

POCKET DIARIES FOR 2005.....

Panel Administrators are being sent 2005 ICVA pocket diaries for each panel member. If you have not received yours, please contact your panel administrator or, Agnes Kitto [020 7202 0230].

The next Chairs and Administrators' meeting will take place on Tuesday 11 January 2005 at 6.00 pm in the MPA offices, 10 Dean Farrar Street, London SW1H 0NY.

MPA ICVA Representative

Rachel Harper, current Chair of Tower Hamlets ICVP, was elected as this year's representative to the ICVA executive. Her first duty will be to attend the executive meeting on 4 December. Rachel is also well known to many ICVs as an MPA trainer and has done sterling work to ensure that our visitors receive good initial training and also continuing refresher training throughout their tenure. We wish Rachel well and we look forward to regular reports on ICVA matters to Chairs and Administrators meeting.



THE LONDON ICV CONFERENCE

The London ICV Conference will take place on 12 February 2005, 10.00 – 4.00 pm [Registration at 9.30 am]. The venue is Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD, convenient to both Euston and King's Cross Stations.

The Clerk to the Authority is writing to all panels outlining the plans for the day. Invitation cards will also be sent to all panels to try to ensure as many panel members as possible, not just chairs and administrators, can attend. Further information is available from Agnes Kitto at the MPA.

ICVA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2004

This year's national conference on 19-20 November was hosted by Northumbria Police Authority in The Assembly Rooms, Fenkle Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne. Some 21 representatives of London ICV panels were supported by the MPA to attend.

The programme was very stimulating and the keynote address on immigration detainees was given by the Chair of Camden ICVP, Mick Farrant. This is an issue of growing importance to custody visiting, and this newsletter contains an informative summary of Mick's presentation.

Other subjects covered at the conference were "The safer detention and handling of persons in police custody" by Assistant Chief Constable David Warcup, Northumbria Police and Chief Supt Bruce Light, National Centre for Policing Excellence. Jim Nicholson from the Home Office also presented a paper on "Deaths in Police Custody". Copies of these presentations are available on the ICVA website www.icva.org.uk.

Time to Review the Role of ICVs ?

This is an outline of a major issue arising from the ICVA conference in November at Newcastle. A more detailed account will appear in *Visiting Times*.

There seems to be a new focus on custody visiting. At the conference the opening presentation from ACPO (the Association of Chief Police Officers) indicated that at long last the woeful state of police custody was receiving due attention in the form of a major working party. Police custody was described as “the dustbin” for many of the 1,500,000 people placed there each year.

The situation in London may be a little behind the rest of the country but the recent MPS/MPA research (July 2004) into conditions for the 300,000 people detained there stated that “(the) *situation* (in the MPS custody environment) *is increasingly untenable if the*

human rights of detainees are put at risk and if future deaths in police custody are to be prevented”. As a result of that study a Custody Directorate has just been formed with its senior staff as keen to address the problems as their colleagues in the north.

The ICVA conference and the Camden Panel’s experience with immigration detainees has led me to the conclusion that the time is now ripe to review our role. This was the subject of my presentation at the conference.

The fact that we now have a statutory role will help this rethink and gives us a stronger basis for bringing about change. The new PACE Code C standards (July 2004) and CCTV are a far cry from the situation when Lay Visitors first started twenty years ago. Changed too, are the types of detainees we are

increasingly seeing in police cells. In Camden we estimate about 30 – 40% of all detainees we see are suffering from the effects of drugs, alcohol or mental illness and sometimes all three, with a similar situation elsewhere in the country. If we look at the prisons, schools and care homes there are formal inspection units to look into conditions and report back. It is interesting that the man from ACPO at the conference used the term “inspection” when referring to the future role of ICVs.

In our work on immigration detainees it was only when we succeeded in involving the MPA members in the issues that things began to change. It is regrettable that for the first four years of its existence no report from ICVs went to MPA members. Fortunately things have now changed. The responses the MPA secured from the immigration

minister, Des Browne, providing they are implemented, should go a long way to improving the lot of immigration detainees and that of custody staff who have to look after them.

In my view, if we as ICVs are to make a difference to the lot of detainees and custody staff we will need increasingly to address (as in the case of immigration detainees) the wider system issues as well as those related to rights and entitlements. I believe the police will welcome this. ICVs are, we must remember, the only independent people visiting custody suites on a regular basis.

Mick Farrant

Chair of Camden Panel