

# Dover Independent Monitoring Board

## Report on Dover holding facilities: 11/10/21



This report primarily summarises the conditions at the Tug Haven and the Kent Intake Unit (KIU) observed on the evening of 10/10/21 and the early morning of 11/10/21. The Board wishes to urgently raise these concerns at a ministerial level in view of the fact that many of these observations remain a concern one month later. A standard rota visit report was circulated to the Dover IMB, Asylum and Protection, the Clandestine Threat Command and Care and Custody shortly after the visits took place. The facilities were monitored on the evening and during the night of 10+11/10/21 and in the early afternoon of 11/10/21. The evening visits to the Tug Haven commenced at 1815 and 0205, with a visit to the KIU commencing at 0037. The following visit to the Tug Haven was at approximately 1400 on 11/10/21 and the KIU at approximately 1500.

Owing to the seriousness of the concerns an earlier draft of this report was shared with senior Home Office officials, including updates from monitoring colleagues at Yarl's Wood. Further information has since come to light about conditions in Frontier House, which has also been added to this report, updated on 5 November 2021.

### **Why these observations are of urgent concern**

These observations have been highlighted in a separate report because the Board is extremely concerned about the continuing – and worsening – conditions in Dover, believing these should be highlighted as a matter of urgency. This is for the following reasons:

- The conditions monitored at the Tug Haven in particular were deeply troubling yet were observed on a day that was described as the “least busy” of the 08-11/10/21 three-day period. Conditions on busier days can potentially be even worse.
- The weather is now growing colder. The outside temperature at the time of the early morning visit on 11/10/21 was approximately 8 degrees and the main tent felt cold. Given that the new facility at the Western Jetfoil is not yet ready and there are no proper arrangements for heating in the tents, the Board is concerned that migrants will soon be held in very cold conditions which could impact on health and wellbeing. Since this report was originally drafted, some heating has now been installed in the tents; however the Board remains concerned that these unsuitable facilities will still be in use until at least the end of the year.
- The Board was informed at its 05/10/21 Board meeting that the new facility at the Western Jetfoil was expected to open on 22/10/21, however the Board has since been informed (in early November 2021) that the facility will not be ready until the new year.
- The Board has again observed children (including toddlers and babies) and people who appear vulnerable being held at the Tug Haven overnight.
- The Board has been made aware of an increasing number of injuries amongst migrants – in particular fuel burns and cuts and bruises to feet – which are not being

picked up at the Tug Haven and which also have the potential to be missed at the KIU and Frontier House. One particularly serious case reported to the IMB involved a 16 year-old with serious fuel burns which went undetected for two days. The Board has also since learned from IMB colleagues at Yarl's Wood that some detainees recently arriving from Dover had serious needs that were not identified until arrival at the IRC, including:

- One detainee who arrived on 12/10/21 with chemical burns that had not been detected in Dover and which were treated at Yarl's Wood.
- Two detainees who arrived on 08-09/10/21 who had disabilities which had not been detected in Dover. One detainee was deaf and mute and was given a supported living plan at Yarl's Wood; the other was deaf. No information about this had arrived with the detainees.
- It was reported to the Board on 10+11/10/21 that the "single male immigration detention estate is now full". The KIU was closed to new arrivals on 10/10/21 due to a positive Covid test result, further reducing the resilience in the system and impacting on waiting times at the Tug Haven.
- There was a serious incident at Frontier House on 12/10/21 during which police were called after a large number of detainees became agitated, banged on the holding room observation window glass.
- Staff from all agencies working at the Dover facilities often appear frustrated and increasingly demoralised about the context in which they are working and the challenges of meeting migrant and detainee needs in a humane way.

### **Overview of the Dover and Folkestone facilities at the time of the visits**

It was reported to the IMB that there had been approximately 600 migrants present at the Tug Haven site during 10/11/21 and approximately 400 slept at the facility overnight. There had been a number of small-boat arrivals during the day, with the final arrival taking place at the time of the IMB's first visit early in the evening of 10/11/21. There were 44 detainees being held at the KIU (some under the age of 18 and some adults) and a further 42 at Frontier House. The KIU was not admitting any further people due to a positive Covid test earlier that day.

## Observations under IMB monitoring headings

### 1. Safety

#### Tug Haven

- **Separation of groups / safeguarding:** As previously reported, there is some separation of sexes and age groups at the facility, with women searched in a separate tent to men and families, women and children generally sleeping in two smaller tents. However the portacabin that had been purpose-built for families, women and children has now been deemed too small for the numbers arriving and is used as a staff rest area. The Board did not make any further specific observations about safeguarding or age assessments during these visits, though concerns previously raised remain. Some children will be sharing tents with adults they do not know, albeit part of other family groups. The youngest child present at the Tug Haven was just two weeks old.
- Migrants are observed to be escorted by at least one member of staff to the toilets or to vehicles. The Board has not observed staff laying on hands or using guiding holds. The ground outside the tents is uneven and generally tarmacked. One small child (3-4) was observed walking across the tarmac area outside the main tent in bare feet. Adults are provided with flipflops, however small children have been observed either wearing their own footwear or none at all.
- During the 1815 visit on 10/10/21 some tension was observed amongst detainees about the provision of water (see below – Fair and Humane Treatment). Whilst this was de-escalated at the time, the Board is aware that there can be tension between detainees when food and drinks are provided, particularly when it appears that supplies are short. The Board is concerned about the ability of staff to manage this effectively if this were to become an argument between detainees at busy times.
- The Board was informed that there were approximately double the number of staff on duty on 10/10/21 than usual.
- The Board member visiting on 11/10/21 observed members of staff in the tent area who were not wearing body armour. This has been stated as a prerequisite for all staff working within the tent and in particular the 'pre-search' areas of the site and also a requirement for the IMB to monitor on an unaccompanied basis.

#### KIU

- Although all detainees were of a similar age group, some detainees held in the holding room were adult single males and some were minors. There was one female detainee also present in the room.

## 2. Fair and humane treatment

### Tug Haven

- **Clothing:** The Board has generally observed large stocks of clothing at the Tug Haven, which is made available in large wheelie-bins in the searching areas of the tents and given to detainees following a search. The Board was informed during the 0205 visit on 11/10/21 that every migrant sleeping at the facility that night had been provided with fresh clothes, with some clothing packs obtained from the KIU and Frontier House. However it is evident from the conversation with the KIU medic that this has not always been the case in recent days (see below – Health and Wellbeing) and that some migrants have not been provided with fresh clothing. When entering the main tent during the 1815 visit on 10/10/21 there was an overpowering smell of diesel throughout the tent, which staff stated was fuel on migrants' clothing.
- **Sleeping:** The sleeping conditions are extremely crowded. The facilities are far too small for the number of people held overnight. During both visits to the Tug Haven on 10+11/10/21 migrants were observed to be sleeping on thin foam mats on the floor of the main tent. Each person appeared to have a blanket, but no pillows. With the exception of the initial arrival and search areas of the tent, every part of the floor space in the screened-off areas were used for sleeping. People were packed so closely together that there was no space between mats and people were practically touching. The same was true of the smaller green tents which were used to hold women, families and children. Some migrants slept on double-decker buses parked on tarmac inside the fence. The Board was informed that these were also used as rail replacement buses.
- **Temperature and heating:** The temperature at the time of the visit commencing at 0205 on 11/10/21 was approximately 8 degrees. The tent felt cold. It is likely that those sleeping on the floor will have felt colder. The smaller green tents used for women, children and families felt slightly warmer but have the potential to still be too cold for young children and babies in particular. The Board is deeply concerned about the suitability of the tents for sleeping when the temperature drops further. When asked about heating the tents further, the Board was informed that this was something that 'would need to be looked at' but there were "real health and safety concerns about how this could work". The Board is also concerned about the temperature on the double-decker buses sometimes used for sleeping. There was a large amount of condensation in tents on the morning of 11/10/21.
- **Food and drink:** Snacks such as tracker bars and biscuits were available throughout the evening. Hot food (pizzas) were ordered later in the evening and the IMB was informed that everyone had received food. However, the Board has observed – and staff have commented – that it can be difficult to regulate how evenly food is divided between individuals and the potential that this also has to cause disputes between migrants. Some migrants were observed by the Board becoming agitated about not having been provided with water (visit commencing 1815 on 10/10/21). This was due to the fact that a large group of migrants who were sitting on benches in one of the sections of the tent had not

been provided with water, with people being escorted to the toilet then observing large stacks of water bottles at the entrance to the tent and questioning why this was not being distributed. However, the Board observed this being dealt with calmly by the officers concerned and an instruction was given by the Silver Commander to provide water to everyone who requested it. The Board was informed that croissants and cereal bars for breakfast had been delivered by the Red Cross and saw these.

- **Toilets:** Migrants are accompanied to the toilet block by one or more members of staff. There are male and female toilets and an accessible toilet with a separate door. The Board observed families with children being escorted to the accessible toilet and on one occasion to the staff toilet block which is outside the facility's fence. The accessible toilet was observed to be clean. However, the male and female toilets (the male toilets in particular) were in an extremely dirty and messy state, with large piles of paper towels and toilet tissues overflowing around the sides of toilet bowls and in other parts of the floor, with faeces clearly visible. The Board was informed that one of the toilets had also become blocked earlier that day and this was resolved within about two hours when Dyno-rod were called out. There was little or no evidence of any cleaning having taken place in the toilets.
- **Property:** It is noticeable upon entering the facility that an enormous number of property bags are stacked up along the fences and against portacabin and container walls in the outside part of the facility.
- **Staff/migrant interactions:** The interactions observed between staff and migrants during the visits to the Tug Haven were respectful and particularly caring interactions were observed between staff and children as they were escorted around the site, including one officer spending some considerable time searching for an item one person had requested from their property bag 'to keep him happy'.

## KIU

- **Sleeping:** The Board's observations about sleeping arrangements at the KIU are the same as previously reported – the room can become crowded, the lights stay on all night and detainees sleep on sleeping mats and are provided with blankets and pillows.
- **Cleanliness/tidiness:** The Board's observations about cleanliness and tidiness remain the same as previously reported – the holding room looks messy when there are a large number of people present, with empty wrappers and packets strewn around the floor. The Board still considers that cleaning does not take place frequently enough, though has been informed by staff that proper cleaning cannot take place whilst large numbers of detainees are present. The Board was informed that the cleaner at the KIU earlier that day had referred to the shower as "disgusting" during their last cleaning visit.

- **Staff/detainee interactions:** The detainees were all of a similar age group, generally quite young. There was a lively atmosphere in the holding room, though approximately half the detainees were asleep (or trying to sleep). A number of friendly interactions between staff and detainees were observed and detainees spoke highly about the staff. During the visit, staff were observed to respond promptly to detainee requests for food, drink and a film to watch.

### 3. Health and wellbeing

During the visits to the Tug Haven at 1815 on 10/10/21 and 0205 11/10/21 there were no serious health issues or injuries amongst migrants reported to the IMB (other than one person who had returned from hospital with a prescription relating to diabetes). However, following lengthy conversations with the medic at the KIU that evening, the following concerns were highlighted:

- There has been a recent increase in the number of fuel burns on detainees' skin. The Board was informed that these are often not being detected at the Tug Haven and that migrants themselves will not always draw attention to these injuries. However, it was evident from the smell of diesel on clothing at the Tug Haven that the presence of fuel can be obvious.
- The medic raised a particular concern about a 16 year-old girl who had been admitted to the KIU the day before with fuel burns on her legs. She had been at the Tug Haven for two days and had been wearing wet clothes. The seam of these clothes had become embedded into the burns. The medic reported that the girl is likely to be scarred for life. The medic had been informed that there had been no clothing available for her at the Tug Haven. These injuries had not been detected until she arrived at the KIU. The medic at the KIU had given her pain relief and she was bailed.
- There has also been a recent increase in the number of injuries relating to cuts and bruises on detainees' feet (usually caused by walking across rocks or rough ground prior to arriving at the Tug Haven). Some of the detainees in the KIU had bandaged feet. The medic reported that they are making much greater use of plasters and that they have had to return to their stores to re-stock on bandages and plasters. Many of these injuries are also not being detected at the Tug Haven.
- A further concern is the risk of wounds becoming infected in the holding room at the KIU. The medic expressed concern that the infrequency of cleaning can contribute to this. The medic expressed further concern about the difficulty in properly washing detainees' feet. The shower in the holding room cannot be used for this purpose and the sink in the medical room is too high up. The medic reported having to improvise by finding a plastic box to fill with water.
- It is also a concern to the Board that medical screening of every detainee does not automatically happen at the KIU, which presumably increases the likelihood of some injuries being overlooked. The Board is also concerned that there is



only one medic available to serve both the KIU and Frontier House. Whilst the medic can travel to Frontier House this is not a satisfactory arrangement. It was also reported to the IMB that whilst at Frontier House the medic may not always have access to the medications they require, unless they take these with them from the KIU.

- As previously reported, social distancing is impossible at the Tug Haven and the KIU, with conditions at the Tug Haven particularly crowded. The KIU was no longer accepting new arrivals owing to a previous positive Covid test. A deep clean of the KIU was due to be undertaken after the detainees had departed.

#### **4. Preparation for return or release**

##### **Tug Haven**

- It was not possible to obtain statistics on the length of time that people had spent at the Tug Haven this week, though it is clear that many migrants will be spending at least one night at the facility, perhaps two.
- The Board was informed during the visits on 10+11/10/21 that a large number of people would have to stay at the facility overnight because “the adult male IDE is full”. The Board was informed that there were no more places in detention available and that migrants would therefore be transferred to secure or non-secure hotels. There were a number of coaches visible during the visits and three coaches were observed to have departed that evening. It was reported that there have been difficulties with transport, partly because of coaches being used as rail replacement services that day and also due to a lack of taxis. The Board was informed that taxis have generally been used to transport families to other locations when needed.
- During the 0205 visit on 11/10/21, staff informed the Board that it was expected that everybody ‘would be away from the site by the end of the day’. At the time of the 1400 visit on 11/10/21 five coaches were waiting to leave the Tug Haven and by the time of the Board’s departure two coaches remained.
- The Board continues to be extremely concerned about the length of time that migrants are spending at the Tug Haven facility, particularly families and children (who are nevertheless still prioritised). This is of particular concern if the factors identified coincide with cold weather over the coming weeks.

##### **KIU**

- Many of the detainees had been in the holding room for two days. The person who had been in the holding room the longest was reported as arriving at 1557 on 08/10/21 (approximately 2.5 days spent in the holding room at the time of the visit). The most recent arrival had been at 0350 on 09/10/21 – almost 24 hours in the holding room at the time of the visit. The length of stay may have partly

been impacted by the positive Covid test of one of the detainees. This had been superseded by a negative test at the time of the IMB visit.

- The Board was informed that the unaccompanied minors in the holding room would be taken to the Atrium – which was reported as being able to hold 30 people – and that the remainder would be transported to isolation accommodation in taxis.

### **New facility at the Western Jetfoil**

The outer shell of the new facility at the Western Jetfoil now appears complete. The Board was informed at its October meeting that this was expected to open on 22/10/21. However, this appears unlikely due to delays in installing IT infrastructure and furnishing the interior. The Board has been informed that it will take considerably longer to complete the ‘wet side’ of the new facility (including a covered walkway to allow migrants to be guided from vessels to the facility via a separate route, shielded from public view) until early next year. The Board is also aware – though has not yet been able to monitor this – that the new facility may still not be large enough to house the numbers who arrive at the Tug Haven. A further concern identified is that the Harbour Board may object to both sites being used at the same time and that it may not be possible to begin using the Western Jetfoil site unless the Tug Haven site is vacated entirely. These delays in opening this facility are disappointing and the Board is deeply concerned that the welfare needs of arriving migrants will not be met and that conditions will worsen as the weather becomes colder.

### **Concerns about Frontier House**

The Board also wishes to express additional concerns about conditions in Frontier House. The Board has reported in rota visit reports and in its annual report on the general unsuitability of the holding rooms, which can hold large numbers of detainees for periods of several days, without access to proper washing facilities. Very often the detainees held in this room are minors. The Board has repeatedly raised the concern about the lack of washing facilities and the impact on detainee welfare but has yet to receive a response about whether or how this will be addressed. The Board has been informed of two incidents at Frontier House which give particular cause for concern:

- In October a number of detainees caught a sickness bug, with a small number of detainees having to be taken to hospital. Whilst the cause of the infection appears unrelated to the facility itself, the fact that it was able to spread is indicative of the close proximity in which detainees are held and the length of time they can spend in this environment. The absence of proper washing facilities makes it difficult – even impossible – for detainees to adequately clean themselves after vomiting.

The Board is aware that there was a serious incident at Frontier House on 12 October. Regrettably the Board was not informed at the time. There were approximately 40 people present in the holding room at the time. Staff have informed the IMB that a



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number of detainees had become unhappy, that there were high tensions in the holding room and that this culminated in detainees banging on the glass of the observation room. The IMB was informed that the staff were not able to control the situation themselves, partly owing to some of the detainees being minors and uses of force therefore being inappropriate. This resulted in police being called to bring the incident to an end. This causes the Board further concern about growing tension amongst detainee groups held in unsuitable conditions for long periods of time and the impact this has both on holding room safety and detainee wellbeing.

### **William Baker**

Chair, Dover Independent Monitoring Board

11 October 2021, updated on 05/11/21 to incorporate recent developments and information from Yarl's Wood IMB.