

Press release IMB 2023 National Annual Report      Embargo 00.01 22 May 2024

## **Independent Monitoring Board report raises significant concerns about the treatment and conditions for people held in immigration detention, with the population 54% higher than previous year**

In her first year as Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), Elisabeth Davies brings together the findings of IMBs across both the prison and immigration detention estate in the 2023 National Annual Report, published today (22 May 2024).

IMB members are the eyes and ears of the public, appointed by ministers, undertaking a vital role in the scrutiny of places of detention. While the functions of the establishments they monitor differ, cross cutting issues have been found that impact all those deprived of their liberty. Detailing significant concerns, this release focuses on findings from across the immigration detention estate.

With the current political emphasis on immigration, and a higher proportion of time-served foreign national prisoners being released into immigration removal centres (IRCs), there has been a sharp increase in the detained population - 54% higher at the end of 2023 than in 2022. If this trajectory continues, the issues highlighted by the IMB are only set to get worse:

### **The number of people at risk of suicide or self-harm increased and disorder, violence and security breaches were at a high level.**

- At Yarl's Wood, the IMB recorded four serious incidents in a four-month period – including men climbing onto the roof and thirteen men escaping.
- Yarl's Wood IMB also reported many people threatening suicide and self-harm, who were only prevented from harming themselves through staff intervention.
- Heathrow IMB reported a marked rise in assaults on both other detained people and staff.
- Gatwick IMB found that self-harm incidents increased throughout the year, nearly doubling between July and October 2023.
- At Colnbrook IRC a number of men attempted to self-harm with ligatures days after an apparent self-inflicted death.

**Detained people's health was adversely affected by their lack of timely access to hospital appointments and prescription medication.**

- At one IRC, a man missed two hospital appointments due to the lack of staff available for escorts. By the time he was taken to hospital he had to have an organ removed. While an earlier appointment would not have prevented this, he had to spend two days in severe pain and discomfort.
- At Heathrow IRC, a GP reported to the IMB that they had to 'beg' the centre's contractor to prioritise facilitating hospital visits.
- IMBs have been raising concerns around detained people's lack of access to prescribed medication at non-residential short-term holding facilities (STHFs), and the potentially fatal consequences of this, since 2017.

**The processes intended to prevent vulnerable people from entering detention, and safeguard them in detention, were ineffective, which meant vulnerable people were being placed at risk of harm.**

- IMBs collectively questioned the Home Office over the quality of screening being completed by the Detention Gatekeeper, whose role it is to prevent the detention of especially vulnerable people. A man who had previously been sectioned under the Mental Health (MH) Act was approved for detention by the Detention Gatekeeper and subsequently held for several months in the separation unit while awaiting transfer to a psychiatric unit.
- A trans woman remained in detention for 22 days even though a Home Office assessment completed at the outset of her detention had confirmed that she was at a risk of harm.
- Home Office staff confirmed that a man whose detention had initially been approved by the Detention Gatekeeper was not fit for detention; he was eventually sectioned under the MH Act after months of deteriorating health.

**With no statutory limit on the length of time people can be kept in IRCs, IMBs observed an overall increase in the time individuals spent detained, which was a consistent cause of frustration and anxiety.**

- One man was held at Brook House IRC for seven months after being granted bail, as six bail addresses he provided were rejected with no explanation why. Similarly, a woman with complex needs remained detained for seven months after her release was authorised while awaiting social services support.
- Although the statutory 24-hour time limit for detention in STHFs may be extended with authorisation of the Secretary of State, IMBs found that people were frequently held for longer than this. Two minors were held for over 50 hours at Manchester airport.

- The North East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber IMB found one individual held in police cells for almost three days prior to removal, rather than being transferred to a residential STHF.

**Elisabeth Davies, IMB National Chair said:**

“As the eyes and ears of the public, the value of local IMBs monitoring places of detention is clear. Yet over recent years their concerns have often gone unaddressed, with Boards posing the same questions over and over again to ministers. It is shocking that Home Office policy continues to deny some detained people of their prescription medication, and that we continue to see vulnerable individuals detained, despite the processes in place intended to prevent this. The concerns reported by IMBs are especially troubling considering the prospect that, under the recent legislative changes, the number of people detained is likely to double. It is time that ministers saw the value of the IMB members they have appointed, and start listening to what is being reported to them from immigration detention facilities across the United Kingdom.”

**Information for Editors:**

Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) monitor fairness and respect for people in custody to confirm it is fair, just and humane. IMBs are made up of independent public appointees and operate in every prison and Immigration Removal Centre. For more information about IMBs see [www.imb.org.uk](http://www.imb.org.uk).