



MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Hammersmith and Fulham Independent Custody Visiting panel

Annual Report 2008



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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 2008 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 visits made including the treatment of those held in custody
- 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 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. Since April 2007 the MPA has overseen custody visiting arrangements in Hammersmith and Fulham as part of the London ICV 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 and 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 that the panel is as diverse as the community it represents. 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.

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 2008 to December 2008. This has been a positive and rewarding period for the Panel, especially after the challenges of the recent past. Having struggled for several years to fulfil our commitment of weekly visits to both Hammersmith and Fulham police stations due to a shortage of visitors we are now almost up to strength. The Panel welcomed five new members during the year as well as an experienced ICV from Lambeth Panel. Huge thanks go to those who undertook extra visits when recruitment was low and provided help and guidance to our inexperienced Visitors. My thanks also go to two members of the Richmond ICV Panel, who continued to help us out in addition to their own Panel commitments.

This year has seen the introduction of the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS), a new computer system for custody centres. As so often is the case with change there was much apprehension as to how it would impact on our work and we were grateful for a comprehensive training session earlier in the year. In the event there have been no significant problems; indeed, there are benefits to us not least that printed records are much easier to read than those hand written!

The MPA has organised several excellent training sessions this year including refresher training, training for Chairs and Vice-Chairs and diversity training. In April a London-wide conference was held which many of us attended. Many interesting topics pertinent to our work were covered including a representative from the Borders agency speaking about Immigration detainees and a presentation on the trial on the use of tasers. The conference was a very well organised and worthwhile event. In October, a Panel member attended the national ICV conference in Stratford upon Avon. Agenda items included the controversial proposals to changes in the FME scheme. I, as Chair, continue to attend the Hammersmith and Fulham Community Safety Board (CSB) meetings and gave a presentation of our work in the autumn.

My thanks go to all Panel members for their hard work and commitment to the scheme. My thanks also go to George Fry, MPA Co-ordinator who deals very efficiently with the administration of the Panel and is a pleasure to work with. My thanks to the Custody manager Inspector Peter Capewell and (former) Custody Manager Gill Knight who have worked 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 2008:

- 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

During the year, the panel made 98 visits against a target of 104; this represents an achievement of 94% of the annual target, an increase of nine percentage points on the results for 2007.

There have been no very significant issues raised either by ICVs or detainees during the year. Those recurring problems that the police have been asked to address, however, include offering showers to detainees that have been in detention for a few days, keeping cupboards in the FME room locked and regulating the temperature at both Hammersmith and Fulham custody suites.

The arrangement for the police to respond to matters raised by ICVs has significantly improved during 2008; this was a stated aim for the year in the last annual report. Hammersmith and Fulham police now provide a written report for each panel meeting which is circulated in advance for panel members to consider; this not only allows for a more effective meeting, but it allows improved scrutiny of police responses.

A better spread of visits was achieved through the year in 2008 when compared with 2007; however the number of weekend visits was about the same. The time that visits were conducted also improved slightly, with more evening visits conducted; however those visits conducted at “unsocial” times (between 20:00 and 08:00) were very slightly fewer.

It has been a successful year for recruitment (see next section) with the panel almost reaching its full complement of 17 members by the year end, (this target was achieved early in 2009). All but one of those starting during the year attended their initial training course. Panel members also undertook a refresher training module during the panel meeting on 16 May 2008.

The Chair attended a cluster meeting on 13 February 2008. Those attending the meeting listened to a Presentation from Maria Filopovic, Operations Manager of Hammersmith and Fulham Drug Intervention Programme.

The panel continue to use every opportunity to raise public awareness of custody visiting. This includes the Chair’s attendance at Community Safety Board meetings and a presence at a recruitment fair at the Town Hall in May and at the Bike and Scootersafe day in October 2008.

The MPA conducted a diversity monitoring exercise during the year; for the first time the panel has information about how it compares to the local community in Hammersmith and Fulham (see next section).

Panel 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.

As stated earlier, the panel has at the time of writing this report, now achieved its target for membership of 17 panel members. This number of ICVs allows for one visit by a pair of visitors each week to Hammersmith and Fulham police stations, which both have 24/7 custody suites. It also allows each visitor to conduct one visit per month, which is the standard. Before now, a very few ICVs in Hammersmith and Fulham have managed to maintain a high level of visiting frequency.

Recruitment panels were held on five separate occasions during the year, many of these recruitment evenings lasting several hours. This effort has however been repaid; several dozen candidates were invited to interview and 10 of these were offered places on the panel. The whole panel have been involved in welcoming the new members and providing them with the support and help they require as they have learnt more about the ICV role.

As already mentioned, recent diversity monitoring has allowed the panel to consider how well it matches the community it represents: The population of the borough as a whole is 49% male, however the majority of panel members (69%), including the Chair, are female. The panel has achieved a diverse racial makeup including proportionately more people from the black community (15.4%) than the borough (12.9%) and less white people (53.8%) than the borough (76.1%). There are no Asian people as defined by the population projection data* available, but 30.8% of the panel cannot be categorised in terms of this, many of whom belong to mixed race categories.

The panel is quite young, with most panel members (37.5%) being under 45; this compares with the population of Hammersmith and Fulham* as a whole where a majority (55.4%) are also in that age range. In another sense the panel is quite old with 31.3% of members being over 65; this compares with only 11.1% of residents in Hammersmith and Fulham.

*based on projections derived from the 2001 census calculated by DMAG - the Data Management and Analysis Group - based at the Greater London Authority (GLA). These data comparisons are confined to apparent strands of diversity only.

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. No visits have been made to Shepherds Bush police station this year.

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:

- Although concerns over the supply of blankets have been resolved ICVs have noticed that dirty blankets have, on a couple of occasions, been inappropriately stored.
- Some improvement to the general quality of the cleaning of custody suites has been observed although this has not been sometimes the case in the food preparation area; ICVs have seen evidence of a deep clean on at least one occasion. Cleaning standards continue to be monitored.
- The panel have, on at least five occasions, expressed concern over the temperature in both custody suites.
- 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.
- ICVs have, on two occasions, been concerned by graffiti in cells.
- An ongoing concern has been whether the cupboards in the Forensic Medical Examiner's (FME's) room which may contain drugs are kept locked. Panel members have found this not to be the case on numerous occasions. The introduction of drug safes and the improvements to notices has only gone some way to alleviating the number of concerns raised.

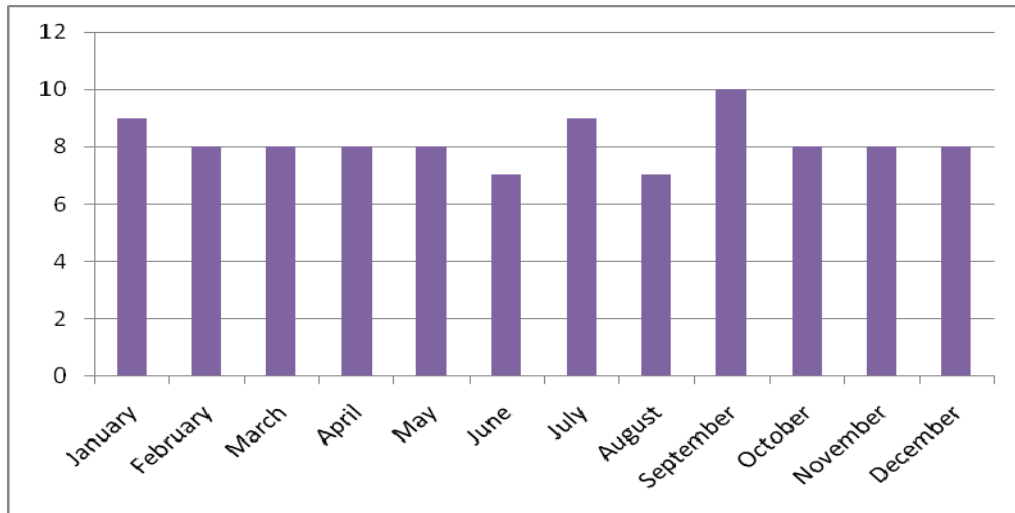
Data from panel visits

1. Number of Visits

Station	Annual no. of visits	% of Annual Target*
Hammersmith	52	52
Fulham	46	52
Total	98	104

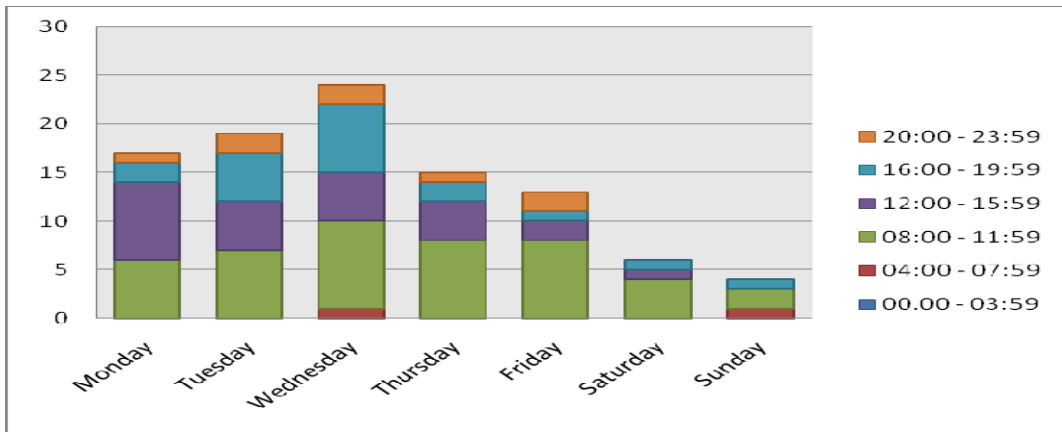
*Annual Target is 52 visits per 24/7-custody suite.

2. Visits per month:



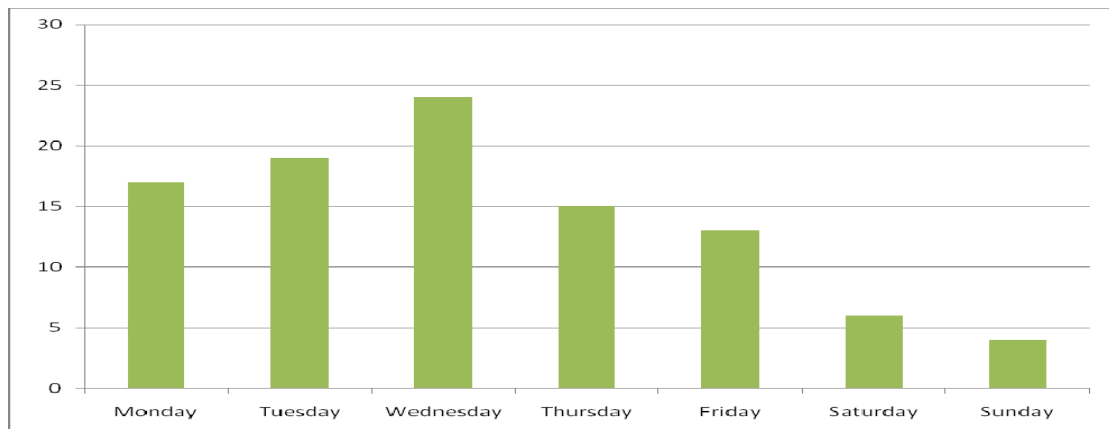
3. Time of Visits

Time Period	Annual no.	% of all visits
0000 – 0359 hrs	0	0
0400 – 0759 hrs	2	2.0
0800 – 1159 hrs	44	44.9
1200 – 1559 hrs	25	25.5
1600 – 1959 hrs	19	19.4
2000 – 2359 hrs	8	8.2
Total	98	100



4. Days of Visits

Day	Annual no.	% of all visits
Monday	17	17.3
Tuesday	19	19.4
Wednesday	24	24.5
Thursday	15	15.3
Friday	13	13.3
Saturday	6	6.1
Sunday	4	4.1
Total	98	100



5. Details of Visits

Reason Detainee was seen or not	Annual no.	% of all DPs*
Detainees seen	274	3.5
Detainees who refused to be seen	60	0.8
Detainees not seen due to other reasons	64	0.8
Total	398	5.1

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

6. Numbers of detainees by type:

		% of all DPs
Total number of detainees held in custody during 2008	7814	100
Immigration detainees included	229	2.9
Home Office prisoners included	Nil	0
Total immigration and Home Office prisoners included	229	2.9

Plans for forthcoming year 2009

The Panel's aims and objectives for 2009 are as follows:

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- To vary the time of visits in order to provide a better spread and in particular to ensure that visits occur more often between 20:00 and 08:00 and at weekends
- To maintain and improve upon the level of communication with Hammersmith and Fulham police, the custody manager during panel meetings and with 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
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- Together with the MPA, to continue to promote and raise awareness of the work of Independent Custody Visitors locally
- To attempt, through the application of an equal opportunities recruitment policy, to ensure that the panel continues to reflect the diversity of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham