



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Brent Independent Custody Visiting Panel

Annual Report 2008



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Aims, achievements and developments
3. Chair's report
4. Recruitment and membership
5. Members
6. Panel data
7. Aims and plans for 2009

Introduction

Welcome to the annual report of the Brent Independent Custody Visiting Panel covering the calendar year January to December 2008.

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 2009

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 Brent, 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 Brent Custody Visiting Panel forms part of the London ICV Scheme. This report brings Brent in line with other panels in the London ICV Scheme and will contribute to a compendium annual report to be produced in 2009.

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 104 visits. One visit per week to both of the 24/7 custody suites 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.

Although the number of visits completed against the target is disappointing at 61% this disguises the improvement during the year. In fact 54% of scheduled visits were carried out in the first quarter of 2008 but 108% were completed in the final quarter (the >100% indicates where visits occurred more than once a week). This reflects the increased number of active visitors in the panel as the year progressed.

From May until November members of Harrow ICV Panel assisted Brent by conducting visits to Wembley custody suite while new members were undergoing training and induction and the panel asked the coordinator to convey their thanks to Harrow.

Visits were reasonably well distributed through the days of the week though members may want to consider visiting at times other than 17:00h-21:00h if possible. A person in detention early on Tuesday morning is considerably less likely to have his sleep disturbed by a visit than a person on Friday evening.

Once again a very encouraging number of those in detention at the time of a visit were either spoken to or visually checked (78%). The number of detainees held for reasons other than PACE fell considerably in 2008.

In the early part of the year a concern was raised that when the food available to detainees was unsuitable for religious or cultural reasons, not enough effort was being made to provide alternatives. Following discussion with custody officers at the panel meeting this appeared to be resolved and no further concern was raised. The early months also saw a bedding in of the NSPIS computerised detention system and something of a learning curve for custody staff and visitors in recording and retrieving relevant data. By the end of the year the most consistent concern was that of the number of detainees with apparent mental health problems. The presence of such detainees raised concerns not only for those detainees, but the impact their detention had on the service that custody staff could provide. The custody manager and CJU manager kept the panel up to date on the process for dealing with such detainees and the panel began to explore ways to improve these processes.

In January the (then) vice-chair Anita attended a training session for Dedicated Detention Officers (DDOs) and was able to inform them about custody visiting and the role of ICVs.

In April the vice-chair Aisha attended the London ICV Conference and reported back to the panel on developments in custody visiting and plans to improve conditions for detainees.

Although the Kilburn custody suite operated at half capacity for most of the year due to staffing resource issues, the early part of the year saw a 25% year on year increase in detentions across the borough and visitors and custody staff reported very busy custody suites. The total figure for detentions was up on 2007 by 2%.

2008 saw the continuation of a review of custody services across London by MPS Operation Herald which focussed on the employment of DDOs, a revamped FME contract and the employment of custody nurses to improve medical services and the possibility of immigration and drug intervention workers on site. This review is expected to lead to changes in 2009.

The ICV panel makes a contribution to the efforts to build confidence between the community and police by reporting to the Brent Community Safety Board (CSB). The panel has embraced on-going learning through a series of in-panel training modules and presentations.

Chair's report

2008 has been a year of change for the Brent ICV panel due to one primary component - we currently have a panel that reflects the complexity of the borough, kaleidoscopic voices, perspectives and professionals that are the silent eyes and ears of the Brent community.

In our meetings we now encourage learning and information exchange breaking the mould of turning up and turning out. Best exemplified in our ICV exchange meeting with Hertfordshire ICV scheme (in 2009) where a wealth of information was exchanged and recommended for the benefit of the detainees. We have also inherited the wind of change and in our discussions some of our members have raised concerns of detainees' fitness for detention which is currently been raised to the MPA by the panel.

This year our visits were up primarily because of a recruitment drive by the MPA and our visit ratio has a very good rating when you review our statistics.

Scouring my first Chairman report some objectives were made for the panel

- More effective lines of communication
- Increase visibility
- 15 strong panel
- 24 hour watch
- More social events

It seems uncanny but as I pen this report a letter sits on my studio desk that has given the Brent ICV an opportunity to participate in a 'fly on the wall' project suggested by Chief Insp Taff Thomas. Please look out for the results in the next chair's report - it will make god bedtime reading. Four out of five objectives read well by any standards. The only incomplete one was the social so I am asking the MPA for some more social and libation of the other kind!

2009 objectives

- Complete 'fly on the wall' shadowing of a shift in the custody suite
- More collaboration with other panels
- Continue to address the 'fit for detention' concerns that the panel has
- Sustain and support the panel as it stands

Finally a panel is only as good as the ingredients and I would have to thank Chief Insp. Taff Thomas for being the man from Delmonte, Inspector Eddon for his steadfastness, James Tate for re-building the team and finally the Brent ICVs who give their time because that is what is irreplaceable. You are the beacons of hope for all those who enter Brent custody suite.

Faisal Abdu'Allah MA (RCA) FRSA

Recruitment and membership

At the beginning of 2008 Brent panel had 11 members. Several members couldn't commit to take part in every visit rota and meetings were poorly attended. Although the number of members at the end of 2008 had only increased to 13 many were new members and the commitment and enthusiasm was reflected in well attended meetings and a huge improvement in performance. The recruitment campaign initiated in the second half of the year continues to bear fruit and membership is expected to reach its optimum number of 17 ICVs in 2009. 4 members left the panel and 1 took a year's sabbatical commencing in July. 12 new applicants were interviewed in 2008 from which 7 were recruited. Some of those are expected to begin visiting early in 2009. 1 experienced member transferred from another panel.

Panels are expected to adhere to recruitment and interviewing guidance provided by the MPA. The MPA expects all panels to adhere to the its 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.

In June a diversity monitoring exercise was carried out across the scheme which sought to identify which, if any, of the 6 common threads of diversity (age, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and disability status) are under-represented. The purpose of this was to ensure the MPA was fulfilling its statutory responsibility in ensuring that no specific communities were denied access to membership of the scheme. As in all public bodies, disclosure of such information is voluntary but a healthy 67% of members provided responses. The results illustrated that although panel diversity doesn't form an exact match to the demographic breakdown of the borough, as identified by census figures and projections, no applicant was denied access to membership of the Brent panel on the basis of status as documented in their diversity response.

According to London Development Agency figures Brent is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London. It is one of only two boroughs where non-white groups (55%) represent a greater proportion of residents than white groups. Following the successful recruitment of members the panel is now more representative of the diversity of the borough than in its recent history.

Members of the Brent ICV Panel

Faisal Abdu'Allah

Aisha Ama Ashanti

Peter Brown

Claire Crawford-Hector

Paul Earle

Francis Eniola

Alloysius Frederick

Nick Jaikaran

Nicholas Kari

Peter Osuhon

Sabrina Senior

Rupert Smith

Leona Sydney

Members who resigned or retired in 2008

William Austin

Leslie Bryan

Cecilia Gabriel

Anita Jakhu

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 2008	2007
Wembley	35	25
Kilburn	28	22
Total	63 (61%)	47

2. Visit times

Time slots	No. of visits 2008	2007
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	0	0
0800 – 1159 hrs	10	9
1200 – 1559 hrs	6	0
1600 – 1959 hrs	30	27
2000 – 2359 hrs	17	11
Total	63	47

3. Visits Days

Days	No. of visits 2008	2007
Monday	9	4
Tuesday	3	4
Wednesday	11	6
Thursday	12	11
Friday	16	9
Saturday	10	4
Sunday	2	9
Total	63	47

4. Visit duration

	No. of visits 2008	2007
Less than 30 mins	18	16
30 – 60 mins	42	29
60 – 90 mins	3	2
90-120 mins	0	0
More than 120 mins	0	0
Total	63	47

5. Visit and detainee details

	2008	2007
Total number of detainees at visits	298	295
PACE detainees	282	246
Immigration detainees	11	30
Other	5	19
Total	298	295
Detainees seen	232	175
Total throughput of detainees in Brent	11,601	11,365

Aims and plans for 2009

As the principle aim of custody visiting alters little over the years – the building and maintaining of confidence between the community and its police service – so the Panel's aims and objectives are likely to change little year on year. The aim persists to continue to provide a professional custody visiting service, maintain performance and illustrate to the people of Brent that should they, or their family members, find themselves in police custody in Brent they can be assured that members of their community take an interest in their wellbeing. To those ends the plans for 2009 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 104 visits to the Brent custody suites and any extra visits considered necessary as a result of special circumstances. To visit stations where Brent detainees may be accommodated should the Brent suites 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 Brent community
- To ensure that all new recruits receive local and MPA training. To encourage continuous learning through panel discussion, ongoing learning modules 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 Brent CSB as a means of informing the community of the panel's work and the conditions affecting those who find themselves in police custody in Brent.
- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors.