



**Annual Report of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at
London Heathrow and City Airports
Short-Term Holding Facilities**

and the Short-Term Holding Facilities at:

**Becket House Immigration Reporting Centre
Eaton House Immigration Reporting Centre**

**For reporting year
01 February 2020 – 31 January 2021**

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Introductory sections 1 - 2

1 Statutory role of the Independent Monitoring Board

1.1 The London Heathrow and City Airports Independent Monitoring Board is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the treatment and welfare of people in immigration detention in the Short-term Holding Facilities (STHFs) at four locations: London Heathrow Airport, London City Airport and the Home Office immigration reporting centres at Becket House and Eaton House.

1.2 Independent Monitoring Boards form part of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism, established in compliance with the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty by establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention.

1.3 The Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 part 7 sets out the responsibilities of the Independent Monitoring Boards (referred to as Visiting Committees) which include visiting each facility at least once a month; talking to detained persons; having access to records; inspecting the premises and the administration of the premises; raising concerns; providing advice or suggestions as it considers appropriate; and producing an annual report.

1.4 The Board has unrestricted access to every person detained in immigration custody and all facilities except those that are the direct responsibility of Border Force. At the airports this includes access to vehicles to monitor the treatment and welfare of people being removed from the country.

1.5 The Board meets monthly. All members of the Board are volunteers.

2 Executive summary

2.1 Background to the report

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the work of the Board for the reporting period 1 February 2020 to 31 January 2021. During lockdown the Board took the decision not to visit holding rooms or to monitor removals in person, in order to safeguard themselves, their families and communities. Members resumed visits between lockdowns. London City Airport, Becket House and Eaton House were all closed for some months. The number of rota visits, recorded in Appendix A, was less than half of those undertaken in previous years.

During the lockdowns the Board received Home Office data giving the number of detainees held each day in the Heathrow holding rooms. There were weekly updates from the contractor, Mitie Care & Custody (C&C), giving both quantitative and qualitative information. Border Force provided monthly telephone updates. In addition to this information, during the second and third lockdowns members undertook 'remote monitoring' through telephone conversations with holding room staff.

There was a considerable variation in the number of detainees being held in the Heathrow terminal holding rooms during the year as a result of various UK Government travel and flight restrictions. During the first lockdown and through the summer months there were relatively few detainees to be accommodated in the holding rooms in the two operative terminals. From September onwards the number of detainees increased and data showed that in total these had almost returned to pre-lockdown numbers. However, with only Terminals 2 and 5 operative, detainees were confined to two rather than the four pre-lockdown holding rooms. Understandably this led, at times, to so many people in a holding room that social distancing could not be maintained.

This report presents the findings of the Board. Most of the evidence comes from observations made on rota visits, scrutiny of records and data, and informal contact with detainees and staff. Where the evidence has not been directly observed by a member, the source of the information is stated.

2.2 Main judgements

At the beginning of the pandemic Covid-19 precautions were introduced which were adequate for holding rooms accommodating a small number of detainees. However, when the number of detainees began to rise in the Heathrow holding rooms, the Covid-19 restrictions in force were observed to be far less stringent than those in public areas of the airport or in the outside community. Although the Board raised its concerns promptly, notably the need for the wearing of masks by everyone, for social distancing between detainees, and for the regular cleaning of seats and tables, it

took many months before more effective measures were implemented. The reactions of the Home Office and the detention contractor were disappointingly slow. The Board remains concerned about the possible risk of infection as the holding rooms have no fresh air and, when they become crowded, social distancing cannot be maintained. The Board recommends that additional accommodation be used for the safety of the detainees and staff.

Due to the pandemic, detainees have been held at Heathrow for longer periods, with more frequent stays of over 24 hours, particularly when waiting for the fewer turnaround return flights.

From our limited observations, the frequency of detainees waiting in the controlled waiting areas for over two hours before being admitted to the holding rooms has increased.

Detainees can rarely access any medication that they have in their possession, even though this can cause them anxiety and may put their health and well-being at risk. The Board is concerned about the great length of time it is taking the Home Office to find a solution to this issue.

There are no showers in Terminal 5 and the shower in Terminal 2 was out of action for most of the year. Detainees refused entry to the UK, with long waits before return flights, could only access the showers at Cayley House, in Terminal 3, if there were sufficient vans and escorts to take them.

In Terminal 5 the facilities for families and unaccompanied children are inadequate.

Detainees are unable to access Wi-Fi and the internet, so limiting their ability to communicate with family, friends and employers and to access their own personal information stored on their devices.

The proposed relocation of the holding room at Eaton House has been halted. The facilities are cramped and men and women are not segregated, both of which affect detainee welfare.

For the most part detention custody officers (DCOs) have been observed to be kind and courteous towards the detainees, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

2.3 Recommendations

TO THE HOME OFFICE

Detainees' access to medication

1. [Applicable to: All holding rooms] The Home Office should ensure that the new system for giving detainees access to their prescription and over-the-counter medication is designed and implemented without further delay. (paras. 9.2-9.4, 18.2, 26.2, 34.2)

New/improved facilities

2. [Eaton House] The Home Office should progress the provision of new, expanded, holding rooms in Eaton House as soon as possible as these are urgently needed. (paras. 29.4, 33.1, 36.1)

Improved facilities for families and children

3. [London Heathrow Airport T5] The Board repeats its recommendation that the Home Office should substantially improve the facilities for families and children in Terminal 5. These are currently excessively cramped and they lack integrated toilet, shower and baby-changing facilities. (para. 6.7)

Detainees' access to showers in the holding rooms

4. [London Heathrow Airport T5] The Home Office should progress the provision of a shower in Terminal 5 to comply with the National Holding Room Standards. (paras. 3.10–3.11)

Improved translation and communication facilities for detainees

5. [All holding rooms] The Board repeats its recommendation that the Home Office should arrange for Wi-Fi and internet access for detainees in all holding rooms, even if it is only available when DCOs can supervise access. (paras. 8.1-8.2, 12.19-12.21, 25.5, 33.4)

6. [London Heathrow Airport T5] The Board requests that a resolution is found to the frequent failure of the Vasco translator device to function in the Terminal 5 holding room. (para. 4.14)

Respect

7. [All holding rooms] The Board encourages the Home Office to complete their review of the provision of sacred books in all the holding rooms, and to provide new stocks of books as required. (para. 8.11)

TO THE HOME OFFICE AND THE DETENTION CONTRACTOR

Detainees' safety

8. [All holding rooms] The Home Office and detention contractor should ensure that their respective policies and guidance on pandemic precautions are strictly adhered to by staff, visitors and, as far as is practicable, by detainees. (paras. 7.4-7.7, 16.6, 24.3-24.5)

9. [All holding rooms] The Board recommends that the maximum safe capacity of each holding room under social distancing conditions should be established by a public health expert and made known to all staff concerned, and that this limit should

be strictly adhered to at all times. Plans should be put in place for an alternative holding area when these limits are exceeded. (paras. 7.4-7.7, 16.6, 24.3-24.5, 32.1)

Use of restraints

10. [Eaton House] We repeat last year's recommendation that when escorting detainees from holding room to van, restraints are only applied when a dynamic risk assessment indicates that it is necessary and proportionate to do so. (para. 35.2)

11. [London City Airport] The Board recommends that when escorting detainees through the airport, restraints are only applied when a dynamic risk assessment for an individual indicates that it is necessary and proportionate to do so. (paras.19.2-19.5)

TO THE DETENTION CONTRACTOR

Holding room inductions

12. [London Heathrow Airport] We repeat the recommendation that the detention contractor should ensure that DCOs use the Big Word interpretation service for inducting non-English-speaking passengers and not just assume that passengers with a smattering of English really understand what they are being told. (para. 4.10)

DCO continuing engagement with detainees

13. [London Heathrow Airport T2] We recommend that the information video screens for Terminal 2 be installed and commissioned. (para 8.1)

TO BORDER FORCE

Excessive periods of detention

14. [London Heathrow Airport] The Board recognises the exceptional pressures created by the Covid pandemic on the Border Force organisation and its staff. Nevertheless, we recommend that more officers be deployed at peak times to avoid unnecessarily extended periods of detention in the controlled waiting areas and in the holding rooms. (para. 4.2)

Detainees' safety

15. [London Heathrow Airport] Border Force should ensure that all its staff are aware that the terminal evacuation protocol requires that C&C are informed without delay to enable them to evacuate the holding rooms. (para 7.16)

2.4 Progress since the last report

The Board is pleased to be able to report on various areas of progress since last year's report. Following the order of recommendations in that report:

- **Detainees' safety:** We have been informed that an additional CCTV monitor has been installed in Terminal 3, enabling both DCOs to exercise continuous surveillance of the detainees in their care.
- **Detainees' access to legal advice:** Each holding room is now provided with regularly updated lists with phone numbers of local solicitors and legal advice centres.
- **Improved communication facilities for detainees:** Dual telephone handsets have been fitted in each holding room aiding interpretation. Electronic translation tablets have been provided for each holding room although there is a problem with getting them to work in Terminal 5.
- **Detainee comfort:** More mattresses have been introduced to airport holding rooms for detainees wishing to rest.
- **New facilities for London City Airport:** The London City holding room has been moved into new premises, which are a great improvement on the previous cramped facility.
- **Care of detained children:** Unaccompanied children in detention have had an adult to sit with them in the holding room and to look after them.
- **Respect:** Holy books and prayer mats are now respectfully stored, usually in cupboards, and apart from secular books.

Description of establishments and evidence - sections 3 – 36

London Heathrow Airport

3 Description of the holding rooms

3.1 Each of the four terminals (Terminals 2, 3, 4, and 5) contains a holding room, with a locked door, where passengers arriving at the airport may be detained on the authority of Border Force on behalf of the Home Secretary. The Home Office contracts the management of the holding rooms to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C). Detention may be for periods of up to 24 hours, and in exceptional cases even longer. From the holding room passengers may be allowed entry to the United Kingdom, or be granted immigration bail or be taken to an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) for further detention. If a person is refused entry to the UK and a return flight is available within a reasonable period, they wait in the holding room until they are escorted to the aircraft door for their return flight.

3.2 Holding rooms are also used to accommodate people where there is a need for them to return to the airport for a further interview by Border Force. They may have returned voluntarily after one or more periods of immigration bail or have been brought back to the airport from an IRC.

3.3 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Heathrow Airports Limited (HAL) closed two of the airport terminals, resulting in the closure of the Terminal 3 holding room on 21 April 2020 and the closure of the Terminal 4 holding room on 4 May 2020. The holding rooms in Terminals 2 and 5 have remained open throughout the reporting period.

3.4 There is a further holding room at Cayley House, part of Terminal 3, which is used for people brought to the airport for removal. This is a different type of facility, in that most of the men and women arriving there will have already spent varying periods of time in detention in an IRC and/or in a prison, and it is anticipated that they will be compliant with their removal. The C&C contract with the Home Office allows these detainees to be brought to Cayley House for up to five hours before their flight departure time. They will then be taken to the aircraft door and travel unescorted to their final destination. Cayley House has remained open throughout the reporting period.

Accommodation and amenities

3.5 All the holding rooms are in good decorative repair, with canvas pictures on the walls, realistic looking plants in pots, and well organised notice boards. They have rows of standard airport seating and fixed tables with seats for eating meals. The family rooms have brightly painted murals on the walls. Daily newspapers are available in a few languages.

3.6 The rooms are windowless with no natural light, or fresh air, and some suffer from fluctuating temperatures, sometimes being very cold at night, both in summer and in winter. We understand that the air conditioning can be controlled by the DCOs locally, but this does not always appear to function properly.

Opportunities for resting and sleeping

3.7 These terminal holding rooms are not, however, designed to be residential facilities and it is the Board's view that they are unfit for detaining people beyond relatively brief periods. There are no proper sleeping facilities despite the fact that detainees can be held for extended periods, including overnight, and that many will have had long intercontinental flights before being admitted to the holding room. In the last couple of years low-cost fold-out mattresses have been supplied to all the holding rooms and the Board is pleased to note that those showing signs of wear are being replaced with new ones. Individual mattress covers have also been introduced this year and one of these is provided with a pillow, pillowcase and a blanket to each detainee wishing to sleep or rest. On almost every monitoring visit members have observed detainees asleep on these mattresses on the floor.

Family accommodation

3.8 Each terminal holding room contains separate accommodation for families with children, although at Terminal 5 this is only a partitioned off section of the main holding room with no separate toilet or washing facilities. Family room accommodation is described in Section 5.

Male and female accommodation

3.9 In Cayley House there are separate holding rooms for men and for women. In the terminal holding rooms men and women wait together. The IMB have observed that some women feel uncomfortable sleeping in proximity to men who are strangers. If the family room is unoccupied, they can be moved there to sleep.

Showers and toilets

3.10 There is a shower room in each terminal holding room, apart from Terminal 5. Last year we reported that due to concerns about the presence of legionella bacteria, the only shower in Terminal 2 was closed and this only came back into action for use in late February 2020. Very unfortunately the same shower was out of use again by August 2020 and has not been functioning for the remainder of the reporting year. Our regular communication with the Home Office Accommodation Manager has kept us informed that Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) engineers have been working to install a lasting solution to the problem. The Board is pleased to note that the shower was finally brought back into use at the end of February 2021, having been out of action for 19 of the last 24 months.

3.11 With only Terminals 2 and 5 open for most of the year, detainees wanting a shower had to be taken to Cayley House by van. To the credit of C&C, in September

we noted that several detainees had been transported for a shower. However, this can only happen when C&C have sufficient vans and escorts. Otherwise detainees, many of whom have lengthy detentions after long journeys, have to make do with washing at a very small handbasin in a toilet cubicle.

3.12 In Cayley House there are separate showers for men and for women. We are happy to report that the noxious smell in the female shower room, which had been a long-term problem, has been completely absent this year. The problem of overflowing sanitary bins has also been addressed with more regular bin collections.

General maintenance

3.13 A summary of maintenance and facilities issues identified by Board members on rota visits is sent to the Home Office every month for their comment and for follow-up action with HAL or C&C as appropriate. The Board is very pleased to note that the Home Office accommodation manager has responded promptly and effectively and that the number of outstanding issues has again declined. Finger guards for child safety have been fitted on family room doors in all terminals, except for the door leading to the toilet in Terminal 3, because this terminal is closed.

Food and drink

3.14 All terminal holding rooms have water fountains. However Covid-19 precautions required all the water fountains in the open terminals to be covered over. DCOs provide detainees with as many individual water bottles as they request. The holding rooms also have machines which dispense hot drinks. In some terminals these machines are situated in the holding rooms while in others they are located in the DCOs' offices.

3.15 Snacks including crisps, packaged croissants, biscuits and, more recently, Nutri-Grain bars are always available in the holding rooms. Fruit-pots have been introduced to supplement or replace fresh fruit, which is a sensible solution to the problem of fruit deteriorating too quickly. A variety of hot microwaveable meals is also provided.

Smoking

3.16 Although detainees are not allowed to smoke, nicotine lozenges are available and there are usually sufficient stocks in each holding room.

Access to telephones

3.17 For security reasons, detainees are not allowed to retain their smartphones which contain cameras. They are provided with a C&C phone with which to make a five-minute call to family or friends either in the UK or abroad. A payphone is available in each holding room so that once they have the telephone number, friends and family can ring the detainee. However, if the holding room is busy, there is a lack of privacy and several people may want to receive calls on this phone at the same time.

4 Fair and humane treatment by staff

Border Force officers

4.1 When Border Force officers have stopped an arriving passenger at the UK border and need time to follow up inquiries regarding entry into the UK, they first take the person to wait in the controlled waiting area (CWA), a seated area by the immigration desks, where food and drink are not readily available. Border Force try to sort out entry problems there rather than having to place passengers in formal detention. Ideally passengers should be kept waiting there for less than an hour, but IMB reports show that on most days a few passengers, across the terminals, wait in CWAs for over two hours and sometimes over four hours when Border Force are very busy.

4.2 Although Border Force do their best to deal with passengers as quickly as possible and to move promptly those cases requiring more interviews to the holding rooms, this has been more challenging during the pandemic. Sometimes there are not sufficient officers on duty.

- *In July and August 2020 reports noted passengers waiting for more than three hours in the Terminal 5 CWA before entering the holding room. Asked to comment, Border Force responded that during the pandemic Border Force was operating with 'minimum viable' staffing to reduce the spread of coronavirus.*
- *In September 2020 six passengers spent between two hours 20 minutes and four hours 45 minutes in the Terminal 2 CWA before holding room entry.*
- *In January 2021 a man who had arrived at the border at 11.20am had to wait until 3.00pm, a wait of 3 hours 40 minutes before entering the holding room. Border Force responded that the initial delay was primarily a resource issue, as the case could not be allocated to a case-work officer until 2.00pm. Problematic findings in the subsequent baggage search further extended the waiting period.*

4.3 Once passengers are in the holding room they may have to wait for several hours before their interview takes place. Sensibly Border Force give priority to families with young children, unaccompanied children, and passengers with physical and/or mental health issues or other vulnerabilities. However adult passengers seeking asylum often have longer waits.

4.4 The Board observes Border Force officers as they interact with detained passengers while they escort them to and from the holding rooms. The officers usually engage with the detainees in a professional and friendly manner, explaining what will happen. Many officers are multilingual and the detainees can be seen to benefit when the officer talks to them in a language they can understand. After interview when a decision has been made, Board members have observed officers

acting with sensitivity towards the detainees and, where appropriate, providing helpful information.

4.5 Last year's report welcomed good cooperative working practices between Border Force and C&C. When Border Force has several passengers to take to the holding room at the same time, they stagger arrivals so that the DCOs have sufficient time to induct each passenger. This cooperation was even more necessary during the pandemic, with all passengers arriving at just two terminals.

4.6 In last year's report the Board highlighted a different issue of failed communication. After detainees had been brought back to the airport from IRCs for interview, those being returned to detention often had to wait many hours, sometimes into the late evening, for transport back to the IRCs. Border Force officers had not informed C&C that their enquiries had been concluded and that return transport should be arranged. In February 2020 there were at least three further incidents. However, Border Force and C&C managers have recognised the problem and informed the Board that a new protocol has been devised to resolve this.

4.7 In addition to dealing with travellers who have made mistakes with visas, those entering the UK illegally, and those seeking asylum, Border Force have to determine when children or vulnerable adults are being trafficked. Board members recognise that they fulfil a difficult role and appear to do it well.

Detainee custody officers

4.8 The Home Office has contracted the management of the holding rooms to C&C. They provide at least one male and one female DCO to staff the holding rooms. The DCOs are responsible for the welfare and safety of the individuals in their custody. In each terminal the DCOs work from a reasonably spacious office which is the entrance to the holding room suite. Apart from Cayley House where there is a corridor leading to the holding rooms, the offices have glass-type walls, through which DCOs can see the detainees and the detainees can see them and attract their attention. The DCOs carry handcuffs and have the authority to search people and make them surrender their mobile phones if they have cameras. C&C are also responsible for providing escorts for detainees being transported to and from IRCs and for those being removed from the UK. Some DCOs wear body-worn cameras.

4.9 For passengers being shown into a holding room for the first time, detention can come as quite a shock, so a good induction is important. Over the last two years the Board is pleased to report that they have observed that the standard of inductions has improved significantly. There are far fewer occasions of finding that an induction is just a tick-box exercise. Excerpts from reports:

- *The inductions seen at Terminal 5 were carried out in a courteous and friendly manner, most particularly with a rather anxious American woman, including explaining to each person how the [C&C provided] mobile phones worked.*

- *I was impressed by the amount of time the DCO in Terminal 2 gave to a Nicaraguan family, including checking their language skills, asking about food and drink, and explaining the facilities in the family room.*

4.10 In last year's report, the Board pointed out that some DCOs did not recognise that a compliant detainee who says that they understand English does not necessarily understand what they are being told. The Big Word interpretation service was not being used as often as was really required. This year there were still some examples of inductions being conducted in English when interpretation was needed.

- *We observed the induction of a 15-year old girl from Somalia, which was conducted in a friendly manner in English. However not all the points on the induction sheet were covered, even though they were ticked. When we attempted to speak to the girl afterwards she had difficulty understanding us. She cannot have understood much of the induction.*

4.11 Occasionally DCOs have to be pragmatic.

- *Members observed a very distressed Nigerian female of mature years, who was admitted with a five-year old girl, allegedly her grandchild. The lady spoke no English, only a minority Nigerian language which could not be identified. The DCO asked the young child, who spoke some English, to translate. Although this was unorthodox, it was justifiable as it calmed the lady down. The child had been sensible and showed no signs of stress.*

4.12 One of the issues with Big Word is that it may take quite a few minutes for the service to supply an interpreter for even a commonly spoken language. This can be problematic when there are several detainees waiting to be inducted. The following is just one example out of several for different languages:

- *A member observed a DCO phoning Big Word to get interpretation to induct a Spanish-speaking detainee. After seven minutes with no reply, the DCO asked another detainee to interpret. She could not wait any longer because Border Force were waiting outside to bring in another 12 detainees.*

4.13 Conducting an induction using telephone interpretation can be an awkward process, passing the handset to and fro. The Board is pleased to report that the Home Office has now provided dual handset phones to make interpreted conversations easier. DCOs have commented to us that these dual handsets are a considerable improvement on the previous arrangement and good during Covid.

4.14 The introduction of the electronic translation device into every holding room is also welcomed. The Board has observed these being used by DCOs and Board members have used them to talk to detainees too. However, there is a problem with using them in Terminal 5 where they often do not work.

4.15 Detainees may be kept waiting for several hours before interview and, with fewer flights due to the pandemic, many have long waits before their turnaround

flights. Board members have reported that some DCOs are most attentive to the detainees, checking on their needs and helping them to feel comfortable.

- *A man from Brazil had an extremely long stay of 68 hours in the holding room due to airline turnaround removal difficulties. The visiting Board member noted that the DCOs were very concerned about this detainee. They had a friendly, caring and supportive approach. They took him to Cayley House on three occasions so that he could shower and freshen up.*

5 Adult detainees and lengths of detention

5.1 The detention services contractor C&C compiles monthly length of stay information.

Table 1: Number of adults in the holding rooms with the length of their stay for February 2020 - January 2021

	0-8 hours	8-12 hours	12-18 hours	18-24 hours	24+ hours	Total
Terminal 2	2,380	445	364	366	165	3,720
Terminal 3	237	70	38	15	10	370
Terminal 4	277	73	52	22	6	430
Terminal 5	1,243	505	228	176	106	2,258
Total	4,137	1,093	682	579	287	6,778
Cayley House	1,579	19	11	2	0	1,611
Grand Total	5,716	1,112	693	581	287	8,389

It should be noted that Terminal 3 closed on 21 April 2020 and Terminal 4 closed on 4 May 2020. They both remained closed beyond the end of the reporting year.

5.2 Due to the coronavirus pandemic there were fewer than half the usual number of detainees. Last year a total of 13,109 people were detained at the terminals whereas this year there were only 6,778. In Cayley House last year there were 3,843, while this year there were 1,611.

5.3 In percentage terms, the terminal holding rooms figures show:

- 61% detained for 0-8 hours, (68% in the previous year)
- 16% detained for 8-12 hours, (16% previous year)
- 10% detained for 12-18 hours, (10% previous year)

- 8.5% detained for 18-24 hours, (5% previous year)
- Just over 4% detained over 24 hours, (1% previous year)

Overall, the lengths of detention were a little longer this year.

5.4 The main factors affecting length of stay in the holding rooms by passengers who have just arrived in the United Kingdom are:

- Time taken by Border Force to complete casework and decide what is to happen to the person. This will depend on the complexity of someone's circumstances, including the possible need to contact third parties, such as an employer or college, and the need to use telephone interpretation.
- For those being returned on a flight, the time taken by the Home Office to arrange a flight with the carrier, and then the flight's departure time.
- For those to be detained at an IRC, the time taken by the Home Office to allocate accommodation and by C&C to collect them to go there. The present contract gives C&C eight hours from the issuing of a movement order in which to collect the detainee.
- A few lengthy stays will be those of people who have returned for a further interview by Border Force having been detained in an IRC, or who have previously been given immigration bail.
- Those seeking asylum are referred by Border Force to the Home Office's National Asylum Allocation Unit (NAAU) which finds them appropriate asylum accommodation in the community. They then have to wait for several hours for the transport contractor Clearsprings to collect them. Those arriving in the evening may have to wait overnight for the NAAU to open at 9.00am.

5.5 When monitoring, IMB members follow up cases in which arriving passengers have been detained for more than twelve hours and where the reasons for this are not immediately obvious. The longer detentions this year, particularly those of over 18 hours, were frequently due to less availability of turnaround return flights.

5.6 Other reasons for extended stays can be more complex.

- *In July two women, one Brazilian and one Japanese, had been in the holding room for 19 hours 25 minutes before going to an IRC. Border Force explained the complexity of the Brazilian woman's claims including claims for asylum, then withdrawn by her, and also threats to self-harm, which all delayed the processing of her case. The Japanese woman had entered detention at 4.00pm and due to difficulties with getting interpretation, she was not denied entry until 3.00am the next day. With the limited operation of the airline, it then took time to determine that she could not be removed that day, so she needed to go to the IRC.*
- *In October a man from India was detained in the holding room for 36 hours 15 minutes. Border Force responded that this man had fraudulently applied for a student visa. He had arrived at 9.45pm but the relevant university did not*

revoke its sponsorship until 4.40pm the following day. The records were not clear as to why it took Border Force a further five hours to make a detention request. By then no IRC beds were available, so he spent a second night in the holding room, before he was transported to an IRC at 8.00am.

6 Children in families and unaccompanied children

6.1 By law every person under the age of 18 is deemed to be a child. The DCOs complete a paper copy of a child care plan for each child, which names the DCO responsible for that child, whether or not a parent is also present. The DCO must check on each child every 15 minutes and record that on MEDS, their electronic records system. They also record the child's activities such as eating a meal, playing with toys, watching a DVD or sleeping. All families with a member under the age of 18 are accommodated in the family room.

6.2 Board members have observed children being inducted into the holding rooms in a friendly and sensitive manner by the DCOs. They search children using a wand rather than giving them a body search.

- *An unaccompanied thirteen-year old Chinese boy was the only day-time arrival in the holding room. He was seeking political asylum. The boy appeared to understand good English and there was the general impression of DCOs dealing with him with some sensitivity and with due regard to his age. He was placed in the family room. One of the male DCOs went in with him and when I left they were clearly enjoying a video game together.*

Numbers and length of detention

6.3 The service contractor C&C compiles monthly information on the number of children in detention*.

Table 2: Children detained: February 2020 – January 2021 (12 months)

Location	Unaccompanied children	Family units with children	No. of children in family units	Total number of children
Terminal 2	92	259	477	569
Terminal 3	0	18	28	28
Terminal 4	7	29	49	56
Terminal 5	34	194	304	338
Total	133	500	858	991

*C&C have warned that there may be some inaccuracies because their figures are based on the daily count

6.4 As for the adult detainees, the coronavirus pandemic has led to fewer children being detained this year. Whereas a total of 1,830 children were detained in the last reporting year, 991 were detained this year.

6.5 Examining the detailed C&C data for children's lengths of detention showed that 36 children were detained for over 12 hours and of these seven had stays of over 24 hours. Six out of these seven were removed on turnaround return flights. The youngest two were children aged three and five both with their families, who each waited just over 24 hours. The longest wait was for a 16-year old unaccompanied Israeli female who was in the holding room for 32 hours 30 minutes.

Family room facilities

6.6 In Terminals 2, 3 and 4 there are separate family rooms situated directly beside the DCOs' offices, with transparent safety glass windows. Each is furnished with a fixed table with seats and a bench seat, underneath which are pull-out boxes for toys. There are payphones and water fountains. The rooms all have toilets and baby changing facilities for the sole use of the family room occupants. However the rooms are small and sometimes have to accommodate two families. With no natural light, no fresh air and no space for running around, the Board considers that the holding rooms are unsuitable for the detention of children beyond the very briefest period.

6.7 In Terminal 5 the family room is a small partitioned area within the main holding room, with frosted glass. It is small and narrow with a table so positioned that it is difficult for occupants to lie down to rest. It can only hold one family at a time. This room is uncomfortable and claustrophobic with its frosted glass and lack of space. In addition, to use the toilets the parents and children have to go into the main holding room, where adults are being detained, to use their facilities. Similarly a

parent has to take their child through the main holding room to access the baby-changing facilities. Improved facilities for children are urgently required in Terminal 5.

Toys and activities for children

6.8 All the holding rooms have toys for younger children, DVDs and games for older children, books, colouring books, pens and crayons. The DCOs are responsible for keeping these clean and in good order. The Board has a member who is responsible for checking these provisions but the usual surveys were not conducted during the pandemic.

7 Safety

Coronavirus precautions and concerns

7.1 The greatest challenge for C&C this year has been to manage the holding rooms in as safe a way as possible for both detainees and staff, while mitigating the risks associated with the transmission of coronavirus. This has been particularly difficult as for the largest part of the year, passengers were arriving from all over the world and were not being tested for Covid-19 on arrival.

7.2 During the first lockdown from March to June when the Board was conducting remote monitoring, C&C assured us that they had strict guidelines entitled 'Covid-19 Safe Systems of Work' which were being observed. The Home Office published 'Guidance for Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), Residential Short-Term Holding Facilities (RSTHFs) and escorts during the Covid-19 pandemic', but provided no specific guidance for Non-Residential Short-Term Holding Facilities such as the airport holding rooms. At that stage there were few daily arrivals in the holding rooms.

7.3 At the very end of June, visits to the holding rooms resumed and the following was observed.

- *Whilst hand-sanitiser and gloves were available, those entering the holding rooms were not asked to use them.*
- *Social distancing was mainly observed between the DCOs and the detainees, but staff were not socially distancing between themselves.*
- *When telephone engineers arrived to work in the holding rooms, there was no social distancing between them and the DCOs.*
- *Although masks were obligatory in the rest of the airport, they were not being used all the time by the DCOs.*
- *There was no provision, such as seat blocking, for social distancing.*
- *C&C assured the IMB that passengers with Covid-19 would not be allowed to enter the holding rooms, but no actual Covid-19 testing was taking place.*

The Board were very concerned that asymptomatic detainees or staff could be entering the rooms and spreading the virus to one another and perhaps taking it into

the community. The responses to all our written concerns were that staff were following the guidelines.

7.4 In all the visits in subsequent weeks, individual members reported their concerns about the lack of precautions being observed in the holding rooms. Throughout the summer, masks were not being routinely worn. On visits some DCOs expressed their personal concerns of being at risk of catching the virus. At the same time numbers in the holding rooms were increasing. These report excerpts are a small sample showing the Board's concerns:

- *In September a member asked if the DCOs had any concerns about Covid. One stated that mixing up the detainees from all destinations in the holding room, without taking account that some were from countries which were on the UK's 14 country quarantine list was not good practice. Nor was the lack of seat spacing between detainees. We noted that masks were not obligatory for DCOs and that not all detainees were wearing masks.*
- *In October, there were 14 detainees in the Terminal 5 holding room. With Border Force officers and C&C all present in the DCOs' office [while more detainees were being inducted]...we felt that it was not safe for the detainees or for us to enter such a crowded room.*
- *In early November the Terminal 2 holding room was very busy. There was a total of 22 people on the log with twelve carried forward from yesterday and nine arriving between 0.05am and 1.25am. Eighteen of the detainees were from Brazil [a country with very high rate of Covid]. ...Two were asleep, others were talking in an animated group. The member recorded: "With the best will in the world I cannot believe that the sheer number of detainees held overnight at Terminal 2 provided sufficient safety for both staff and detainees in respect of social distancing". The question was asked of the Home Office, Border Force and C&C. The Home Office did not reply to this particular question. Border Force replied that the question of the holding room capacity was outside Border Force's control and the response should be left to the other recipients. C&C responded: 'C&C are following guidelines and the safe systems of working practices set by the Home Office and from our own QHSE department.'*

It should be noted that while some detainees were sent to IRCs and some were removed on turnaround flights, others went out into the community either being landed or bailed.

7.5 Worried that detainees' health was at risk, as well as that of the staff, many of whom were already self-isolating, on 17 November the Board wrote a formal letter to senior managers at the Home Office, Border Force and C&C listing our main concerns. The conclusion of our letter bears repeating here:

'We are mindful of the difficult issues that the Covid-19 situation has created in the holding rooms, and we are very sympathetic to the daily challenges and

risks faced by the C&C and Border Force staff involved. Nevertheless, we are not satisfied that there is yet an embedded culture of health risk mitigation – social distancing, mask wearing, cleaning. It is not acceptable in our view that detainees should be exposed to a lower standard of infection control and care than they would receive in the public areas of the airport. This is a management issue which we believe needs to be addressed urgently.’

Border Force told us that they had discussed the matter with the Home Office and referred us to them. C&C never responded. The Home Office passed it to a senior manager who responded orally at the Immigration Detention Estate Chairs’ Forum on 22 January 2021.

7.6 Despite instructions from the Home Office that all staff in the holding rooms and preferably all detainees should be wearing masks with a particular specification, the situation in December was no better. Two excerpts from the same December visit report:

- *Some DCOs were wearing masks and others in Cayley House, TN2 and TN5 were not. It was also the case for the detainees. Face masks were not visibly displayed in any of the holding rooms. New detainees arrived during my visit (in all the rooms), and none of them was offered new masks. They all had their own; some were not of the specified type.*
- *Both TN2 and TN5 were chaotic due to a high number of detainees and extended stays. DCOs were doing an excellent job with thorough inductions ... Understandably, Covid-19 was not their priority. Detainees usually sleep across the benches, they socialise, and they walk around the room. When I left TN5 I observed a queue of BF officers escorting detainees waiting to take them into the holding room.*

7.7 At the meeting on 22 January, mentioned above, the Board’s Chair and Vice-Chair asked the Home Office representatives about their medium-term plans for the safety of detainees in the holding rooms, given that scientists suggested that mutations of Covid-19 would be with us for some time. The Board members suggested that Terminal 3 holding room could be used when Terminals 2 and 5 had too many detainees for adequate social distancing. The Home Office responded that they could consider this but the ever-changing Covid-19 situation made planning difficult. The Board considers that plans for different eventualities should be in place.

General safety

7.8 Apart from coronavirus concerns, the holding rooms can reasonably be said to provide a safe environment for detainees. In most cases staff are able to keep detainees under observation, either directly or through CCTV.

7.9 Last year we reported a CCTV surveillance problem in the Terminal 3 holding room. The Board is pleased to report that following the recommendation, we were informed that an additional CCTV monitor has now been installed in the office area,

hopefully resolving the problem. We look forward to seeing this when Terminal 3 re-opens.

Self-harm incident

7.10 There was one reported incident of self-harm in the holding rooms during this reporting year. Unfortunately the IMB were not informed of this at the time and were given the following details by C&C a few weeks later. In November, a man who spoke good English, was rude to officers during his induction and made extreme self-harm threats. The DCOs managed to calm him down and, because of his comments, they raised a self-harm warning form. A few hours later, returning from a Border Force interview, he became disruptive. He broke fixtures and threw items around the room and then punched the glass to the DCOs' office until there were signs of blood on his hand. He tried to self-harm using the telephone cord. Police and paramedics were called. Having been assessed by the paramedics, he was taken to Hillingdon Hospital. Later he was taken to Polar Park police station and charged with criminal damage. Thankfully such incidents are rare in the airport holding rooms. The Board is aware that DCOs are vigilant and are usually good at de-escalating situations before they lead to harm.

- *In December a Board member observed an incident with a particularly difficult detainee who was shouting and threatening to wreck the holding room. Mindful of the welfare of the other detainees and a family waiting to enter, the DCOs asked for assistance. They eventually managed to calm the man with talking and, without use of force, he was taken to another secure location provided by Border Force. The staff were commended for the calm and professional way they defused the situation.*

7.11 DCOs sometimes need to be proactive to keep detainees safe from one another.

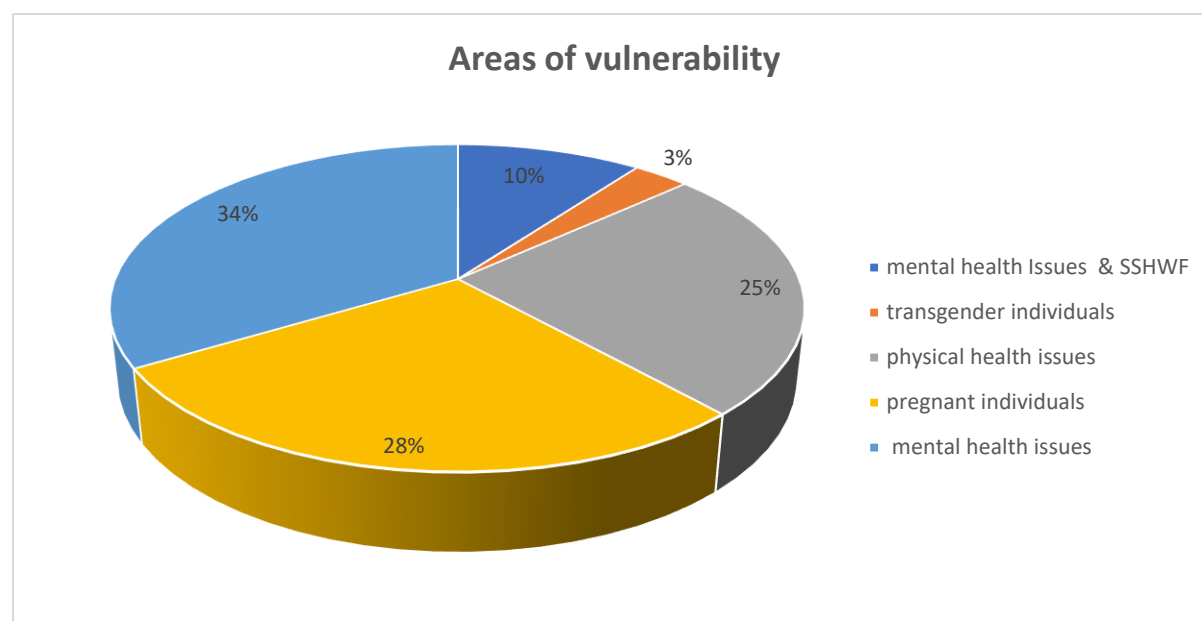
- *On a visit, DCOs explained that on seeing a young man behaving inappropriately towards a female of the same nationality, they moved the female into the family room for her safety.*

Vulnerable detainees

7.12 The DCOs usually pay particular attention to vulnerable detainees and open vulnerable adult warning forms (VAWF) and suicide and self-harm warning forms (SSHWF) for them. The Board receives information regarding the number of detainees for whom these were opened from the national Detainee Welfare Forum. From March 2020 to January 2021 inclusive (the only available figures) a total of 128 VAWFs were opened.

7.13 The data showed that 44% of the group had mental health issues, all were younger than 37 years old and two-thirds of them were women. (See figure 1.)

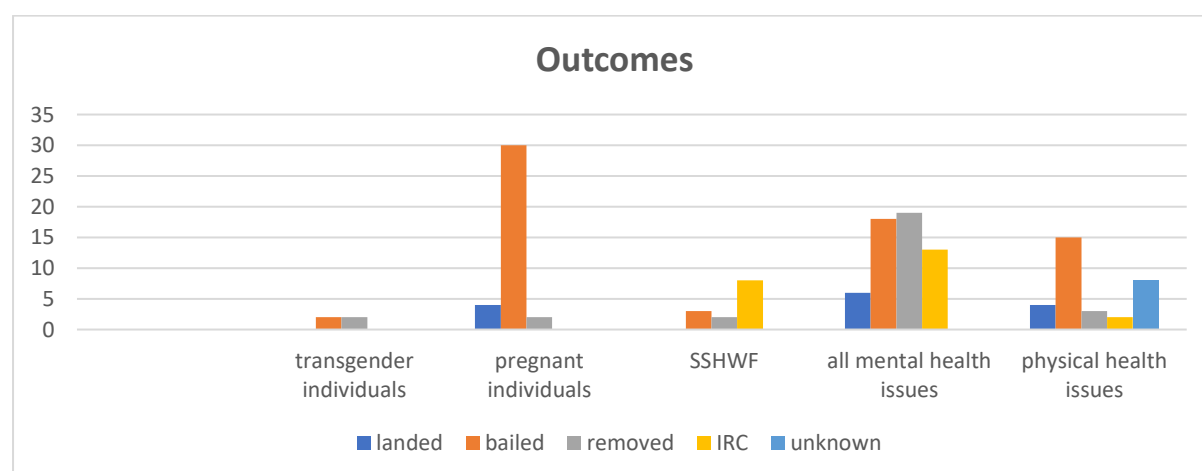
Figure 1. All VAWFs issued for March 2020 – January 2021 showing areas of vulnerability



7.14 Out of all the detainees with VAWFs, 19% were on medication, with half of them on medication for mental health conditions. For these people in particular access to their medication was important. (See 9.2 - 9.4)

7.15 We received information about the outcomes for most of the detainees with VAWFs. (See figure 2.) It was good to see that most pregnant women were either bailed or landed. Only two women (16 and 24 weeks pregnant) were removed. Of the four presenting as transgender persons, two were bailed and two were removed.

Figure 2. Outcomes for all detainees with VAWFs issued for March 2020 – January 2021



Evacuation protocol

7.16 There needs to be good working practice between C&C and Border Force for incidents requiring the evacuation of a terminal building. In December 2020, a Board member telephoning the Terminal 2 holding room for remote monitoring enquired about the evacuation of the holding room the previous day when the whole terminal building was being evacuated due to a suspicious object. Unfortunately, the DCOs in charge of the holding room had not been informed of the evacuation and were totally unaware until one of them went outside to find an empty arrivals hall. The Board has been assured that C&C managers are working with Border Force managers to ensure that protocols are in place, and known by all Border Force officers, so that in an emergency they remember to inform C&C immediately.

8 Fair, humane and equal treatment

Access to information

8.1 C&C have provided information for detainees in 17 different official languages both on paper and also displayed on video, one language at a time, on information screens in the holding rooms. Unfortunately the video equipment in Terminal 2 has never been installed so the video information is unavailable there. The video presentation is commendably professional. Unfortunately, when we last checked, it took nearly 30 minutes to scroll through all the pages in all of the languages offered. We doubt that many detainees will have the patience to watch the screen for long enough for the information in their language to appear. This is a shame as it is otherwise a very good initiative. Its usefulness would be considerably improved if some way could be found to make the languages selectable.

8.2 In each of the holding rooms there is a pack of laminated A4 cards explaining the role of the IMB translated into each of the standard languages. Board members have found these cards invaluable when talking to detainees, facilitating questions and responses in regard to basic welfare.

8.3 Aware that detainees cannot always absorb or remember all of the information given during the induction, we suggest that pictograms illustrating key points from the induction process, such as the availability of hot meals, drinks, pillows, blankets and phone calls would be helpful to settle detainees and to encourage them to request the facilities to which they are entitled.

8.4 Complaint forms that can be sent to the Home Office are available in the official languages. The Board has suggested to the Home Office that Russian is added because detainees coming from many of the former Soviet countries can often understand Russian.

Complaints

8.5 The Home Office provides the Board with details of the complaints received from those detained at Heathrow and those being removed from the airport. C&C's

investigations into 13 of these were concluded during the year; one outstanding case concerns detainee welfare. We examined the comprehensive written responses to the complainants. The concluded investigations fell into three broad categories:

- Excessive use of force or assault. None of the five complaints was upheld after detailed investigation by C&C of CCTV, paper records and interviews of relevant staff members. In those cases where C&C reported the case to the Metropolitan Police, C&C's response to the complainant records that the police had closed their file with no action taken.
- Missing or damaged property and money. Of the five complaints two were substantiated and one partly so. In these cases, compensation was offered.
- Welfare and facilities. Of the three concluded complaints concerning welfare and facilities, one was partially upheld when a detainee was unable to sleep due to the noise of external building works being undertaken at Heathrow Terminal 2 during the night.

8.6 The Board concludes that investigations into complaints were generally conducted in a thorough and fair manner and that the conclusions reached were justified by the evidence provided.

Access to legal advice

8.7 In previous years we have expressed concern that arriving passengers detained by Border Force and wishing to avail themselves of independent legal advice lacked adequate information about how to access such services. The Board is very pleased to report that the Home Office eventually acted on our recommendation. Legal advice sheets listing the phone numbers of legal advice centres and local solicitors are now provided in all the holding rooms. DCOs ensure that they are put up on the walls next to the telephone and are regularly updated.

Access to Wi-Fi and the internet

8.8 The Board finds it unsatisfactory that, despite previous recommendations, detainees still have no direct access to the internet. The internet is an essential communication tool for both text and voice-based communication such as WhatsApp to contact family, friends and employers. While one or two of the holding room offices can receive mobile data or Wi-Fi connections and DCOs can assist detainees to use WhatsApp on their own devices, other holding rooms have no such connection and this use is only ever limited. Board members have observed distressed detainees who have no means of contacting their families.

8.9 As is common practice now, many detainees have details of their travel arrangements, bank accounts and other personal information stored electronically. These detainees have no opportunity in the holding room to prepare this information for their Border Force interview. The Board repeats the recommendation that, even if it takes place under supervision of the DCOs, detainees should have access to Wi-Fi and the internet.

Multi-faith prayer rooms and sacred texts

8.10 The newest holding rooms in Terminals 3 and 4 both have multi-faith rooms adjacent to the main holding rooms. These have seats, a qibla and a cupboard containing prayer mats and a selection of sacred books relevant to many faiths. Cayley House has quiet rooms situated off both the male and the female/family holding room which are suitable for prayer, contemplation or quiet rest. While there are no separate quiet rooms in Terminals 2 or 5, prayer mats and sacred books are available in these holding rooms and we are pleased to report that these are now normally kept respectfully in cupboards. DCOs have received diversity training and they are generally aware of the particular requirements of major religions and cultures.

8.11 In last year's report the Board noted that there was no consistency between the terminals regarding the selection of sacred books and we did not know whether they were appropriate for those following major religions. Also, we suggested that the books be labelled in English so that those unfamiliar with the original languages could identify what texts were, or were not, being provided. Following our suggestion the Home Office has informed us that they have undertaken a review of the sacred books in all STHFs and taken advice from an IRC chaplain. Although the pandemic has taken priority, we trust that they will in due course supply all holding rooms with an appropriate set of sacred books.

Dietary requirements

8.12 In addition to snacks and fresh fruit, microwaveable hot meals are available, including vegetarian meals. In each terminal there is a list stating which meals are halal. Kosher meals are available too.

Support for people with disabilities

8.13 The DCOs are well-trained in this respect and the Board has not reported any issues of concern this year.

9 Health and wellbeing

General health issues

9.1 If a detained person is demonstrably unwell, one of the London Ambulance Service's paramedics who patrol the airport can be summoned. If there is any doubt as to the person's condition they are taken to hospital. The Board has seen many examples of good practice by DCOs seeking outside help and advice when this is necessary.

Accessing medication

9.2 As the Board has reported over the last four years, members are seriously concerned by the policy of denying detainees in the holding rooms access to their own prescribed medication. This policy applies to all STHFs. In the last few months

the Home Office and NHS England have appointed a pharmacist to examine the relevant situations faced in the holding rooms and to provide solutions which will enable detainees to access their medication and also, hopefully, allow them to be given over-the counter medication such as paracetamol for headaches. As requested by the pharmacist, this Board has provided several case studies to illustrate some of the difficulties faced by detainees and those looking after them.

9.3 During this year too, members have observed detainees growing anxious or upset because they could not access their medication.

- *In July 2020 a female from Russia was worried that she could not access her blood pressure medication. She was sent overnight to Colnbrook IRC where she could see a doctor.*
- *In August 2020 an anxious young man from the USA told DCOs that he was on a lot of medication, some of it three times per day. Although he had been given food, he did not have access to his Irritable Bowel Syndrome medication, which worried him. He was in detention for four and a half hours in addition to time spent in the CWA.*
- *Also in August a young woman from Iran indicated six different medications that were in her baggage, for anxiety and other conditions. She was observed telling a Border Force officer that she was in discomfort, pointing to her stomach, and asking for her medication. She was detained for at least 11 hours.*

For some the surprise of finding themselves in detention can exacerbate a condition of anxiety. Not having ready access to their usual medication can further aggravate their symptoms.

9.4 The Board was previously told that the pharmacist would report back with possible solutions in February but there seems to have been further slippage on the date. We would urge the Home Office to move quickly to choose solutions and put them in place once the report is received.

9.5 Meanwhile the DCOs provide cool strips for detainees complaining of headaches and Nicorette lozenges as a nicotine substitute for those wanting to smoke.

Mental health issues

9.6 The Board has not been made aware of any cases of detainees with mental health issues having particularly long stays in detention during this reporting year.

9.7 Board members have observed DCOs paying particular attention to detainees with mental health concerns.

- *A distressed middle-aged American woman, whose records showed that she suffered from depression, was being helped by the DCOs to make a phone call to her daughter. The DCOs were clearly trying to help her feel at ease. When*

she felt unwell, they immediately offered to call paramedics, which she refused. In due course she was observed chatting to the DCOs more calmly. This was a sensitive interaction which diffused a potentially difficult situation.

(See also 7.12 - 7.15.)

10 Transportation

10.1 C&C are contracted to supply transport for detainees being taken from the holding rooms to IRCs. They also take detainees from IRCs and from prisons to the airport when they are to be removed from the UK or are returning to the airport for interview. A separate firm called Clearsprings supplies transport to take those seeking asylum to asylum accommodation.

10.2 For taking a detainee to the airport for removal, the contract states that the person due to be removed should arrive at the airport no earlier than five hours before departure time. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic has led to many changes resulting in longer waits for detainees. C&C provided several reasons for detainees to be brought to the airport more than five hours pre-departure, including the following:

- Wilson James, the facility outside the airport where baggage search takes place, has been closed each night during the pandemic. Greatly reduced opening hours has sometimes resulted in removees on early morning flights being brought to the airport the day before. Similarly those booked to travel on late evening flights have arrived at Cayley House more than five hours before flight departure.
- Prison release times are strictly limited and if a person being released for removal cannot be moved overnight to an IRC, they have to arrive early at the airport. For example, in January 2021, a man arrived at 8.55pm the previous evening for a 5.05pm flight, having a wait of 20 hours.
- On a busy day a large number of detainees have to be collected for flights at similar times. Due to Covid restrictions, each van can only transport two passengers at a time. On 21 January 2021, 17 passengers had to be collected from IRCs and taken through baggage search and delivered to the airport for removal flights between 2.50pm and 6.00pm.

10.3 If a passenger is refused entry to the UK, and has to return to where their flight departed, this can lead to a long wait for the carrying airline. With far fewer flights, detainees have had to wait far longer, frequently over 24 hours. Heathrow STHF does have a detention time limit of 24 hours, unless there are exceptional circumstances. (The pandemic is an exceptional circumstance.) However, if there is sufficient time before the flight, detainees may be taken to Heathrow IRC to allow them to rest or sleep.

10.4 In previous years the Board has reported that detainees have been taken to the IRC and then been brought back to the airport after unacceptably brief stays. The

Board has not found examples of this during the reporting year, although this sort of information is not easily available to members conducting remote monitoring. We hope that last year's recommendation has been taken up and that Border Force, the Home Office and C&C have worked out a protocol to prevent the journeys to the IRC for very short stays.

11 Removals

11.1 The Board monitors the removal of detainees from the United Kingdom through Heathrow Airport up to the point when the aircraft door is closed. Some of these people fly 'unescorted' in the sense that they are brought from an IRC to Cayley House, are taken to the aircraft by DCOs and then fly by themselves. These are known as in-country removals and the vast majority of these are completed successfully. Any problems that occur are likely to be at Cayley House if the person refuses to go, perhaps because there are continuing legal proceedings. They will then be returned to detention without any further attempt being made to remove them at that point.

11.2 Other detainees are escorted during the flight to their final destination, wherever in the world that may be. These are known as overseas escorted (OSE) removals and usually take place because the person may have refused to go voluntarily, is assessed as presenting a risk to themselves or to others, or is being deported having served a prison sentence for a serious offence. The escorting team usually comprises a lead and two or more other escorts, plus somebody with medical training if there are any anticipated health-related issues. The team is usually larger for longer journeys or if it is anticipated that the removal will be problematic. The procedure is for the team to collect the detainee from the IRC and stay with them throughout the journey until they reach their destination airport.

11.3 Before the pandemic, to monitor an OSE removal a Board member would try to meet the removal party at Wilson James, the off-site baggage search facility. Practice over several years has been for the Board member to travel in the van, where they are able to observe the interaction between the escorts and the detainee, so observing the latter's demeanour and the way they are treated. They continue to observe the removal during the boarding of the aircraft and the seating of the detainee, before leaving the aircraft themselves. With the introduction of new vans with weight restrictions, meeting the escort party at Wilson James has become less frequent and, for many monitoring visits, the first time a member meets the detainee and escorts is in the van at the aircraft stand, an hour or so before aircraft departure. During the pandemic, when social distancing prohibited a member from travelling in the van, monitoring has taken place only at the aircraft stand.

Failed removals due to administrative errors and Covid test requirements

11.4 Occasionally there were administration errors which prevented removals from taking place. Detainees arrived at Cayley House to find that travel documents were

missing, or the removal had been booked for another day. This is disappointing and potentially stressful for the person already prepared for their return to find themselves returned to an IRC until another removal flight is booked.

- *In December a man had arrived at Cayley House from prison expecting a flight home. Unfortunately, his passport and other documents had been left at the prison and he could not depart. He was upset and frustrated.*
- *Also in December a man arrived from Heathrow IRC, but could not fly. The log started that there was the “wrong name on booking”. He was then taken to Brook House IRC.*

11.5 During the pandemic the requirement for proof of a Covid negative test before flying has presented another hurdle. This has not been helped by ever-changing requirements by individual airlines. The Home Office have done their best to ensure that removees have the correct Covid documents before travelling to the airport, but unfortunately detainees have arrived, only to find that their documentation is unsatisfactory or missing.

Use of Force

11.6 If a removee is resistant to being removed, the escorts are authorised to use waist restraint belts (WRBs) to restrain the use of arms, leg restraints, and rigid handcuffs and to apply pain to gain compliance. The primary and most important technique used by the escorts is to talk to the removee, explaining exactly what will happen at each stage of the removal. Engaging in conversation is a method of stemming their understandable anxiety about what will happen when they return to their own country. It is also a way of gaining the detainee’s cooperation.

- *After two previous failed attempts of removing a man to Mogadishu, for one of which his behaviour had caused the taxiing aircraft to return, much planning had been put into a third attempt. The Board member, who met the detainee and escorts in the van by the aircraft stand, observed that while the detainee was in a WRB, there was a lot of ongoing conversation between the escorts and detainee. Before boarding, the aircraft captain was briefed and escorts spent time explaining and re-assuring the other passengers. Unusually there were police in attendance too. On this third occasion the man was cooperative and the removal was successful. The Board member commented that this removal had been satisfactorily managed.*
- *Monitoring from Wilson James, the Board member observed a non-compliant removee being given ample opportunity to use a phone, with a translation app, to talk to his solicitor. The escorts did keep talking and explained to the man that if he would not walk to the aircraft, he would be carried. At boarding he was resistant, leg restraints were applied and the man was carried onto the aircraft. Despite his resistance, both verbal and physical, the removal was successful.*

While it is never pleasant to monitor this, it is the Board's opinion, based on their observations of the use of such manoeuvres in a few cases this year, that the use of force was reasonable, necessary and proportionate to effect a legal removal.

11.7 The pandemic restriction severely limited the Board's ability to monitor removals this year. While there had been 46 monitored removals last year there were just six this year. Of these, three required use of force.

11.8 The Board did not monitor any family removals. Just two family removals took place from Heathrow during the year.

11.9 The difficulty with monitoring removals has led the Board to a method of remote monitoring. The Board has requested the Home Office to provide them with a list of the removals, both successful and unsuccessful, from Heathrow each month. They will select a number of cases and request the personal escort records (PERs) and, where relevant, the use of force records (UoFs) for each of them. This initiative began in January 2021 with eleven case records being inspected. Most were satisfactorily managed and were completed successfully including one involving the appropriate use of a force. A few raised issues of concern, for example, regarding the length of time spent waiting at the airport and a last minute need to locate a voluntary resettlement grant (in the form of a payment card) for a detainee. In another case where a detainee was removed through the Channel Tunnel, it would appear that poor communication with the French authorities led to the removal failing and the person having to be brought back to the United Kingdom. The case also raised concerns about the number of hours escorts had to spend in the van with the detainee, in apparent contradiction of C&C's requirements related to social distancing.

London City Airport

12 Description of the short-term holding facilities

12.1 A Board member conducted one monitoring visit to the London City Airport (LCY) holding room in February 2020. In March the airport closed to traffic because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it did not reopen to international traffic until 10 July. Since then the number of flights and the volume of passenger traffic through the airport has remained very limited. The Board recommenced monitoring of the holding room by telephone in August and undertook physical visits in September and October. In November we reverted to telephone monitoring with the emergence of the second Covid-19 wave.

12.2 Passengers arriving at the airport may be detained on the authority of Border Force on behalf of the Home Secretary. There are several types of detainee in the holding room: arriving passengers who are in the process of being questioned by Border Force officers or who have been refused entry and are awaiting transport for detention in an IRC; asylum seekers who are awaiting transportation to asylum accommodation or to an IRC for detention; passengers who have been refused entry and are being removed; and detainees from other places of detention in the UK who are being removed.

12.3 The Home Office contracts the management of the holding rooms to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C). The holding room opening times are:

Weekdays: 7.00am – 10.00pm

Saturday: 7.00am – 3.00pm

Sunday: 10.00am – 10.00pm

There is no overnight detention, but if detainees arrive late in the evening, DCOs or Border Force officers stay with them until transport arrives to collect them.

Accommodation

12.4 For the first half of the year the airport's holding facility was as described in the Board's Annual Report for 2019-2020. Situated on the ground floor of the main airport building, close to the Border Force office area, the old holding facility comprised an oppressively small holding room which also functioned as the reception/office area for the DCOs, and an even smaller family room adjacent to it. There was no natural light. The rooms were cramped, with too much furniture and too little storage space. The whole facility was claustrophobic and airless. Next to the main holding room and opposite to the family room was a unisex toilet, with a small wash basin. There was no shower.

12.5 At the end of August 2020 the holding facility moved to a new location on the first floor of the airport building. This is said to be a temporary facility, but nevertheless it is a considerable improvement on the previous accommodation.

12.6 The new facility comprises a central DCOs' office, reception, search and kitchenette area; this is flanked on one side by a male holding room; and on the other side by a family holding room. All three rooms are directly accessed from a single, secure, corridor. There is no direct access from the DCOs' office into the holding rooms on either side. The holding rooms are separated from the DCOs' room by semi-glazed partitions which provide the DCOs with a good view into the rooms.

12.7 There is a small multi-faith room accessed through a door off the male holding room. This can be monitored using CCTV.

12.8 Separately, there are two small storage rooms off the external corridor for food supplies and other stores, and for detainees' baggage.

12.9 The new male and family holding rooms are mirror images of each other, although the configuration of the furniture is different. They feel reasonably light and airy, despite having no access to natural light. Overall, the floor plan for the two rooms is square, but in each room one corner is taken up with a large toilet and shower room. The remaining seating area therefore has a rather awkward L-shaped layout and is less spacious than it might ideally have been. At the levels of occupancy experienced in recent times this should not pose a problem. However, the rooms could become crowded if the number of detainees increases significantly in future with more stringent border checks on short-haul European arrivals and an increase in traffic through the airport.

12.10 The toilet/shower room off the family holding room is equipped with accessible facilities for wheelchair users.

12.11 Each of the main holding rooms has two blocks of seats, with four and two seats respectively. There is also a rectangular table in each room, with two hard benches along the long sides – each of which might accommodate two persons in non-socially distanced times. The multi-faith room has a single chair and a bookcase to hold the sacred books.

12.12 In the male holding room the block of four seats is located in the narrowest part of the room and faces directly on to a blank wall not very far away. This could be quite claustrophobic and unpleasant for detainees sitting in these seats for more than a very short time. These seats are also located directly underneath the TV screen, which is therefore out of sight for anyone sitting there.

12.13 Board members made two visits to the new holding rooms shortly after they opened and noted a number of snagging items which needed to be dealt with. The Board has been assured that many of these items have been resolved. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, we have been unable to visit in person to check the recent

status. Suffice it to say that none of these items would have materially affected detainees' welfare except for one safety issue referred to in 16.1 below.

12.14 The showers in the new holding rooms are likely to be used by detainees infrequently. Given the long-running difficulties that we have experienced with legionella contamination in the showers in the London Heathrow Airport holding rooms, we are concerned that there is a similar risk for the LCY showers. We trust that suitable maintenance and operational procedures are being put in place to avoid this. We are also concerned that there appears to be only minimal ventilation in the toilet/shower rooms, posing a risk that they may become damp, humid and malodorous.

Food and drink

12.15 There is no drinks machine in the new facility. Hot drinks are prepared using a kettle. There are the standard microwaveable meals and snacks, including crisps, biscuits and fruit pots. Understandably, fresh fruit may not be provided during periods of low occupancy. The DCOs have petty cash to purchase fresh food and sandwiches from the airport shops (when they are open) to suit the requirements of the detainees.

Access to telephones

12.16 For security reasons, detainees are not allowed to retain their smartphones which contain cameras. There is now a payphone in each holding room to receive incoming calls. In addition, detainees can be given a mobile phone for both UK and international calls to contact their families and friends.

Amenities

12.17 The Board welcomes the fact that several fold-out mattresses have been provided in the new facility, for the first time at LCY. However, there would be limited space to lay these out if more than one person wanted to sleep in each holding room. For those wishing to rest on the mattresses, there are pillows, sheets and blankets available.

12.18 For detainees needing warm clothing, there is a stock of new quilted jackets in addition to jogging bottoms and other items of emergency clothing.

Access to Wi-Fi and the internet

12.19 The London City Airport public Wi-Fi is accessible in the new holding facility. Although internet access is available on the DCOs' computer, it cannot be used by the detainees. In some instances, such as booking return flights, Border Force will provide internet access to a detainee in one of their interview rooms.

12.20 The Board continues to find it unsatisfactory that detainees have no routine access to the internet. The internet is an essential communication tool for both text

and voice-based communication such as WhatsApp to contact family, friends and employers.

12.21 As is common practice now, many detainees have details of their travel arrangements, bank accounts and other personal information stored electronically. These detainees have no opportunity in the holding room to prepare this information for their Border Force interview. The Board recommends that, even if it takes place under supervision of the DCOs, detainees should have access to the internet.

13 Fair and humane treatment by staff

Border Force officers

13.1 Border Force officers bring each detainee to the holding room with an IS91 form, authorising detention.

13.2 On the rare occasion when there are too many detainees to be held together in the holding room, Border Force will keep some detainees in their interview rooms. This arrangement also works if one detainee needs to be separated from another, whether due to vulnerability or for another reason.

Detainee Custody officers

13.3 There is always meant to be at least one male and one female DCO on duty at any time. Exceptionally, we found on one occasion that there were two male DCOs on duty due to sickness issues with female officers. If a female detainee was admitted they would have asked for assistance from Border Force.

13.4 Board members' visits to LCY have rarely coincided with times when detainees were present. The few interactions that have been observed indicated that the DCOs treat the detainees kindly, and with respect, and that they make them as comfortable as possible.

14 The adult detainee population

14.1 The detention services contractor C&C provides monthly data detailing the number of detainees and their length of stay. In the twelve-month period (February 2020 to January 2021) a total of 47 persons were detained at London City Airport (2019/20 – 253). The vast majority – 91% (43 persons) – stayed between 0 and 8 hours. Just two detainees were held for more than 12 hours.

14.2 Of the 47 persons detained in the twelve-month period, 17 were detained in the month of February 2020, in line with the monthly average for the previous 12 months. There was one detainee in March, but none in the period April to mid-July when the airport was closed to international flights. Since the airport re-opened to limited international traffic in mid-July, there has been an average of 4-5 detainees per month.

15 Children in families and unaccompanied children

15.1 By law every person under the age of 18 is deemed to be a child. The DCOs complete a paper copy of a Child Care Plan for each child, which names the DCO responsible for that child, whether or not a parent is also present. The DCO must also check on the child every 15 minutes and record this on MEDS, their electronic records system. They also record the child's activities such as eating a meal, playing with toys, watching a DVD or sleeping.

15.2 There were no minors detained in the LCY holding facilities in the twelve-month reporting period.

Family room facilities, toys and activities for children

15.3 There are boxes containing toys, books and DVDs. The selection of books is suitable for a variety of ages, including some bilingual books.

16 Safety

16.1 DCOs expressed concern to the Board that the low-level shower hose in the new family room toilet/shower could potentially be used as a ligature. We were assured by the Home Office that the whole facility has been risk-assessed. However, we remain to be convinced that this hose does not constitute a self-harm hazard. The emergency bell-pull rope was also considered to be a potential hazard but this has now been dealt with.

16.2 The principal safety concern in the period since March 2020 has been Covid-19 precautions. From what we have been told by DCOs, and from what we have observed on our limited visits, the risks at LCY have been lower than we have observed at other locations. Of course, this has been assisted by the very low throughput of detainees.

16.3 We were informed that everyone entering the airport from airside and landside was being temperature-tested. A further temperature check was being done on detainees entering the holding room.

16.4 The DCOs have reported that they have good stocks of PPE (masks, gloves, aprons) and of hand sanitiser. Detainees are asked to wear masks, and new masks are provided.

16.5 The Board was initially advised that the number of detainees in the old holding facility would be limited during the pandemic to one individual or 'bubble'. This was reasonable. Subsequently we were told that agreement had been reached that up to six persons at any one time could be detained. This was grossly excessive for the old facility.

16.6 The new holding facility provides more space for detainees. Although occupancy of the holding rooms has been very limited to date, the present configuration of the seating would make it difficult for social distancing to be

maintained if more than four detainees who are not in a family 'bubble' have to be accommodated at any one time. We do not know what number, if any, has been agreed as the Covid-adjusted maximum capacity of the new holding rooms.

16.7 All drinking fountains have been taped off and are out of use.

17 Fair, humane and equal treatment

17.1 Some sacred books and a prayer mat are available for detainees of different faiths. Sacred books are treated with respect and kept separately from secular books and magazines. A Board member reported:

- *When one of the DCOs was showing me round, he decided that the magazines should not be on one of the shelves beneath the sacred books and moved them to lie on the table in the main family room. His comment "some people might have become upset about where they were." I think this was an appropriate action.*

17.2 Vegetarian and halal meals are available and other dietary requirements can be purchased by DCOs from airport shops (when they are open).

17.3 There is access to Big Word interpretation. We have not yet observed whether a dual handset phone has been provided in the new facility as we have previously recommended.

17.4 A translation tablet is now available in the holding facility.

- *The DCOs told me that this had already proved its worth as they had used it to assist in communication with ... detainees So far they had found that the text facility was better than the speech facility.*
- *The tablet was being used, for example, to explain to detainees the handcuffing process when they are leaving.*

17.5 We have previously commented adversely on the lack of access to legal advice for incoming passengers who are detained. We are very pleased to note that lists of local immigration lawyers and their contact details are now being provided in the airport holding rooms.

17.6 We are pleased to note that provision has been made for a wheelchair-accessible shower and toilet in the new holding facility. As the facility is on the first floor of the building, the normal means of access from/to the arrivals area on the ground floor is via a flight of stairs. However, a lift is available.

18 Health and wellbeing

18.1 If a detainee falls ill in the holding room, the DCOs call 111 for advice or they call the London Ambulance Service. The Board have not been informed of any such instances during the period they have been monitoring.

Accessing medication

18.2 The Board continues to be seriously concerned by the policy of denying detainees in the holding rooms access to their own prescribed medication and to over-the-counter medications such as paracetamol. While steps have been taken by the Home Office in the past year to appoint a pharmacist to find a solution to this problem, as yet no practical measures have been implemented to address detainees' needs or to mitigate the risks to their health and welfare. The Board was previously told that the pharmacist would report back with possible solutions in February but there seems to have been further slippage on the date. Once the report is received, we would urge the Home Office to move quickly to choose solutions and put them in place.

18.3 Cool strips are available to apply to foreheads to ease headaches. Nicotine lozenges are also available for smokers.

19 Transportation

19.1 Detainees seeking asylum are collected by the transport firm Clearsprings to take them to asylum accommodation. Detainees who are being taken to IRCs are picked up by C&C who have the escorting contract.

Handcuffing

19.2 Board members did not have the opportunity to observe a detainee being escorted from the new holding facility to a vehicle for transport to an IRC. However, we were shown the route taken during such movements, which includes passing through the public arrivals area of the airport.

19.3 We were informed by the DCOs that it is standard practice for the majority of detainees to be handcuffed during these movements unless they have a disability restricting their movement. Handcuffing is a degrading and distressing process for the majority of passengers who will never have experienced this before. The Home Office and C&C have both confirmed to us that their policy is that handcuffing a detainee is never a matter of course and that a DCO will always conduct a dynamic risk assessment when it comes to escorting a detainee through a public area.

19.4 We accept that a few detainees will pose a genuine escape risk and that it will be necessary and proportionate to handcuff them. However, we find it implausible that truly objective risk assessments could conclude that the majority of the detainees being moved from the LCY holding rooms might attempt to abscond. We also note from our observations that it is exceptionally rare for Border Force officers to handcuff detainees when escorting them through public areas at Heathrow Airport.

19.5 The Board recommends that C&C investigates its processes to ensure that a dynamic risk assessment is carried out on each individual before a decision to handcuff is made.

20 Removals

20.1 Board members have not observed any removals from the UK on flights from LCY.

Becket House Immigration Reporting Centre STHF

21 Description of the short-term holding facilities

21.1 Becket House is a Home Office immigration reporting centre in London SE1. The centre is used by immigration compliance and enforcement (ICE) arrest teams and Home Office caseworkers. People admitted to the country on immigration bail are required to report there at regular intervals. This may result in some of them being detained in the holding room, for example if it has been decided that they now should be removed. Other detainees will have been brought in by the ICE arrest teams. Nearly all of those detained will be taken to an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) later in the day but are likely to have to wait until early evening for transport to arrive, even if they have been detained during the morning. This leads to stays of up to eight hours, and in a small number of cases longer.

21.2 The holding room is open between 9.00am and 7.00pm daily. The DCOs stay until the last detainee is collected. There are no overnight stays.

21.3 Board members normally make unannounced visits to the holding room each month. Due to Covid-19, immigration reporting at reporting centres was suspended for much of 2020. Becket House was closed between 20 March and 29 July. The Board visited in February, September, and October 2020 with telephone monitoring in November 2020 and January 2021.

Accommodation

21.4 The holding room is entered via the DCOs' office, which is of a reasonable size. There are two separate holding rooms behind a glass-type screen, one for men and one for women, each with a maximum seating capacity of fifteen. They might best be compared to railway waiting rooms, with rows of upright seats lining the walls. The rooms are not expected to accommodate children and did not do so during the year under review.

21.5 There is a toilet cubicle with a wash basin at the end of each of the two rooms. The toilets are clean, although they lack seats and lids. There is usually a small supply of sanitary products in the female toilet.

Showers

21.6 The Board regards the lack of a shower in the current facility as an issue as the holding room may accommodate detainees who have been brought in from sleeping rough, who need to freshen themselves up, or who had not expected to be detained. We hope that this omission will be addressed in the design of the new facility (see 31.1).

Food and drink

21.7 Hot and cold drinks are available. There is a good supply of microwaveable meals, including halal and vegetarian. Within the holding room detainees can usually help themselves to snacks including crisps, biscuits, foil-wrapped croissants, and fresh fruit. Latterly the fresh fruit has been replaced by fruit pots.

Access to telephones

21.8 Detainees are not allowed to retain their smartphones which contain cameras for security reasons. There is a payphone in the holding room which can receive calls. Detainees can make telephone calls to their family, friends, and legal advisers.

Maintenance

21.9 We have not noted any significant maintenance issues. The facility is in good decorative order and, on the evidence of our visits, has been kept clean and tidy.

22 Fair and humane treatment by staff

Immigration Enforcement officers

22.1 Immigration Enforcement officers authorise the detention of people in the holding room while they wait for transport to take them to IRCs. Occasionally detainees are released from the holding room after enquiries have been satisfied.

22.2 The majority of the people detained at Becket House have been brought there by the ICE arrest teams, who have arrested them that day, often in their homes. Additionally, a few people who have come to the centre for their routine reporting are then detained. It may feel completely unexpected to those detained, even though they may have been warned that this could occur.

22.3 The Immigration Enforcement officers escort each detainee to the holding room after interview and produce the IS91, which is the written legal authority for detention.

Detainee Custody officers

22.4 The Home Office contracts the management of the holding room to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C). C&C are also contracted to transport detainees to and from IRCs. The contract states that they have up to eight hours in which to collect a detainee.

22.5 There are usually three DCOs on duty, with at least one male and one female at any one time. Board members have observed examples of particularly good care and concern for the welfare of detainees.

- *In the case of a male from Bangladesh, who spoke no English at all, the DCOs had sought the help of a Bengali speaking member of Border Force.*

They thought that direct human contact like this was far preferable to using the telephone.

- *An Iraqi Kurdish female had been very distressed on arrival in the holding room because she was fearful of being sent back to Iraq. The DCO told the Board member that she had spent time with her and had managed to comfort her. She was monitoring her on the CCTV and was talking to her regularly although she had little English.*

23 The detainee population

23.1 C&C supplies information monthly regarding the number of people in detention. Reflecting at least in part the closure of the facility from 20 March and 29 July 2020, and the further effects of Covid-19 on the operation of the reporting system, the number of detentions was approximately 20% of the previous year. A total of 200 persons, all adults, were detained in Becket House during the twelve-month reporting period, (compared with 1,066 in the previous year). Of these, 97% (92% in 2019) were detained for less than eight hours. No person was detained beyond 12 hours.

23.2 During the year six people were detained for over eight hours in Becket House, compared with 85 in the previous year. Two cases that we noted during our monitoring were:

- *In February 2020, two Albanian men had been brought in by the arrest team at 9.25am and went to detention at Brook House at 8.50pm, a stay of 11 hours 25 minutes.*
- *Also in February a man from Bangladesh had been in the holding room from 1.10pm to 10.00pm, a stay of 8 hours 50 minutes before going to detention at Brook House.*

The Board considers the former to be a particularly long waiting period in surroundings with only upright seating, and limited activities to help detainees pass the time. Before the pandemic, at times, the male holding room has been very full indeed. Given the limited size of the room this can be extremely uncomfortable for the detainees even for a few hours.

24 Safety

24.1 The holding room can reasonably be said to provide a safe environment. The Board is not aware of any incidents of self-harm during the year. The staff can keep detainees under observation, either directly or through CCTV.

24.2 While the toilets are lockable, they can be opened from the outside if necessary.

24.3 However, the holding rooms are quite small and feel airless, a matter of increased concern in the light of Covid-19, although the Home Office is satisfied that

there is adequate ventilation within the rooms. Detainees are unable to spend any time in the open air.

24.4 To ensure social distancing, seats in the holding room have been blocked off. When there are no female detainees the DCOs use both rooms for males. Thus far they confirm that the maximum has been two detainees in each room at any time. We were advised that this was their maximum number.

24.5 On our September 2020 visit we noted that in the DCO office there were at times three DCOs and two escorts which made the office feel crowded and not compliant with Covid distancing requirements.

24.6 The Home Office has confirmed that the holding rooms are cleaned thoroughly once a day when everyone has left the facility, and that if any detainee were to be symptomatic or suspected of having Covid-19 the room would be deep cleaned before anyone else was detained there.

24.7 In recent telephone monitoring the DCOs have confirmed that detainees are used to wearing masks, and that they put them on, of their own accord. They have a stock of masks to supply or to replenish detainees' own items.

25 Fair, humane and equal treatment

25.1 There is a speaker phone which is used for interpretation. This is not always readily available or thought appropriate by the DCOs who make alternative arrangements as in 22.5 above.

25.2 Sacred books and prayer mats are stored separately and respectfully, although we have on occasion noted secular literature being stored in the same cupboard as religious items.

25.3 Vegetarian and vegan food can be provided.

People with disabilities

25.4 The Board has not observed detainees with significant physical disabilities in the holding room this year.

Access to legal advice

25.5 We are very pleased to note that lists of local immigration lawyers and their phone numbers are now being provided in the holding room. Detainees can also contact their own lawyers by telephone, although they do not have email access. There is no Wi-Fi or internet access.

26 Health and wellbeing

26.1 If a detainee becomes ill while in the holding room, the DCOs call the London Ambulance service. They can also call the 111 help-line for advice.

26.2 As in all STHFs the DCOs may not allow detainees access to their own prescribed medication or to common non-prescription medication such as paracetamol. The Board was told that a pharmacist had been appointed to find possible solutions to the problem. A report was expected in February but there seems to have been further slippage on the date. Once the report is received, we would urge the Home Office to move quickly to choose solutions and put them in place.

27 Transportation

27.1 C&C are contracted to transport detainees from the holding room to IRCs. The contract with the Home Office allows them up to eight hours from the issue of a movement order in which to collect the detainee.

27.2 The eight-hour contractual window for transport of detainees means some inevitable long waits in a crowded and uncomfortable room, which may be detrimental to the welfare of the detainees.

27.3 Vans arriving to take detainees from Becket House to IRCs park just outside the holding room exit in a secure car park, which means that there is no need for restraints to be used when detainees leave the holding room and enter the van.

28 New accommodation

28.1 The Board was informed in January 2020 that the Becket House building was due to be vacated in September 2020 and that the Home Office was planning to move the reporting centre and the STHF to new facilities in East London near to the Excel Centre. This has not yet happened.

28.2 A move date remains indeterminate while the Home Office progresses a Change of Use application for the relevant part of the premises. As stated in last year's report, the Board hopes that the move will lead to improved facilities for the detainees.

Eaton House Immigration Reporting Centre

29 Description of the short-term holding facilities

29.1 The Board has been responsible for monitoring the STHF in Eaton House since 2018. Until the beginning of March 2020, Board members conducted monthly monitoring visits. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown the reporting centre was closed between 20 March and 10 August 2020. After this, monitoring visits took place in September and December. Remote monitoring by telephone was conducted in November 2020 and January 2021.

29.2 Eaton House is a Home Office immigration reporting centre in Hounslow, West London. It is situated within a large four storey office block, which houses Border Force staff and acts as a base for regional Immigration Enforcement arrest teams. It also provides reception and interview facilities for individuals who are required to report to the centre. The holding room within is staffed from Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 7.00pm.

29.3 The current holding room is on the ground floor at the western end of the building. It is immediately adjacent to a secondary entry/exit door to the building which is used by escorts who are removing detainees to their vehicles to take them to IRCs. The door opens to an open car parking area which is designated as insecure.

Accommodation

29.4 The facility is entered via the DCOs' office/reception area which is adjacent to the holding room. The DCOs on duty have a good view of the holding room through a glazed partition. However, this area is very cramped. It has a floor area of about 30m² but it holds a desk, office and easy chairs for three DCOs, a large drinks machine (which has been out of order since October), microwave, filing and storage. There is no separate search area, and a portable screen is used for privacy.

29.5 The holding room itself has windows and so benefits from natural light. However, the external windows do not open and so there is a lack of natural ventilation. There is one fixed table in the room with four seats around it and banks of three and four seats respectively arranged along two walls, a total of 11 seats.

29.6 Covid protection measures mean that half the seats and the table are now out of use to facilitate safer spacing for detainees and the maximum capacity of the holding room is reduced to four detainees at any one time. There are signs on the floor and seats to encourage distancing. There is a new, wipeable bean bag. A bookshelf holds sacred books, secular books and magazines.

29.7 This small room, with an effective area for seating and circulation of only approximately 28m², has to accommodate both men and women. An already

cramped space is now inadequate for the social distancing required if more than four detainees are held there.

29.8 On one side of the holding room there are adjacent male and female toilet cubicles, with doors that open directly into the holding room. There are handwashing facilities in the cubicles. The female toilet has good supplies of sanitary products.

Showers

29.9 The lack of a shower in the current facility is a serious issue as the holding room sometimes has to accommodate detainees who have been brought in from sleeping rough. A supply of emergency clothing is available if required.

Food and drink

29.10 Since October the drinks machine has been out of order so the DCOs have made hot drinks for detainees using the office kettle. Cold drinks are also available. There is always a good supply of microwaveable meals, including halal and vegetarian. Should kosher meals be required, the DCOs have petty cash to purchase acceptable food locally. Within the holding room detainees can help themselves to snacks including crisps, biscuits, and fruit.

- *There were good supplies of the usual hot and cold drinks available together with a supply of microwaveable foods recognising the limited lengths of stay for most detainees. There was also a good supply of fresh fruit and various snacks in packets.*

Amenities

29.11 A daily newspaper is supplied. There is also a small supply of magazines. Detainees are not allowed to smoke but nicotine lozenges are available.

Access to telephones

29.12 For security reasons, detainees are not allowed to retain their smartphones which contain cameras. A payphone is available in the holding room which can receive calls. There is a plentiful supply of basic mobile phones which detainees can use with their own SIM-cards.

- *There was a good supply of mobile phones for detainees to use – 14 for UK calls only, one for overseas calls.*

Maintenance

29.13 The Board was informed that during this reporting year a small number of maintenance issues had arisen but, with the exception of the drinks machine, these had been remedied in a timely manner. The facility is in good decorative order and, on the evidence of our visits, it is kept clean and tidy.

30 Fair and humane treatment by staff

Immigration Enforcement officers

30.1 Immigration Enforcement officers authorise the detention of people in the holding room while they wait for transport to take them to IRCs. Occasionally detainees are released from the holding room after enquiries have been satisfied.

30.2 The majority of the people detained at Eaton House have been brought there by immigration compliance and enforcement (ICE) arrest teams, who have arrested them that day in the community, often in their homes. Additionally, a few people who have come to the centre for their routine reporting are then detained. To those detained it may feel completely unexpected, even though they may have been warned that this could occur.

30.3 The Immigration Enforcement officers escort each detainee to the holding room after interview and produce the IS91 which is the written legal authority for detention. Board members have observed a good working relationship between immigration officers and detainee custody officers.

Detainee Custody Officers

30.4 There are three DCOs, two males and one female on duty throughout the day. For the three DCOs usually on duty, this is their main place of work and they take pride in their role. The IMB has not been able to observe any inductions over this reporting year but our observations of interaction between DCOs and detainees have been positive. The DCOs at Eaton House appear to be professional and friendly in their attitude to detainees.

- *He said that he had been well-looked after in the holding room and that the DCOs had been 'very nice'.*

31 The detainee population

31.1 The Home Office contracts the management of the holding room to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C). C&C are also contracted to transport detainees to and from IRCs.

31.2 C&C supplies information monthly, regarding the number of people in detention. During the twelve-month reporting year from February 2020 to January 2021 inclusive, 181 individuals were detained at Eaton House. Ninety-six percent of these stayed between 0 and 8 hours. Seven individuals stayed between 8 and 12 hours and no-one stayed over 12 hours. In the previous reporting year (2019-20) 1,079 individuals were detained, so this year has seen a very sharp decline in numbers of detainees held at Eaton House. For the months of April, May June, July and January there were no detentions at all.

32 Safety

32.1 Covid-19 precautions are in place and operated in accordance with C&C rules and requirements. Cleaning is carried out daily by external contractors and by the DCOs following occupation by detainees. It was noted in January 2021 that a good supply of PPE equipment was available. The holding room staff were observed to be wearing face masks during an IMB visit in December 2020.

- *Everywhere was thoroughly cleaned and the DCOs are very much aware of their Covid responsibilities in maintaining cleanliness. For example: when detainees leave, tables and chairs are all immediately re-cleaned and sanitised as are pens, books, and the telephone.*

32.2 In November 2020 there was a self-harm incident of which the Board was promptly informed. A detainee had self-harmed using a blade which had been secreted within his mouth. The DCOs were quick to react and the man was taken to West Middlesex Hospital, from where he was discharged after two hours and taken to an IRC. The Board has been informed that C&C have considered the circumstances of the incident and the detainee's behaviour beforehand to try to prevent such incidents in future.

32.3 The self-harm incident involved the spillage of a quantity of blood in the holding room. Some routine cleaning took place immediately afterwards, but the Board were concerned to learn that an 'administrative fault' had delayed specialist cleaning staff entering the reporting centre, resulting in the deep clean only taking place several days later.

33 Fair, humane and equal treatment

33.1 Detaining men and women who are not related in the same room can be problematic. The greatest concern is that there is no separate safe space for women. The fact that the toilets open straight on to the holding room also leads to a lack of privacy. New, larger holding rooms were originally planned for 2020 but have been postponed due to the pandemic. These would give more privacy for detainees and provide a shower.

33.2 As mentioned above, different dietary requirements can be accommodated.

People with disabilities

33.3 The Board has not observed detainees with significant physical disabilities in the holding room. No problems have been reported to the board.

Access to legal advice

33.4 Detainees can get in touch with their own lawyers by telephone but they do not have email access. There is no Wi-Fi or internet access. Following an IMB recommendation, a poster displaying contact numbers for legal services is displayed on the holding room wall and is regularly updated.

- *The new legal advice notices were posted on the wall next to the telephone. Apparently they are changed regularly (weekly) to update the list of advisers.*

34 Health and wellbeing

34.1 If a detainee becomes ill while in the holding room, the DCOs call the London Ambulance service.

34.2 As in all STHFs the DCOs cannot allow detainees access to their own prescribed medication or to common non-prescription medication such as paracetamol. The board eagerly awaits the roll out of the allocated pharmacist scheme, which we expect to be available to Eaton House staff.

- *... a Filipino male, ... was awaiting a pick-up to go to detention in an IRC. His IS91 recorded that he was carrying pain killers for an old injury to his foot. The DCOs advised that he hadn't requested any medication and that they wouldn't be able to let him have it if he did.*

35 Transportation

35.1 C&C are contracted to transport detainees from the holding room to IRCs. The contract with the Home Office allows them up to eight hours from the issue of a movement order in which to collect the detainees.

Handcuffing

35.2 The Board's recommendation in our 2020 annual report was for DCOs to be encouraged to only use handcuffs when a full risk assessment supports their use. A guiding hand and a secure fenced area up to the van were recommended. Due to the limitations of monitoring this year, the Board is not yet able to ascertain if there has been any change in practice but we repeat the recommendation that the detention contractor is recommended to reinforce the briefing of its escort crews to ensure that restraints are applied only when a dynamic risk assessment indicates that it is necessary and proportionate to do so.

36 New accommodation

36.1 The planned new holding rooms have not progressed and building work had not yet started in February 2021. The Board believes this new accommodation is urgently needed and we recommend building work starts as soon as is practically possible.

37 The work of the Board

37.1 Before the Covid pandemic in March 2020 two members of the Board visited Heathrow each week. One made an unannounced visit to the holding rooms to monitor the facilities and to talk to the detainees. The other observed people being removed, usually monitoring an escorted overseas removal. After each visit a report was circulated to the Home Office, Border Force and to C&C. The Board appreciates the regular responses it receives to the issues raised.

37.2 Due to the pandemic there were no visits to Heathrow from 6 March to 30 June 2020, or from 15 December until the end of the reporting year. When not physically visiting, the Board received regular weekly updates from C&C, and the Home Office and monthly updates from Border Force. All these stakeholders were most helpful. Visits to the holding rooms resumed between lockdowns and a few removals were monitored. From November to January members supplemented the updates with weekly phone calls to the DCOs in the open holding rooms, who willingly engaged and responded to the Board's enquiries. Again reports were circulated and responses received.

37.3 Before the pandemic Board members visited London City Airport and the reporting centres of Becket House and Eaton House once per month. All these places were closed during the first part of the lockdown. When they re-opened monthly visits recommenced but with further lockdown, the Board resorted to remote monitoring with phone calls to the DCOs and Home Office updates. After both visits and remote monitoring, reports were written and circulated to the stakeholders and responses were received to the issues raised.

37.4 The Chair and Vice-Chair have attended each meeting of the Quarterly Heathrow Detention Board, convened by Border Force and attended by representatives of Border Force, the Home Office and C&C. (The last three meetings were by telephone conferencing.) All have been very useful meetings where the Board could raise matters of concern. There was good inter-agency cooperation to resolve issues. During the year Home Office representatives have attended some Board meetings and plans are being made for their more frequent attendance.

37.5 In October 2019 three new members were appointed to the Board. After the protracted period it took to obtain airside passes for Heathrow, they were able to start training in January 2020. Despite Covid restrictions two have now become full Board members and the third will do so shortly.

37.6 The Board's Vice-Chair is the IMB's regional representative for Short Term Holding Facilities.

Appendix A

BOARD DATA	
Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of members at the end of the reporting period	11
Total number of Board meetings in reporting period	12

VISIT & REMOTE MONITORING DATA	Actual Visits	Remote monit'g
London Heathrow Airport	31	7
London City Airport	3	3
Becket House	3	2
Eaton House	4	1
Total amount of monitoring	42	12