



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Hounslow Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2007



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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Hounslow 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 Hounslow, 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 Hounslow in line with other parts of the London ICV Scheme.

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 panel made a total of 112 visit against a combined target of 116 visits; this represents an achievement of 97% of the target. Fewer than expected visits were made to Chiswick however, compensated by a more intensive visiting schedule at Hounslow.

The panel set themselves a target of including included more late night visits; this has still to be achieved at Hounslow and Chiswick.

New recruits have now all met the initial training requirement and have received or are receiving practical support in conducting visits from more experienced visitors. The Chair of the panel recently attended refresher training held in the new cluster format. She has asked that some of these training items be delivered locally as part of regular panel meetings.

The Chair has also attended presentations on the Metropolitan Police's new facilities and cleaning contract; two of these presentations have been at Chairs' Meetings.

A presentation was made to the whole Hounslow panel at the introduction of the new National Standard for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) computer system, which has changed the way custody staff operate.

At the north and northwest cluster meetings, panel chairs and vice-chairs have received presentations from the Metropolitan Police' Custody Directorate on proposals for borough based custody centres and from the Hammersmith and Fulham Drugs Intervention Team.

The panel has members from many of the diverse communities of Hounslow and probably comes quite close to representing the make-up of the local community. In future the panel will attempt to formally measure its composition to make sure that this remains true.

Chair's report

Since my last Chair's report, there have been significant changes for the Hounslow Panel. There has, of course, been the major change brought about by the MPA's taking over the administration of London panels, resulting in the appointment of our new Administrator, George Fry, replacing our administrator from Hounslow Council, Wendy Merry. George, who also has responsibility for other Panels, rapidly grasped the ideology of the work of Independent Custody Visitors and is a source of knowledge concerning the legal requirements of our role.

The MPA has initiated Cluster Groups for geographically close panels to meet, currently on a 3 per year basis, and these are proving good forums for presentation and informal discussion for Chairs and Vice Chairs. George Fry and James Tate are responsible for the North West London Cluster Group arrangements.

George has also, after consultation, changed our rota format, clarifying contact details to ensure fewer missed visits.

A further major change has been the introduction of the NSPIS computer program in the Custody suites, replacing the whiteboards.

Hounslow has a new Borough Commander, and we were pleased that our new Commander, David Bilson, asked to meet us at our October panel meeting, expressing his interest in our work, and set out his promise to the Borough, highlighting his intention to be cooperative and transparent.

Brentford Police Station is now used under Operation Safeguard to hold convicted prisoners. Meenu Dhiri, our Vice Chair, has done sterling work in initiating and carrying out visits to Brentford, which are necessarily late evening visits. We have now regularised these visits on our rota.

We continue to maintain our good relationship with the police and are pleased to see Ch Insp Steve Kyte who regularly attends our panel meetings to discuss our concerns. In my letter to David Bilson, I identified that the majority of our concerns related to the physical conditions of detainees: the supply of blankets, heating of cells, and washing facilities, and only rarely do we have any issues with the treatment of detainees whilst in custody. Matters brought to the attention of the custody staff are dealt with promptly or answers provided for our next panel meeting.

I should like to formally record those visitors who have left the panel since my last Chair's report. They have left us for a variety of reasons and far-flung destinations and we are grateful for their contributions to the Hounslow Panel:

Robert Fish (ex Chair)
Sheila Petersen, Vice Chair
Rehan Ahmad
Ashton Bynoe (continued)

Shakeela Din
Gilbert Hughes
Sunaina Kumar
Dimple Limbachia
Eamon Lonergan
Samantha Mayne-Rocque
Navin Puri
Harjinder Singh
Edward Abraham

Present members of the panel are:

Vivienne Cox (Chair)
Meenu Dhiri (Vice Chair)
Alice Hodgson
Khaqan Jabbar
Peter Jackson
Kim Lawrence
Basil Mann
John Mellor
Andrew Parker
Hussein Qureshi
Rev Samuel Ofosu-Siaw
Aftab Siddiqui
Jane Sidery

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.

According to the London Development Agency Hounslow is a very diverse borough, with minority communities totaling 44.2%, compared with the outer London average of 25.4% and the England average of 10.1%. The largest ethnic group in the borough is Indian (17.3%), followed by 'other white' (6.2%), Pakistani (4.3%); white Irish (2.9%), African (2.7%) and 'other Asian' (2.6%). Hounslow has 35% non-white ethnic minorities compared to outer London (25%) and London (29%), and is significantly higher than England (9%).

The male panel members presently outnumber the females two to one whereas in Hounslow as a whole, 49% of the population is male And 51% female. It is not yet possible to say how far the panel properly reflects the make-up of the different ethnic communities in Hounslow, although it is expected that it is a fair match.

The panel has been successful in recruiting new members recently and interest from members of the local community is good. A waiting list has had to be started now that the panel looks like regaining its total of 14 members.

Visits to police stations

There are three custody suites in the borough, but only Chiswick and Hounslow Police Stations operate full time custody suites. Brentford police station is used exclusively under Operation Safeguard; this is the operation under which prisoners on remand and other low-risk prisoners are held in police custody suites dedicated for that use. This practice is expected to continue throughout 2008.

As well as weekly, unannounced visits to Hounslow and Chiswick, the panel schedules monthly visits to Brentford and a further visit to Hounslow. Because Brentford is used for Operation Safeguard, visits need to coincide with its use, essentially as an overnight facility. This means arranging visits and gaining access using procedures agreed with the police.

The majority of visit 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.

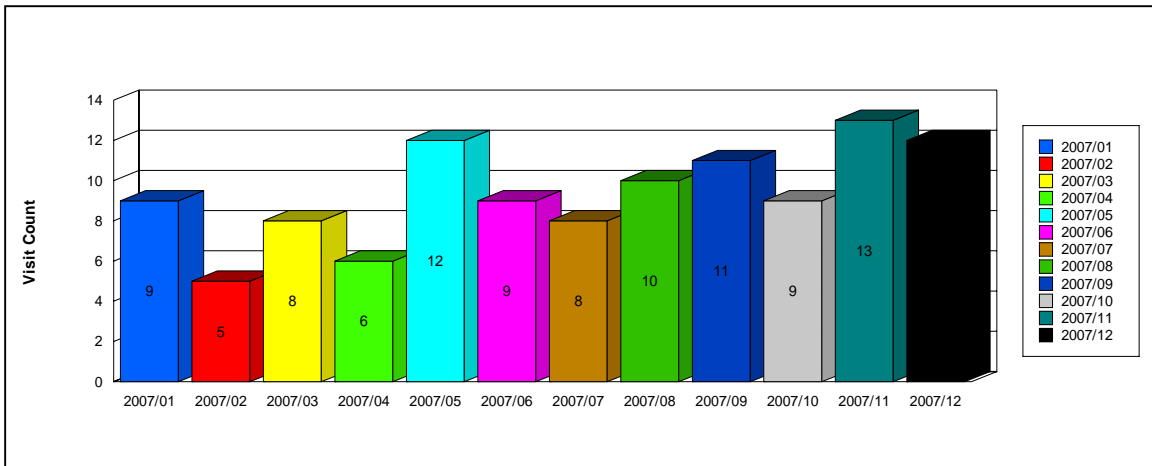
The introduction of a “no-smoking” policy in all Metropolitan Police buildings, including custody suites, has not produced the level of adverse reaction from detainees that some had feared.

Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

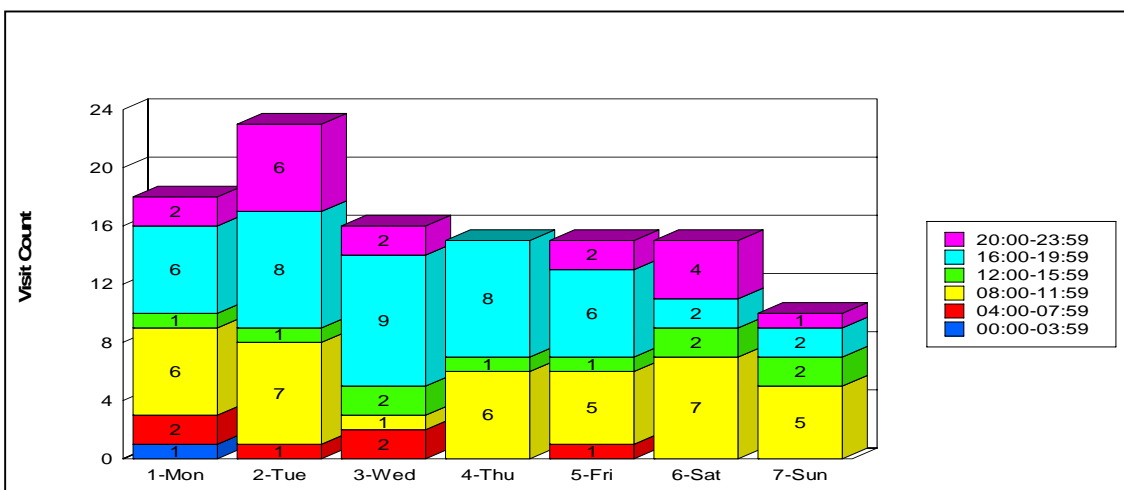
Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Hounslow	68	131
Chiswick	32	62
Brentford	12	100
Total	112	97

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



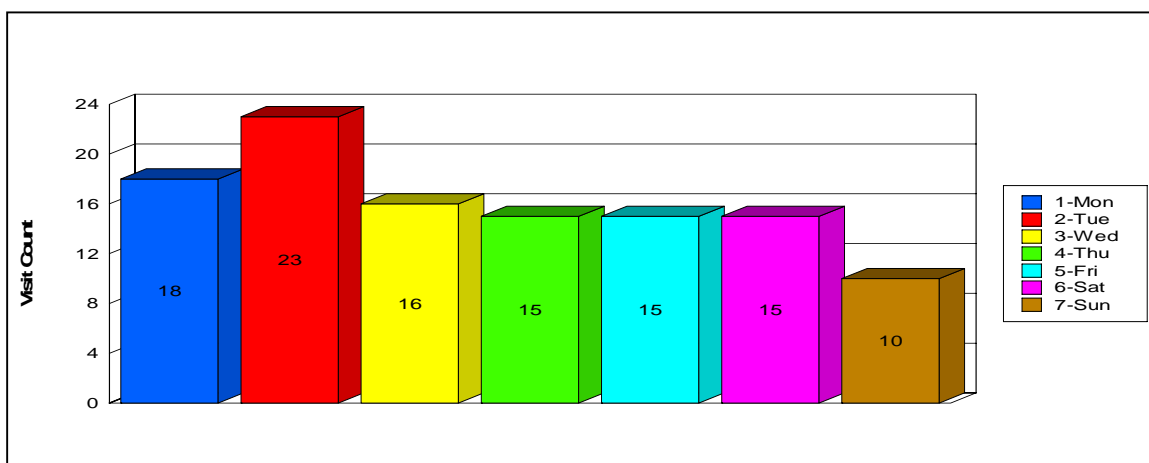
2. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	1	1
0400 – 0759 hrs	6	5
0800 – 1159 hrs	37	33
1200 – 1559 hrs	10	9
1600 – 1959 hrs	41	37
2000 – 2359 hrs	17	15
Total	112	100



3. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	18	16
Tuesday	23	20
Wednesday	16	16
Thursday	15	13
Friday	15	13
Saturday	15	13
Sunday	10	9
Total	112	100



4. Details of Visits

Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	351	64.1
Detainees who refused to be seen	107	19.5
Detainees absent from cell at interview, etc	69	12.6
Detainees not seen due to language reasons	4	0.7
Other	17	3.1
Total	548	100

*% of all DPs in custody at time of visit

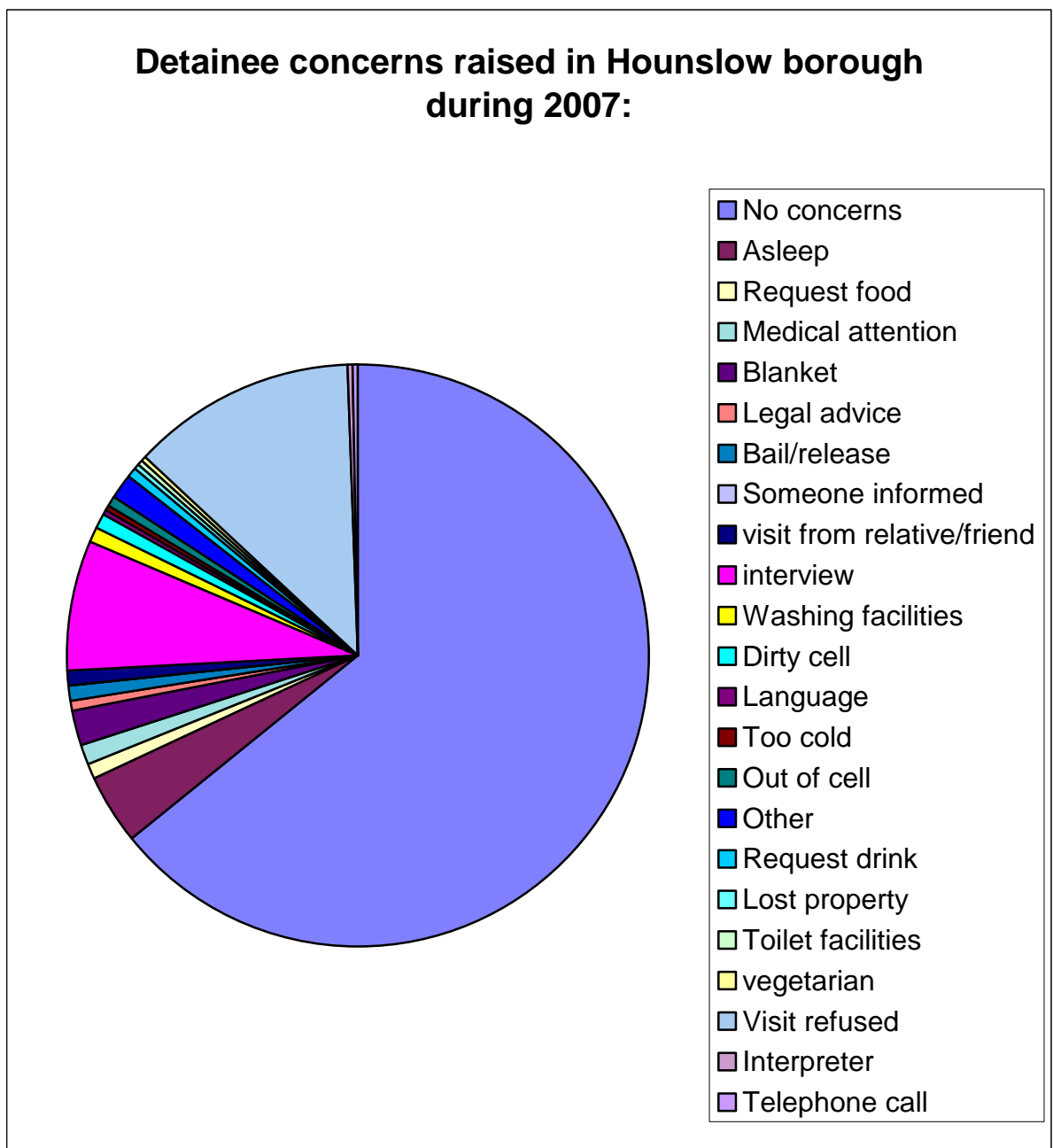
5. Immigration Detainees and Home Office Prisoners

Category of Detainee	Annual no.
Immigration Detainees noted	81
Home Office Prisoners noted	887
Total	968

6. No of detainees by type

		% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2007	10219	-
Immigration detainees included	81	0.7
Home Office prisoners included	887	8.7
Total immigration and Home Office prisoners included	968	9.4

7. Details of detainee concerns:



Plans for forthcoming year 2008

- To make a total of 116 visits to the three custody suites in the borough, of which 52 will be to each of Hounslow and Chiswick, with additional monthly visits to Brentford while it is being used for Operation Safeguard.
- To vary the time of visits in order to maintain or improve upon the pattern achieved during 2007.
- To continue to ensure that the rights and interests of detainees are upheld and to raise concerns promptly and effectively with 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, with training items being regularly scheduled at panel meetings for this purpose.
- 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 measure the diversity of the panel's membership and to attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel reflects the age, gender and ethnic diversity of the Borough of Hounslow.