of securing accountability of the police to the local communities they serve, bringing police and communities closer together and enhancing public perception of police procedures and practices. It is now mandatory for each Police Authority in the country to have a Custody Visiting Scheme in place.

Visits are always made in pairs and Custody Visitors speak to detainees out of earshot but within sight of the escorting officer. All detainees are offered the opportunity to speak to the Custody Visitors but can choose not to. Before leaving the Custody Area visitors compile a report on their findings which will draw attention to any matters which need addressing. Very often minor issues can be dealt with there and then simply by speaking with Custody Staff. The Panel holds bi-monthly meetings a part of which is attended by the Custody Inspector of the borough. This is an opportunity for him to respond to any queries Visitors may raise in connection with their visits to stations.

This report of the Hammersmith and Fulham Independent Custody Visiting Panel covers the period January 2007 to December 2007. This period has seen significant changes in particular the centralisation of administration of the London ICV Scheme under the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA). Previously, schemes had been organised and administered at borough level. Many visitors were, quite rightly, concerned that our operational independence might be compromised with such a close link with the MPA. My predecessor, Maggie Maloney, deserves credit for her hard work and commitment working with other panels, the MPA and Home office to try and resolve sensitive and contentious issues. Compromises were agreed which to a large extent met our own panel's objections. We therefore did not encounter the resignation of visitors which neighbouring panels did.

Recruitment remains a major issue for this Panel and for many years we have struggled to fulfil our commitment of weekly visits to both Hammersmith and Fulham and Fulham Police Stations with membership far lower than the 20 we aspire to. It is particularly heartening then that we welcome 3 new members to the Panel – John Ryan, Madelin Hill, and Maya Donelan. We continue to be very grateful to Sally Speed, Joan Benham and Melanie Baker from the Richmond Panel who in addition to their own Panel commitments help us out.

Other changes which have occurred during the year include the change of venue from St John's Church, Fulham and a reduction in the frequency of Panel meetings. The Irish Centre at Hammersmith has proved more convenient for Panel members and bi-monthly meetings sufficient to attend to all necessary business.

In December Vanilda Campodell'orto gave a presentation at a Custody Staff Seminar at Fulham Police Station and I, as Chair, continue to attend the Community Safety Board meetings.

Unfortunately there has been no refresher training or a London-wide conference this year. Hopefully this will be redressed next year.

My thanks to Maggie Maloney, my predecessor, for her incredible hard work and dedication to both the Panel and the ICV scheme London wide. To all Panel members for their continued commitment – regularly undertaking more than one visit a month which is the normal expectation of ICVs. My thanks also to George Fry, MPA co-ordinator who deals very efficiently with the administration of the Panel. My thanks also to the custody officers and staff at Hammersmith and Fulham police stations who are often very busy when we come to visit but are generally good humoured and helpful. My thanks also to Custody manager Inspector Peter Capewell and DDO Manager Gill Knight who are working with us to ensure any matters of concern we raise are investigated quickly and effectively. Finally, thank you to all the people in custody who have been willing to talk to us at a very difficult time.

Carol Bailey

Aims and achievements

The aims and objectives of the panel are laid out in the Home Office Codes of Practice and the National Standards governing Independent Custody Visiting as well as 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.

In the previous annual report the following specific aims and objectives were set out for 2007:

- To maintain a programme of weekly visits to both main police stations at variable times including occasional night visits
- To explore the possibility of making visits connected with football matches
- To include Shepherds Bush Police station in the visit programme by liaising with the police
- To continue to monitor the standards of cleaning and the temperature of cells and the provision for detainees' hygiene needs
- To explore the possibility of visiting the British Transport Police facility in the borough as the opportunity arises
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Hammersmith and Fulham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To provide input to police training when requested
- To recruit more men and younger people to the panel and to have a complement of 20 by the year end
- To ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the borough
- To attend local events such as summer fairs to publicise the work of the panel and to recruit new members
- To enable panel members to attend refresher training courses and to use the panel meetings as an opportunity to provide training
- To develop the relationship with Hammersmith and Fulham Community Safety Board, reporting back to the community about the work of the panel

The panel made a total of 78 visits compared to a target of 104; this represents an achievement of 75% of the annual target.

In the majority of cases, there were no significant issues raised. However, there are some recurring concerns. One of these has been the temperature of the cells both at Hammersmith and Fulham; another is the problem of offering detainees showers even when they have been in custody for several days.

Visits have not been all that well spread throughout the week, with fewer visits on Mondays and Thursdays and at the weekend. However there has been a relatively good distribution of visiting times throughout the day with more than 10% of visits taking place between midnight and 08:00; this rises to 21% completed in the unsocial period between 20:00 and 08:00. 53% of the visits take place in the morning between 08:00 and 11:59 compared to 28% that take place in the afternoon or early evening.

It has been a constant challenge to recruit new members to the panel. With fewer than ten members for much of the year, the objectives of conducting football-related visits, visits to Shepherds Bush when this custody suite is in use and visits to the BTP station have all had to be put on hold. With so few members it has also been difficult to schedule any attendance at local public events. In particular, it has not been possible to recruit any young people to the panel and the panel remains relatively old with six members over 60 and with the youngest panel member being 40 years old. By the end of the year there were seven female panel members and only two men. It is not possible to yet say how well the panel matches the diversity of the borough in other respects, however there will be an opportunity to monitor the diversity of the panel quite soon.

Relations with the police remain good. Both the custody manager and panel members have invested a lot of effort to ensure lines of communication are kept clear and that matters requiring a response to the panel are dealt with effectively.

Towards the end of the year the panel changed venue and decided to meet every other month. The Irish Centre has proved to be a very suitable venue and the change in meeting frequency has meant the police custody manager attends every meeting of the panel.

No refresher training was possible during the year however plans for this have not been abandoned. A panel member was however asked to present to a permanent custody seminar held at Fulham police station attended by custody officers and staff. The Chair has continued to engage with the Community Safety Board as it develops and to represent the work of the panel to this public forum.

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, faiths, races, genders, sexualities, abilities and age on the panel.

In the previous annual report it was stated as an objective that the Panel should have a full complement of 20 members. At the start of the year the panel had just seven members. The number of visitors at the end of the year was ten. Recruiting volunteers to the Hammersmith and Fulham ICV panel has been a challenge; advertisements in the Metro and Evening Standard normally produce a plentiful supply of applicants in other boroughs, however for some reason this is not the case in Hammersmith and Fulham. New supplies of posters and leaflets have been placed in libraries and community centres and the ICV role has been advertised on the council's intranet.

During the year four potential recruits were interviewed, all of whom were successful and two of whom took up the role.

While the population of the borough as a whole is 48% male, the majority of panel members, including the Chair, are female. Hammersmith and Fulham has a higher proportion of people aged 25-39 (37.6%) than the rest of London or the UK and 22% of the borough is aged 50 or over, similar to the rest of inner London. Most of the panel are aged over 60 however and, at the end of 2007, there was no panel member younger than 40 years old.

22.2% of residents of the borough come from non-white ethnic groups, this is below the London average of 28.8% but this proportion is increasing. The majority of the population consider themselves Christian (56.8%) with Muslims being the next largest religious group (6.8%). 12.8% of people of working age are disabled. Without measuring the diversity of the panel it is not yet possible to confirm whether or not the panel matches the diversity of the borough. It is however expected that the match will be close, at least in those areas that are apparent.

The panel welcomes applications from all sections of the community in line with stated policy. It is hoped that future recruitment will result in an increased number of men and of younger people. New initiatives will be needed both to target different types of people and to increase the take up of the role.

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough Hammersmith, Fulham and Shepherds Bush; Shepherds Bush does not operate full time however being used for overflow purposes, when either of the main stations are shut, or occasionally under Operation Safeguard.

The panel makes weekly, unannounced visits to Hammersmith and Fulham police stations.

The majority of our reports have not raised any significant issues that had to be brought to the attention of the MPA or which required a response from the local police. However, there have been some issues:

- The panel have requested that, wherever possible, female detainees are given the opportunity to speak to a female officer.
- Over the year concerns over the supply of blankets and toilet paper have had to be resolved.
- The introduction of the new facilities contract has raised expectations of an improvement to the general quality of the cleaning of custody suites; this continues to be monitored.
- The panel have from time to time expressed concern over the temperature in both custody suites.
- Panel members have recorded their dissatisfaction with the facilities at Shepherds Bush custody suite, especially the absence of shower facilities inside the suite.
- Panel members continue to be concerned over detainees' access to showers and washing facilities, especially immigration detainees who may have been in custody for several days.
- The panel have welcomed the introduction of Dedicated Detention Officers (DDOs), which they believe will help with resolving some issues of concern including access to washing facilities.
- On 31 May, ICVs interviewed a vulnerable female detainee at Fulham police station whose circumstances gave rise to concern; during the visit it was discovered that the cell buzzer had been masked off with tape. The panel and Custody Manager spent some time investigating this matter and resolving issues.
- In accordance with the Smoke Free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006, custody areas became smoke free in July 2007. The panel were pleased to note that this resulted in few of the adverse outcomes that had been anticipated.

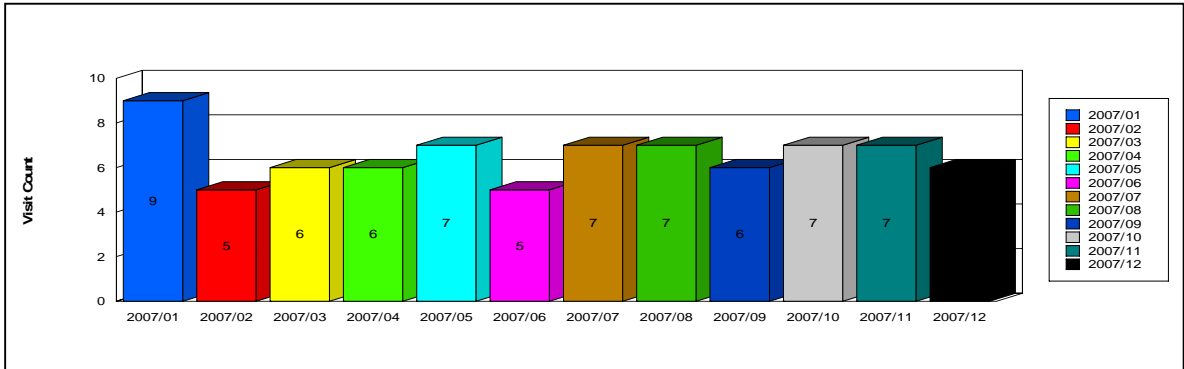
Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Hammersmith	33	42
Fulham	41	53
Shepherds Bush**	4	5
Total	78	75

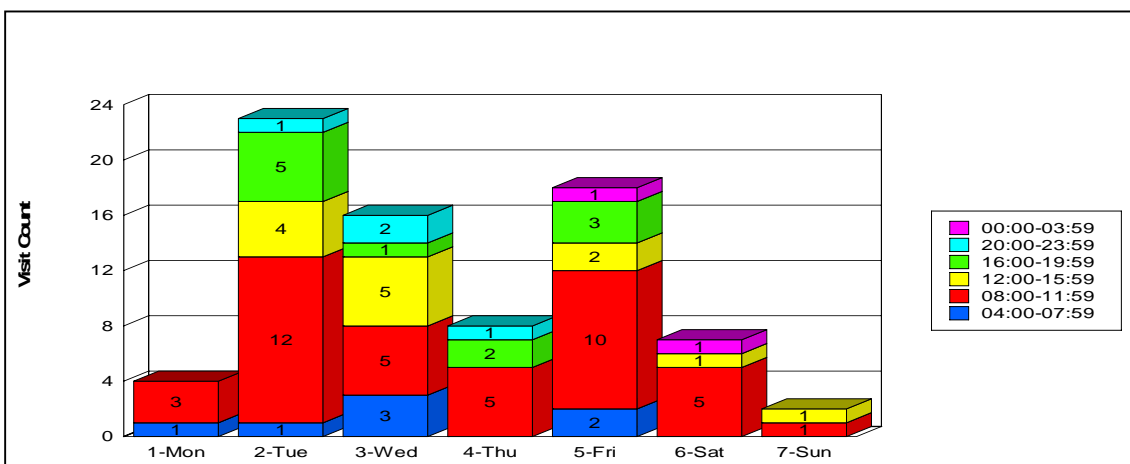
*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.

** In use when Hammersmith or Fulham were closed for repair



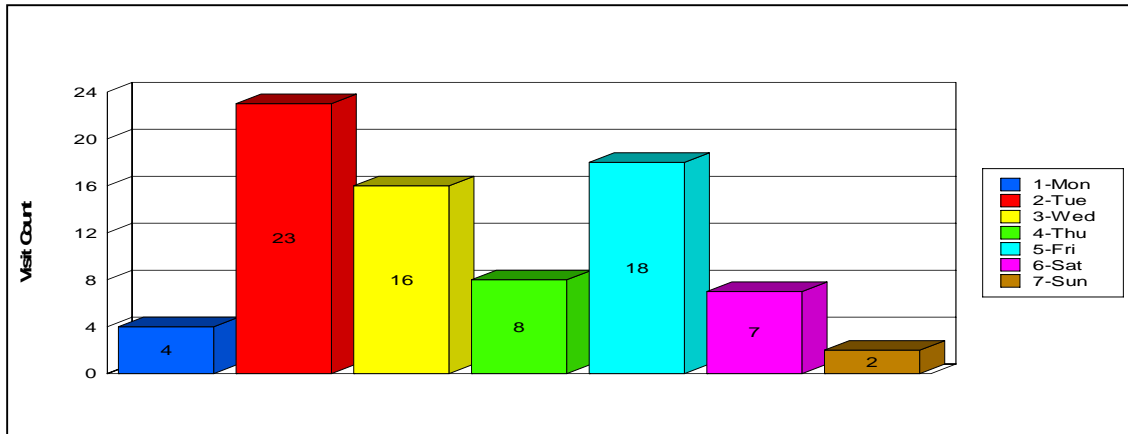
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	2	3
0400 – 0759 hrs	7	9
0800 – 1159 hrs	41	52
1200 – 1559 hrs	13	17
1600 – 1959 hrs	11	14
2000 – 2359 hrs	4	5
Total	78	100



3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	4	5
Tuesday	23	29
Wednesday	16	20
Thursday	8	10
Friday	18	24
Saturday	7	9
Sunday	2	3
Total	78	100



4. Details of Visits

Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	186	2.1
Detainees who refused to be seen	90	1.1
Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc	33	0.4
Detainees not seen due to other reasons	31	0.4
Total	340	3.9

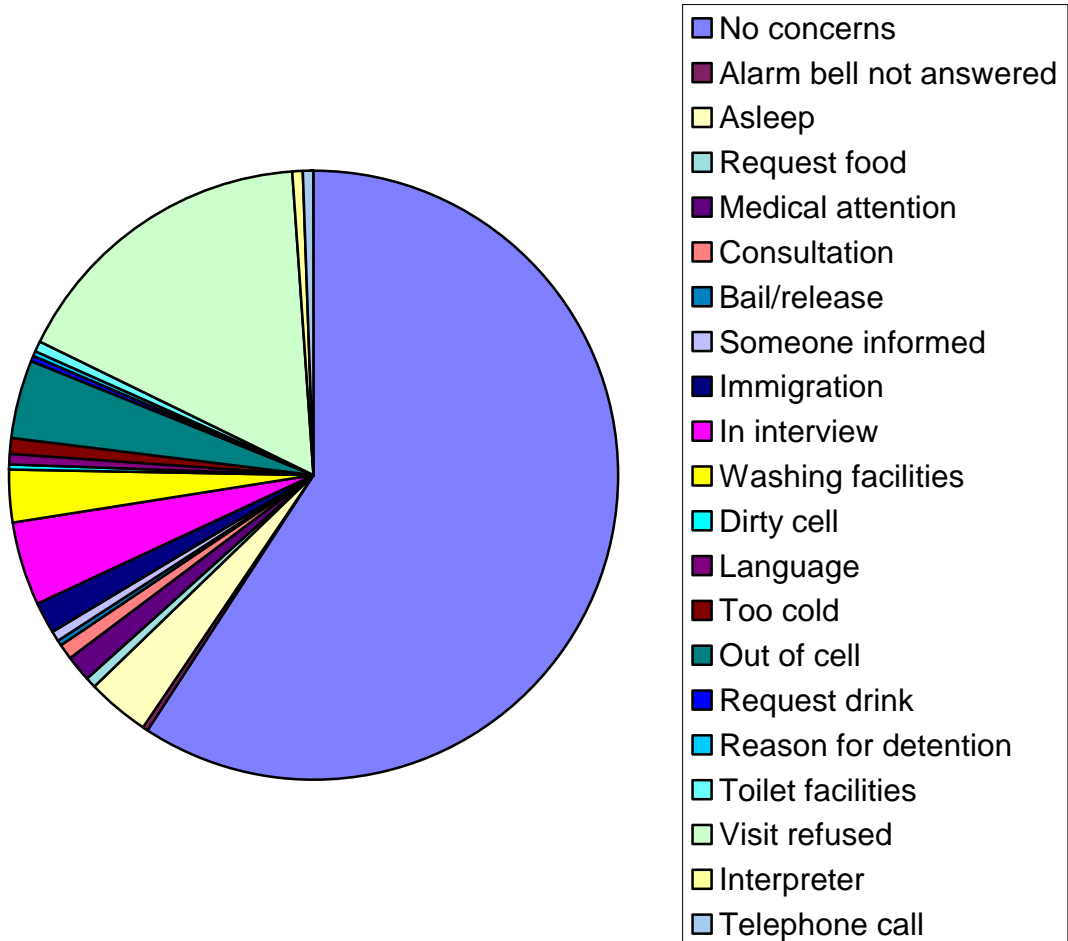
*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit (DP = detained person)

5. Numbers of detainees by type:

		% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2007	8719	-
Immigration detainees included	206	2.4
Home Office prisoners included	30	0.3
Total immigration and Home Office prisoners included	236	2.7

6. Details of detainees' concerns:

Detainee concerns raised in London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in 2007:



Plans for forthcoming year 2008

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

- To make a total of 52 visits to each of the custody suites at Hammersmith and Fulham.
- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread and in particular to ensure that visits occur more equally across the week.
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Hammersmith and Fulham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and custody staff during visits
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with the local police or the MPA as appropriate.
- To ensure that all new recruits receive local and MPA training and that existing members of the panel undertake refresher training at least once during their three-year tenure.
- To increase engagement with other panels, through cluster meetings, shared training and providing resources if appropriate.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.
- To attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.
- To achieve the above through new initiatives designed to target different types of people and increase the take up of the ICV role