



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Hillingdon Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the 19th annual report of the Hillingdon Independent Custody Visiting Panel covering the period from November 2006 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 Hillingdon, 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 Hillingdon Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme. This new reporting arrangement brings Hillingdon 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 Panel continues to meet its overall community service delivery and recruited new members during the course of the year.

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 156 visits per year. One visit per week to both of the borough 24/7 custody suites and the custody suite at Heathrow, 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 in 2007 compared to the target is very reassuring. The membership of the panel falls short of the optimum number but retains the resilience to cope when members become unavailable.

Visits have been reasonably well spread throughout the week, though weekdays are heavily preferred with only 6% of visits taking place over weekends. Members may also want to consider varying time slots as 50% of all visits were carried out in the evening between 4 and 8 pm. A person fortunate enough to be detained in Hillingdon at 6 pm on a Thursday evening is very likely to have their welfare checked by an independent custody visitor but a person detained on a Saturday or Sunday might not be aware that such visits take place. A very encouraging 70% of those in detention were either spoken to or visually checked during visits. 84% of detainees were held under PACE, just over 8% were immigration and under 8% 'other'.

In the majority of cases, there were no significant issues raised. The number of detainees who accepted a visit suggests that the introduction of visitors is such that it encourages detainees to engage during a visit. 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 Hillingdon was disappointing, pointing to a need for more local recruitment initiatives. The panel said goodbye to 5 members in the year. Daphne Salter a previous chair, Lorraine Wallington who moved away from the area, Robin Sansapuri, whose workload as a councillor made it increasingly difficult to maintain regular attendance at meetings and visits and Sabrina Chauhan whose family commitments prevented her from carrying on visiting. Samina Shah left toward the end of the year quoting personal commitments. The Chair and Vice Chair sent thank you cards to these members for their years of service to the Borough's community. 4 new members took their place – Anne Bailey, Amrita Atwal, Ionnis Vompiris and Tara Gleeson all joined the panel in 2007.

Chair's report

I took over as chair from Daphne Salter in 2006 and wish to thank Daphne for her hard work during her term in the Chair.

The Panel undertakes visits to Uxbridge, Heathrow and West Drayton Police Stations. Independent Custody Visitor's (ICVs) make one visit to each station's Custody Suite each week. Visiting in pairs and on a rota basis, the Panel meets bi-monthly together with a representative officer from each of the stations. At these meetings we discuss the visits made and any concerns raised.

During the year we had a talk from the NSPIS (National Strategic Police Information Service) unit. This is the new paper-less Custody Record System being rolled out across the Metropolitan Police area. All three Suites in Hillingdon are now 'live'. Despite initial misgivings, this system seems to work well in practice.

I attended a Death in Custody Conference at Scotland Yard and presentations were given by FMEs and Operation Emerald, the Custody Directorate, on advances made and in new policy.

Throughout the year myself and the Vice Chair John Hayden attended meetings across London, including Chairs' meetings at the MPA. Advancing the changes to the Scheme in London with the help of the MPA was high on the agenda. The scheme had become a statutory responsibility of the MPA to administer and maintain. There were differing views and some discord but now the transition is complete any teething problems appear to have been ironed out. 14 out of 371 ICVs felt unable to continue with the new governance from the MPA and ended their service though none of the Hillingdon Panel ended their service for this reason. Under the new governance arrangements our named MPA coordinator is James Tate. He works very hard on his 'pool' of 5 panels and is assisted by other members of the ICV team at the MPA.

The Vice Chair also attended a Conference on the subject of cleaning within the Metropolitan Police Service. A presentation by Anne Lennox, a consultant employed by the MPS clarified the new cleaning contract.

As panel chair I attend the Borough Community and Police Consultative Group (CPCG) meetings. Some CPCGs will be undergoing a change of name to Community Engagement Group (CEG) or Community Safety Board in the coming year but will continue their work and their funding from the MPA. During the past year David Brough retired from his post as Secretary to the CPCG. David was key in setting up the Hillingdon ICV Panel back in the 1980s. We wish him good luck in his retirement and thank him for his continued support

Following a newspaper article on custody visiting, a visit to Southall Police Station was made by the Chair and a return visit to Heathrow made by the Ealing Chair.

A new system of returning the visit report forms through the internal Police post was proposed early in the year and trialled by Hillingdon and another Panel. This seems to work much better than the Freepost Royal Mail service and may be adopted across London as a result.

I would like to thank the Panel's 17 remaining members for their hard work in the past year. Special thanks are given to the Borough Commander Chief Superintendent Carl Bussey for his cooperation, communication and information to the Panel. Also for releasing the liaison officers from Uxbridge and West Drayton Police Stations to attend our bi-monthly meetings.

Thanks also to all the civilian staff and Police Officers in the Borough for their courteous and efficient support to our ICVs in the past year. We are very lucky with the friendly and cooperative way our pairs of visitors are greeted at the Custody Suites in this Borough.

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 the presence of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups in Hillingdon is notably lower than average figures for west London. The ethnic population of the borough is 27.5% and predominantly Asian. The gender figures show 52% female and 48% male. 16.4% of the working age population are disabled.

The membership of the panel is healthily diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity but not absolutely 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 Hillingdon membership of 18 ICVs affords the panel some resilience to cover periods of unavailability. Allowing for a natural turnover of members, Hillingdon would appear to benefit by implementing local recruitment drives. Any profile raising measures would be useful in raising public awareness and attracting more applicants.

An article run by the Gazette Newspaper series in September/October giving an insight into the role of ICVs brought applications from across west London, benefiting both Hillingdon and the Ealing Panel with who the article was jointly organised. We were lucky to have the use of the mothballed custody suite at Ealing to stage the mock visit for the press.

All 4 new visitors attended training days at the MPA offices, providing good feedback on the centralised system of training new recruits. The MPA plan to roll out localised refresher training, grouped in the same clustered areas that the coordinators currently manage and anyone who has been a member for more than 2 years and has not had refresher training will be encouraged to attend.

Members of the Hillingdon ICV Panel

Sabiha Ahmad

Christine Alexander

Yasmeen Aslam

Amrita Atwal

Sukhi Badwal

Ann Bailey

Eugene Dalton-Ruarke

Tara Gleeson

John Hayden (Vice-chair)

Chris Holdaway

Susan Hopkins

Liam Kenny (Chair)

Joseph Nduva

Angela Roberts

David Stockford

Jane Taylor

Shirley Townsend

Ionnis Vompiris

Members who resigned or retired

Sabrina Chauhan

Daphne Salter

Robin Sansapuri

Samina Shah

Lorraine Wallington

2007 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
Heathrow	45
Uxbridge	50
West Drayton	44
Total	139

2. Visit times

Time slots	No. of visits conducted
0000 – 0359 hrs	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	1
0800 – 1159 hrs	37
1200 – 1559 hrs	22
1600 – 1959 hrs	69
2000 – 2359 hrs	10
Total	139

3. Visits Days

Days	No. of visits conducted
Monday	27
Tuesday	24
Wednesday	28
Thursday	33
Friday	18
Saturday	7
Sunday	2
Total	139

4. Visit duration

	No. of visits conducted
Less than 30 mins	49
30 – 60 mins	76
60 – 90 mins	14
90-120 mins	0
More than 120 mins	0
Total	139

5. Visit and detainee details

	No.
Total number of detainees at visits	543
PACE detainees	458
Immigration detainees	44
Other	41
Total	543
Detainees seen	381
Hillingdon throughput of detainees	11,379

Aims and plans for 2008

Hillingdon is one of the London Boroughs planned to have a 30-plus cell purpose built custody suite at the Hayes Police Station site. There is no firm timetable for when work will commence on this project. The Panel's aims and objectives for 2008 are as follows:

- To continue to ensure that the rights, entitlements and interests of detainees in Hillingdon are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with local police or the MPA.
- To make a total of 156 visits to the custody suites at Heathrow, Uxbridge and West Drayton
- 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 Hillingdon 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 Hillingdon 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 Hillingdon 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 Hillingdon.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.