

Chairs of the Home Affairs, Women and Equalities, Justice and the Joint Committee on Human Rights

Home Affairs Committee
Select Committee Team
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

16 November 2022

Dear Chairs

Observations by the Independent Monitoring Board of conditions at Manston short-term holding facility

In view of your concerns in relation to the conditions at Manston short-term holding facility, I am passing on the findings of the Kent Coast Independent Monitoring Board (IMB). They echo the Chairs' deep concerns about the conditions in which those in the facility in recent weeks were held, particularly children and vulnerable individuals.

Members of the Independent Monitoring Board are unpaid public appointees, appointed by the Secretary of State with statutory duty to monitor the conditions at places of immigration detention, and to report on whether proper standards of care and decency are maintained. Independent Monitoring Boards are also part of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), set up under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, to prevent inhumane treatment in places of detention. Their role includes observing and reporting on the safety, humane treatment, health and wellbeing, and preparations for removal, transfer or release within these settings.

Through observations made during monitoring visits throughout October and November, the IMB has witnessed a worrying and severe decline in the conditions for those held at Manston. The Board shares the deep concerns highlighted by yourselves, the Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, about the state in which those detained, including children and vulnerable adults have been held at Manston, some for weeks at a time.

Length of detention

The IMB has throughout this period observed detention of individuals at Manston beyond the 24-hour period set down as the maximum length of detention in such holding rooms. Facilities at Manston are very clearly not equipped for stays beyond 24-hours, as demonstrated by the conditions described below.

The Board has spoken to individuals and families at Manston who have been held there for weeks at a time. Many reported that they had been there for weeks, with the longest periods approaching four weeks.

Among individuals spoken to by the IMB, there was a general lack of information provided to them about the length of their stay at Manston, how their claim would be processed and when transfers would happen.

Conditions at Manston

The Board has observed the deterioration of conditions for those detained at Manston.

Those detained stay in marquees, temporary tent-like structures that are not suitable for housing large numbers of individuals, especially for periods beyond 24-hours. The provisions within these marquees have been basic. Whilst some have been given mattresses, the IMB observed many individuals who only had a flattened cardboard box to lie on; some simply had a blanket. In these marquees, people have been sleeping in crowded conditions with no privacy between individuals who do not know each other. This raises safeguarding issues, as well as issues of humane treatment. The IMB has observed blankets being used to fill the gaps between the joins of the tent to try and gain some greater protection and keep the wind and rain out. During one visit, a set of portaloos had overflowed and, due to torrential rain, seeped under the wooden flooring of one of the marquees.

There have not been enough towels, wash kits or clean clothes, and children have been observed in inadequate clothing. The lack of such items has increased feelings of desperation and blankets have reportedly been stolen. We are aware this has led to disputes.

The IMB has observed the efforts of on-site staff to clean up and keep the marquees tidy, but due to the sheer number of those held, the Board described the state of the site as squalid. The cleanliness of the facility, overcrowding, close contact and sharing of blankets also raises serious concerns for the risk of cross contamination of diseases.

Owing to the seriousness of the Board's concern about the safety and decency of Manston, updates have been shared with Home Office officials. We believe that the Home Office must, as a matter of urgency:

- Ensure that length of detention at Manston does not exceed the 24-hour limit, and therefore that there are adequate contingency plans to accommodate significant numbers of arrivals.
- Provide those detained at Manston with information on how long they will be detained at the centre and how their claim will be processed.
- Ensure that conditions for those detained at Manston meet basic standards of safety and decency, and in particular that arrangements safeguard the most vulnerable.
- Ensure that there are sufficient healthcare staff on-site to screen arrivals to identify urgent healthcare needs and prevent the spread of contagious disease.
- Work to mitigate the risk of contamination at Manston by improving cleanliness and hygiene on-site.
- Ensure that every individual detained at Manston is provided with adequate bedding, clean clothes and means for washing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anne Owers".

Anne Owers

National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards