



**Metropolitan Police Authority**

# Harrow Independent Custody Visiting Panel

## Annual Report 2007

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# Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Harrow 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 panels 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 Harrow, 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 Harrow Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme. This new reporting arrangement brings Harrow 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 52 visits. One visit per week to every 24/7 custody suite 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.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the week, though times of visits indicate that varying times slots should be considered as 66% of visits were carried out on the evening. A very encouraging 66% of those in detention were either spoken to or visually checked during visits. 95% of detainees were held under PACE and the figure of 3% immigration detainees goes against the trend in many other London boroughs.

Harrow custody suite was closed at short notice for refurbishment from 16<sup>th</sup> February to 18<sup>th</sup> May when detainees were held in the suites at Kilburn and occasionally Wembley stations. Although members were entitled to visit detainees at those stations they were not obliged to do so. 2 visits were carried out and concerns reported back to the panel meetings.

In the majority of cases, there were no significant issues raised. However, there are some recurring concerns including temperature in the suite and open access to the FME room. There is also the ongoing London wide issue of immigration detainees and the particular challenges this presents in terms of language and duration of detention.

The MPA carried out a London wide recruitment campaign throughout 2007 in response to membership issues on many panels. Harrow was not one of the panels experiencing shortages, with only 1 member leaving and 1 new recruit during the year. Several applications were received at the end of the year and are under consideration.

Harrow ICV panel meetings are consistently well attended and visit workload shared among members. Members are kept well informed by the Custody Manager on custody issues and wider police developments. The panel has also begun the process of re-establishing the formal relationship with the Harrow Police and Community Consultative Group. (HPCCG)

# Chair's report

It is my honour and privilege to report to you the reader of this report and, generally, to residents of the London Borough of Harrow about our activities and visits to Harrow Police Station during the period January – December 2007. I sincerely hope that after reading this whole report, you will be able to form an opinion about whether the police in Harrow (when discharging their duties of crime prevention, detection and investigation) are able to maintain a balance between their duties and the rights and entitlements of people they take into their custody.

As a public body the police, and in particular custody staff in Harrow whose activities we observe, monitor and report on, have a duty to ensure that detainees are treated humanely and with dignity. These are statutory requirements. Among other things, these requirements enable members of the public to ascertain the minimum treatment they expect from the police, if they find themselves in police custody. In essence, police power to detain and the right of the public to expect prescribed minimum treatment, if properly maintained, guarantee a relationship of trust between the police and the community. ICVs in Harrow come into the frame at this intersection. We put on the community's eyes and ears during our visits. At our meetings with the Inspector in charge of custody matters, we become the community's mouthpiece.

Our visits to Harrow custody suite are in essence a means to finding out whether a proper balance has been or is being struck. For the year under review, I am pleased to report that during the times my members visited Harrow Custody suite, they found no abuse of detainees' rights or denial of their entitlements. I must commend Harrow Police for maintaining high standard of professionalism in the treatment of detainees. The year 2007 also saw the refurbishment of Harrow custody suite; so that our previous perennial concern of poor heating facility in the custody suite became a thing of the past by the end of 2007. In the previous year, my members had observed that the police doctor's room was left often unlocked with used syringes exposed in disposable boxes. The Panel felt this was a risk to all those who frequented the custody suite as well as a public health risk in the event of a member of the public come into contact with contaminated fluids from those syringes. My members raised this issue on many occasions with the custody staff. Accordingly, I am pleased to report that a new and more secure doctor's room has been provided for in the refurbished Harrow custody suite. Furthermore, during the period under review members observed increased good food quality and well maintained food preparation area in the custody suite. However, members noted that detainees who, for religious or cultural reasons, could only eat certain food were offered vegetarian food. These include Muslim and Jewish detainees and although some of them accept vegetarian meal; others chose not to have it at all. I hope that in the not too distant future, something would be done to address this area.

The internal organisation of the Panel witnessed two transition events during the period under review. In 2006, it was resolved that as a community volunteer group, it was appropriate that the Panel associated ourselves more with the voluntary sector than the local authority. Accordingly, my executive committee pioneered and eventually succeeded in acquiring membership of Harrow

Association of Voluntary Services. We also negotiated a contract for HAVS to provide the Panel with administrative support. HAVS provided us with administrative support from November 2006 to March 2007. Thereafter, the MPA took over this function thereby ushering the second transition in the Panel within a year.

Nonetheless, these transitions did not adversely impact on the Panel. In fact, the transitions occurred at a time when the Panel was harvesting from its membership recruitment drives conducted in 2006. Therefore, by the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, the Panel actually saw an increase in its membership. This increase brought with it a more diverse representation of the prominent racial groups in Harrow. The new members also brought with them diversity in age, gender and occupational composition of the Panel. The new members included a city worker, pensioner, lawyer, a college teacher, etc. I am proud to report that Harrow ICV Panel is truly a reflection of the community we serve. We are yet to receive an application from someone who is registered disabled. The year 2007 also gave Panel members another opportunity for a third annual end of year party. This social function proved to be very important in strengthening the friendly bond among members and an opportunity to share life's other experiences.

Below are our aims and objectives for 2008. Among other things, the Panel will endeavour to establish and/or increase its contact with other community groups who have dealings with the police, suspects and the criminal justice system generally. The Panel has already accepted membership of Harrow Police and Community Consultative Group and as from 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008, the Panel aims to attend meetings of the HPCCG. The Panel would also seek to establish contact with faith groups in order to address the issue of religious or cultural food offered in Harrow custody suite and other matters.

I will fail in my duties if I omitted to thank my enthusiastic and committed Panel members: Sohail, Deepa, Julia, Michael, Antonia, Faiz, Peter, Ashok, Abu, Roger, Kathy and June. I must say the Panel is blessed with members who care passionately about a cohesive and convivial police-community relationship in Harrow. In the past year, my members continued to demonstrate this in ensuring that the issues above were reported in almost every visit report. As I speak on behalf of the Panel, I am sure I would not be marked down for saying that Inspector Richard Moss, Harrow Custody Manager, was very exceptional in his concern for the highest standard of treatment from his officers. He insisted on seeing a well maintained custody suite. The Inspector showed a real sense, not only of a duty, but also of service to our community. On behalf of the Panel, I want to thank Inspector Richard Moss and wish him well in his career. Last but by no means the least, on behalf of the Panel, I thank the MPA ICV Team including James Tate for the support they provided to the Panel while ensuring that our independence was not compromised. I hope that the coming year will bring more achievements. I wish every Panel member a successful 2008.

Signed: *Patrick Matthew Hassan-Morlai*

With the assistance of vice-chair Faiz Nazerali

## 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 Harrow is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London with 50.1% of residents belonging to a minority ethnic group. The gender figures show 52% female and 48% male.

The membership of the panel is broadly representative of the borough as a whole and diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, though 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 Harrow membership of 14 ICVs affords the panel a ready made resilience to cover periods of unavailability. In such circumstances, and allowing for a natural turnover of members, Harrow panel would gain no benefit by implementing local recruitment drives and the objective of any profile raising measures would be in raising public awareness rather than attracting more applicants.

## **Members of the Harrow ICV Panel**

**Sohail Anwar**

**Deepa Chana**

**Julia Fraser**

**Michael Fitzgerald**

**Antonia Green**

**Patrick Hassan-Morlai (Chair)**

**Faiz Nazerali (Vice-chair)**

**Peter Morris**

**Ashok Parmar**

**Abu Saud**

**Roger St Paul**

**Kathy Twomey**

**June Walker**

### **Probationary members**

**Emma Treanor**

### **Members who resigned or retired in 2007**

**Winifred Potter**



# 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
Harrow	
Scheduled	<b>39</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

## 2. Visit times

Time slots	No. of visits conducted
0000 – 0359 hrs	<b>0</b>
0400 – 0759 hrs	<b>0</b>
0800 – 1159 hrs	<b>9</b>
1200 – 1559 hrs	<b>2</b>
1600 – 1959 hrs	<b>11</b>
2100 – 2359 hrs	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

## 3. Visits Days

Days	No. of visits conducted
Monday	<b>6</b>
Tuesday	<b>7</b>
Wednesday	<b>2</b>
Thursday	<b>9</b>
Friday	<b>1</b>
Saturday	<b>5</b>
Sunday	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

## 4. Visit duration

	No. of visits conducted
Less than 30 mins	<b>16</b>
30 – 60 mins	<b>16</b>
60 – 90 mins	<b>1</b>
90-120 mins	<b>0</b>
More than 120 mins	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

## 5. Visit and detainee details

	No.
Total number of detainees at time of visits	<b>164</b>
PACE detainees	<b>156</b>
Immigration detainees	<b>5</b>
Other	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>
Detainees seen	<b>109</b>

# 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 are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA as appropriate.
- To make a total of 52 visits to the Harrow custody suite and any extra visits considered necessary as a result of special circumstances. To visit stations where Harrow detainees may be accommodated should the Harrow suite 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. (pp9)
- 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 Harrow community
- 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 Harrow CPCG as a means of informing the community of the panel's work and the conditions affecting those who find themselves in police custody in Harrow.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.