



Annual Report of the London Short-Term Holding Facilities

**For reporting year
1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024**

Published July 2024



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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The London Heathrow and City Airports Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the welfare of people in short-term holding facilities (STHFs) through observation of their treatment and of the premises in which they are held. The Board also monitors the treatment of people being removed from the UK through London Heathrow Airport on scheduled flights.

The Board conducts its work in line with the Short-Term Holding Facility Rules, which place the day-to-day operations of STHFs on a statutory footing. Part 7 of the Rules sets out the responsibilities of the IMB (referred to in the Rules as the visiting committee). The Board has unrestricted access to every detained individual and all immigration detention facilities, and to most records. Board members have access, at all times, to all parts of the facility and can speak to detained individuals outside of the hearing of officers. They must consider any complaint or request which a detained individual wishes to make to them and make enquiries into the case of any detained individual whose mental or physical health is likely to be injuriously affected by any conditions of detention. The Board must inform the STHF manager about any matter which they consider requires their attention, and report to the Secretary of State any matter of which they consider the Home Office needs to be aware.

The Board's duties also include the production of an annual report covering the treatment of detained individuals, the state and administration of the facility, as well as providing any advice or suggestions it considers appropriate. This report has been produced to fulfil that obligation.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detained individuals and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMBs are part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the holding rooms

London Heathrow Airport holding rooms

Each of the four terminals (Terminals 2, 3, 4 and 5) contains a Short Term Holding Facility (STHF). The Home Office contracts the management of the holding rooms to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C).

Under the STHF Rules, 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 UK, be granted immigration bail or transferred to an alternative detention setting. 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.

Holding rooms are also used to accommodate people who are required to return to the airport for a further interview by Border Force (BF). They may have returned voluntarily in accordance with their bail conditions after one or more periods of immigration bail or have been brought back to the airport from an IRC.

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 prison, and it is anticipated that they will be compliant with their removal.

London City Airport holding room

There are two separate holding rooms, one for adults and one for families and unaccompanied minors. Each room has its own toilet and shower facilities. There are in principle no overnight stays, only in exceptional circumstances.

Eaton House holding room

Eaton House is a Home Office (HO) reporting centre located in the Borough of Hounslow. There are no overnight stays since detained people are all taken to immigration removal centres (IRCs) from here. It has two separate holding rooms, one for men and one for women and search areas, which are separate from the office, that allow for more privacy.

Controlled Waiting Areas

When Border Force officers stop a passenger arriving at the UK border and need time to follow up inquiries regarding entry into the UK, they first take the person to the controlled waiting area (CWA), a seated area by the immigration desks.

From March 2022, the Board had a trial protocol with Border Force enabling members to visit the CWAs at Heathrow Airport, accompanied by a Higher Border Force officer, and to engage with passengers waiting there as well as the officer in charge.

The trial was terminated in February 2023 and it was agreed that a small group of board members would visit the CWAs along with senior border force officers on an annual basis. At the time of writing, no visits have taken place.

London Heathrow Airport escorted removals

The Board regularly monitors overseas escorted (OSE) removals, during which an individual being removed from the UK is taken by a team of escorts onto a scheduled flight and accompanied to their final destination. Such passengers may have stated that they refuse to go voluntarily, have been assessed as presenting a risk to themselves or others, or are being deported having served a prison sentence for a serious offence. The Board monitors such removals taking place through Heathrow Airport until the passenger is seated in the aircraft.

The Board also occasionally monitors in-country escorted (ICE) removals, during which a person is escorted through the airport to board the aircraft as a regular passenger.

3. Key points

Background to the report

The report refers to the Heathrow holding rooms unless indicated otherwise.

All numerical data are provided by Care & Custody.

Main findings

Safety

- All holding rooms in all facilities can reasonably be said to provide a safe environment for detained individuals. Vulnerable people and children are checked on regularly by the Detention Custody Officers (DCOs).
- There have been occasions when a minor is not accompanied by a responsible adult in the CWA. Whilst it is not a requirement, unaccompanied children without a chaperone will be monitored by the Border Force in the CWA. We would like to see all children accompanied by a responsible adult whilst they are in the CWA.
- Since July 2023 we have not been provided with the necessary data to monitor vulnerable adults and those at risk of self-harm, or the use of force, contrary to the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) the IMB has with HO and BF.
- The child-sized benches with an adult-height table in the main London City Airport holding room have been replaced. The problem persists in the family room, where they pose a risk of injury to detained people.

Fair and humane treatment

- Insufficient numbers of Border Force officers sometimes result in long waits in the Controlled Waiting Areas.
- Asylum seekers (adults and children) who have been bailed sometimes face long waits for Clearsprings (the company contracted to provide transport and accommodation for asylum seekers) to pick them up. Unavailability of accommodation or transport is often given as the cause.
- Not all residents are offered a translator upon arrival into immigration detention. Where English is not their first language, they should be offered this, regardless of whether or not an officer believes that the level of English is of a sufficient standard.
- Delays and unavailability of certain languages in The Big Word translation service can cause problems for inductions and further communication afterwards.
- In most of the inductions monitored, the detained persons were not reminded that they had the right not to disclose certain information, in line with Rule 21 of STHF rules. Some people would prefer not to disclose their religion or marital status.
- The holding rooms are not equipped for stays over 24 hours but people do sometimes have long stays, often overnight, without sufficient mattresses and blankets. The Board would like to see a significant reduction in the number of people having these long stays. It currently stands at 4.4%.
- The temperature in the holding rooms, both at London Heathrow and London City Airport, is sometimes too low for people sitting in a room for an extended

period and DCOs are unable to control it directly. This often causes considerable discomfort for the detained people who complain of being cold even when blankets are supplied. Thermometers have been placed in Terminal 3 holding rooms.

- The agreed upgrade of the family room and shower facilities for the main holding room in Terminal 5 has still not started. However, Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) now has a schedule for updating all the holding rooms. During the time covered by this report, the proposed plan had not been shared for IMB input. (The plans were subsequently shared on 09.04.2024).
- Those held in the CWAs have no or very limited privacy, other than in Terminal 4, where a thin partition affords privacy. The CWA at Terminal 2 appears to be too small for the number of people regularly being held there.
- Although agreed, toilet seats in holding rooms at Heathrow have still not been installed.
- In past reports, we have recommended that DCOs are reminded to engage regularly with people during their long periods of detention because people do not remember everything they have been told during their induction. This year again, we observed people who would have benefited from a reminder of what was available to them.
- Lack of internet access still causes problems with translation devices and prevents passengers who struggle to communicate verbally to interact with their environment. This is a particular problem in Terminal 2. The promised internet trial, escalated in 2022, has still not taken place.
- The Disability Review has not taken place and IMB members have witnessed wheelchair users being denied access to the holding rooms. This would appear to be contrary to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.
- The Board has observed that some children had extended waits in the CWA. There are no facilities for children in the CWAs and the Board would like to see these children being accommodated in the family holding room instead.
- Complaint forms are not always replied to in full. Whilst detained, individuals have contact with different agencies during the detention period and complaints are about their overall experience with BF and C&C. We would like to see replies to complaints collated from different agencies and sent as one response.
- The quality and tone of responses are variable and we are concerned that agencies may be missing opportunities to learn from complaints and improve practices.

Health and wellbeing

- People detained at London City Airport and Eaton House still do not have access to their own prescribed or over-the-counter medication.

Recommendations

TO THE MINISTER

Internet access

- The Board would like to see access to Wi-Fi for detained people across all the holding rooms. The trial promised two years ago has still not taken place.

- The Board would like the lack of signal in Terminal 2 to be urgently addressed, so that a translation device can be used to communicate with detained people.

Access to medication

- Eaton House and London City Airport urgently need a workable solution for administering personal medication. This issue has been raised for many years now, including at Ministerial level.

Response to Rota Reports

TO THE UK BORDER FORCE/HOME OFFICE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

- The Board recommends 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.
- The Board has observed that some children had extended waits in the CWA. There are no facilities for children in the CWA, nor is the environment comparable to that in the family room. The Board would like to see these children accommodated in the holding room instead.
- Unaccompanied minors are not always allocated a responsible adult when they are in the CWA. We would like each minor to be accompanied by a responsible adult.
- The Board would like a small group, accompanied by a higher officer, to visit the CWAs, as agreed in writing by BF last year, and now request that this is an unannounced visit rather than one scheduled in advance.
- A solution needs to be found to give people waiting in the CWAs more privacy, and the CWA in T2 needs to be enlarged.
- The holding rooms are not equipped for stays over 24 hours and the Board would like to see the current 4.4% of people experiencing these long stays decreases significantly.
- The Board is of the opinion that one person or a team should be made responsible for sending out a consolidated reply that incorporates replies to the complainant from all agencies.
- We have experienced long delays in receiving responses for some rota reports. We would like timely responses so that we can be assured that our concerns are being addressed. At the time of writing, we are waiting for responses on eight reports for the reporting year.

TO MITIE CARE AND CUSTODY

- The Board stopped receiving Safer Detention Reports in July 2023 and despite many requests, these have not been forthcoming. This means that we do not have access to the data to enable us to monitor Suicide and Self Harm Warning Forms, Vulnerable Adult Warning Forms and Use of Force. After repeated requests at every Board meeting, we were eventually told that we would not be receiving the reports. This concern has been escalated and we have been told that the information will be forthcoming. At the time of writing this report, March 2024, we still have no information from July 2023 to January 2024. According to the Data Sharing MoU between HO and the IMBs (August 2020), we should be notified by the supplier (C&C) of Use of Force

without delay and Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention on a weekly basis. We would like to see regular monthly reports containing meaningful information in order to monitor the treatment of vulnerable people effectively

- 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 that they should not assume that passengers with a limited grasp of English really understand what they are being told.
- Delays and unavailability of certain languages in The Big Word translation service need to be addressed.
- During inductions, detained people should be reminded that they have the right not to disclose certain information, such as marital status and religion in line with Rule 21 of STHF rules. As mentioned in last year's report, the maintenance of showers in all terminals should be prioritised so that they remain functional at all times.
- The temperature problems in the holding rooms, both at London Heathrow and London City Airport, need to be resolved. The Board would like to see DCOs be given some form of control, either by being able to directly adjust the temperature or by asking someone to adjust the temperature at their request. The temperature problem in LCY was also raised in last year's report.
- The Board has been asking for toilet seats in all terminal holding rooms for the last few years and we would like to see this issue finally resolved.
- In past reports we have recommended that DCOs should be reminded to engage regularly with people during their long periods of detention because people do not remember everything they have been told during their induction. This year again, we observed people who would have benefited from a reminder of what is available to them in the holding rooms.
- The Board would like to see C&C staff trained to deal with wheelchair users, to ensure that detained people with disabilities have equal access to the facilities available in the holding rooms as per the Equality Act 2010.

TO CLEARSPRINGS

- We would like to see shorter collection waiting times for those seeking asylum and being transferred to asylum accommodation.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Issues raised	Response given	Progress
<p>Minister</p> <p>1. Eaton House and City Airport urgently need a workable solution for administering personal medication. This has been raised for several years.</p> <p>2. The Board would like to see a quick completion of the Wi-Fi trial in the holding rooms so a decision can be made on how to introduce internet access.</p>	No response received.	<p>1. No progress made</p> <p>2. No trial has taken place</p>
<p>Home Office/ Immigration Enforcement</p> <p>1. The promised improvements to Terminal 5 family room and showers to the main holding room should be delivered as soon as possible.</p> <p>2. The maintenance of showers in T2 and T3 should be prioritised so that they remain functional at all times.</p> <p>3. The temperature problems in the holding rooms both at LHR and LCY need to be resolved.</p>	No response received	<p>1. Work has not started. We are told that a plan is in place but at the time of writing, we have not seen this.</p> <p>2. There have been times throughout the year when the showers have not been functioning.</p> <p>3. Thermometers have been introduced in LHR Terminal 3. No data had been made available, however. We would like to see thermometers in all terminals.</p>

<p>4. A solution needs to be found to give people in the CWAs more privacy and the CWA at T2 needs to be enlarged.</p> <p>5. The Board repeats its request for the child-sized benches to be replaced at LCY and for the provision of toilet seats.</p> <p>6. Delays and unavailability of The Big Word translation service need to be addressed.</p> <p>7. The Board would like to see better co-ordination between establishments to ensure that payments for the Facilitated Return Scheme (FRS) are being made.</p>		<p>4. No progress.</p> <p>5. The benches have been replaced in the main holding room at LCY. The problem persists in the family room. Some toilets still have no seats.</p> <p>6. No progress.</p> <p>7. There are still occasions where the person being removed believes they are entitled to payment and the payment is not made.</p>
<p>Border Force</p> <p>1. [London Heathrow Airport] The Board recommends 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.</p> <p>2. We hope that BF has permanently addressed the situation where officers caused distress to detained people when conversing with each other in a language other than English.</p> <p>3. The Board has observed that some</p>	<p>No response received.</p>	<p>1. Delays have been observed at peak times throughout the year.</p> <p>2. We have not observed any incidents this year.</p> <p>3. The Board has observed long waits for</p>

<p>children have extended waits in the CWA. The facilities in the CWA do not compare with the environment in the family holding room and the Board would like to see these children accommodated in the holding room instead.</p>		<p>children in CWAs on several occasions.</p>
<p>Mitie Care & Custody</p> <p>1. 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 should not make the assumption that passengers with a smattering of English really understand what they are being told.</p> <p>2. During inductions, detained people should be reminded that they have the right not to disclose certain information such as marital status and religion in line with Rule 21 of STHF rules.</p> <p>3. We recommend that DCOs should be reminded to engage regularly with people during their long periods of detention because people do not remember everything they have been told during their induction.</p>	<p>No response received.</p>	<p>1. The Board has reported on a number of occasions that The Big Word has not been used even though the detained person can neither understand nor converse in English.</p> <p>2. The Board has observed inductions where the detained people are not made aware of their right not to disclose information.</p> <p>3. The Board has noted on several occasions that detained people had forgotten or were not aware of information which would have been given during induction.</p>

<p>4. The Board would like to see C&C staff trained to deal with wheelchair users to ensure that detained people have equal access to the facilities available in the holding rooms.</p> <p>Clearsprings</p> <p>1. [London Heathrow Airport] We would like to see shorter collection waiting times for those seeking asylum.</p>	<p>No response received.</p>	<p>4. No progress.</p> <p>1. The problem persists.</p>
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Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Reception

All holding rooms in all establishments can reasonably be said to provide a safe environment for detained individuals. In almost all areas of the holding rooms, apart from the toilet and shower areas, DCOs are able to keep detained persons under observation, either directly or through closed-circuit television (CCTV).

For passengers being brought by Border Force Officers into a holding room for the first time, detention can come as quite a shock, so a good induction is important. The Board is pleased to report that the majority of inductions observed, even under difficult circumstances, were done to a high standard, and searches were conducted sensitively and respectfully.

Some problems persist, however:

Problems with The Big Word: This interpretation service is regularly used but is not without its problems. Sometimes, long delays are experienced when attempting to access the service. Some languages are not available at all. In those circumstances, DCOs have to show initiative and will sometimes use translation tablets or ask colleagues or other people in detention to translate. There is not always a suitable solution for the absence of a translator:

- A man from Timor-Leste had returned for an interview. His induction form noted that the induction was not completed due to an interpreter for his language not being available. It was not available on the translation tablets either. (13.04.23)
- A very sensitive, kind induction from the DCO was witnessed. The person was a Tamil speaker but the DCO was unable to contact The Big Word. (21.02.23)

Not offering The Big Word service when it should have been C&C's policy regarding translation services details that all residents must be offered a translator upon arrival into immigration detention, if English is not their first language. Unfortunately, as in the three previous years, the Board again saw examples of inductions being conducted in English when interpretation was needed. One example:

- Induction sheets for three people with little or no English indicated that The Big Word had not been used and the interpretation had been provided by a DCO. These were a Punjabi speaking man, a Punjabi/Italian speaking man, and an Arabic speaking unaccompanied minor. (23.03.23)

Discrepancies in recordings: Most of the induction checklists seen during monitoring visits were fully completed, but in some cases, there was a discrepancy between the IS91s, the information on the induction checklists, and the MEDS (Mitie Escort and Detention System). The Board noted the following:

- Questions 1-12 of the induction sheet were not completed there for a Pakistani man. His IS91 had indicated he spoke Urdu. He was spoken to using the translation tablet device. (19.06.23)

Not informed about the right not to disclose religion or marital status: In most of the inductions monitored, the detained persons were not reminded that they had the right not to disclose certain information, in line with Rule 21 of STHF rules. Some people would prefer not to disclose their religion or marital status:

- The induction of a male passenger was listened to. It was done in English, very considerately. However, the DCOs did not highlight that the questions regarding his religion and marital status were optional in line with Rule 21 of the STHF rules. The DCOs were later asked whether they were aware of Rule 21, and they were not. (14.10.23)

Suicide, self-harm, deaths in custody

The Board is unable to report on this aspect as we have not received the data for July 2023 to January 2024.

Vulnerable adults, safeguarding

The DCOs usually pay particular attention to vulnerable people and open a vulnerable adult warning form (VAWF). The Board is unable to report on the number and type of vulnerabilities recorded during the year as we have not received the data from July 2023 to January 2024. The Board is very concerned about this failure to supply data which is vital for our work. The lack of this data makes it extremely difficult for us to monitor equality and diversity issues.

The Board observed that vulnerable people are generally treated with care and consideration:

- A young man claiming political asylum complained of a severe headache and tightness in his chest, so the DCO called immediately for a medic while the induction continued. He said he had suffered from mental health issues but was not on medication. Later in the interview, he said he had been a victim of torture. The paramedic arrived promptly, took him to the empty family room for a private consultation and gave him medication for the headache. (24.07.23)

Although Border Force gives priority to vulnerable persons, we have noticed occasions when some of them have been detained for a considerable length of time, as in one Board report:

- A woman had a stay of 30hrs 30mins in the holding room. Her total stay with the HO/C&C was recorded as 33hrs 45mins. (06.06.23)

It transpired that this was a complicated case involving serious safeguarding concerns in respect of a young woman accompanied to the UK by an 'aunt'. Further investigations identified trafficking. The delay in moving the young woman from the holding room was explained to the Board as being due to legal proceedings and the need to find accommodation that would not expose the young woman to further risk.

Unaccompanied children and children in families

All unaccompanied children and families with a member under the age of 18 are accommodated in the family room. The DCOs complete a paper copy of a childcare plan for each child, which names the DCO responsible for that child, whether or not a

parent is also present. In addition, the DCO must check on each child every 15 minutes and record that on MEDS, the electronic records system. They also record the child's activities, such as eating a meal, playing with toys, watching a DVD or sleeping.

- During and IMB visit, a child was observed sleeping on a mattress on the floor with a blanket. A DCO checked on the family during the visit. It was noted that a childcare plan had been opened and actioned by DCOs. (18.10.23)

The Board has a concern about the capacity to accommodate families when more than one family is present.

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.

Children who arrive unaccompanied, 11% of the 1614 children at Heathrow Airport, (see Table 2), are a priority for Border Force. Often, the complexity of their situation, involving safeguarding issues and/or concerns that they may be victims of trafficking, may mean that they are detained for several hours. The children often have to wait to be collected by a social worker.

Location	Unaccompanied children	No. in family units	Total no. of children
LHR TN2	39	449	488
LHR TN3	45	364	409
LHR TN4	56	460	516
LHR TN5	43	158	201
Cayley House	0	0	0
Total	183	1431	1614

Table 2: Number of children in the Heathrow Airport holding rooms for February 2023 – January 2024

Board members met unaccompanied children being held and noted:

- A 14-year-old female unaccompanied minor was being chaperoned by a male Heathrow staff member, later replaced by a female Heathrow staff member. The girl was observed sleeping at the table, rather than lying down (07.12.23)

The Board is concerned that a male officer was chaperoning a teenage girl and consider having a male in a closed room could make a lone female child feel uncomfortable and vulnerable.

During rota visits, Board members review the data from the previous days and note any concerns about unaccompanied minors. Of particular concern is the long stays in the CWAs where unaccompanied minors are not necessarily accompanied by a responsible adult:

- A report noted a stay of 8 hours for one young person (27.08.23).
- A fifteen-year-old boy was bailed after a total stay of 13 hours 20 minutes including 8 hours 50 minutes in the CWA (11.09.23).

There have been a number of occasions when Board members have asked about the presence of a responsible adult for an unaccompanied minor. We are informed by Border Force that whilst it is not a requirement to provide a responsible adult to accompany a child whilst in CWA, a child will be chaperoned or monitored by Border Force staff. Border Force notes that they rely on the goodwill and resources of third parties such as airlines and the airport operator/ sub-contractors. CWAs are always manned and the CWA officer will also oversee the detention of a child. The IIMB feels that an unaccompanied child should have a dedicated adult. At times, there may be sufficient Care and Custody staff to sit with children in the holding rooms. The Board would like to see unaccompanied minors provided with a responsible adult in the CWAs and in the holding rooms.

Use of force

At the time of writing this report, we do not have access to the information required to monitor this aspect of our remit. This is of grave concern to the Board.

5. Fair and humane treatment

Length of stay In the Controlled Waiting Areas

Border Force aims to have people waiting for a maximum of 2 hours in the CWA. However, our visit reports show that many passengers have substantially longer waits.

It remains the view of the IMB that there are still insufficient Border Force officers on duty to deal with surges of passengers as the examples below show:

- Operational pressures were cited as the reason for a prolonged stay of 7 hours 38 minutes. (06.09.23)
- A number of passengers from a single flight contributed to a stay of 8 hours in the CWA. (24.07.23)

In the holding rooms

Our rota visits have shown that one of the greatest concerns for incoming passengers is the length of time that they will be detained in the holding rooms.

Detentions of over 24 hours are not unusual. Of 16,600 adults in the terminal holding rooms, 4.4% had stays over 24 hours. (See table 3) Last year that percentage was 6.6%; in the pre-pandemic year 2019-20 it was only 1.0%. (See table 4) The holding rooms are not equipped for stays over 24 hours, with no natural light, access to fresh air or facilities to sleep comfortably and the Board would like to see the number of people having these long stays go down to pre-pandemic levels of 2019/2020.

Location	0 - 8 hours	8 - 12 hours	12 - 18 hours	18 - 24 hours	24+ hours	TOTAL
LHR TN2	2337	717	546	222	100	3922
LHR TN3	2319	694	582	510	416	4521
LHR TN 4	2213	786	657	360	123	4139
LHR TN 5	1069	418	327	197	105	2116
Total	7938	2615	2112	1289	744	14698
Cayley House	1852	39	8	3	0	1902
Grand Total	9790	2654	2120	1292	744	16600

Table 3: Number of adults in the Heathrow holding rooms with the length of their detention time for February 2023- January 2024.

A total of 8 children had a stay in the holding room of London City Airport during this reporting year. Three of these children were unaccompanied. A total of 91 adults had a stay in the holding rooms of London City Airport. All had stays of less than 12 hours, while 81 people stayed less than 8 hours. A total of 739 people had a stay in the holding room at Eaton House compared to 165 people in the previous reporting year 2022. This is a significant increase, but the Board thinks that this is not posing any concerns. The majority of these people had stays of less than 8 hours.

Report year	0-8 hours	8-12 hours	12-18 hours	18-24 hours	24+ hours	Total
2023/24	7938	2615	2112	1289	744	14698
2022/23	6635	2327	1842	1420	865	13089
2021/22	6133	1513	944	863	276	9729

Table 4: Total number of adults in the Heathrow terminal holding rooms with their length of stay for 3 different reporting years.

Even though the total number of adults in the Heathrow terminal holding rooms has gone up, the Board is very happy to see that the number of stays of over 18 hours has gone down.

Enquiries from members reveal a variety of reasons for long stays:

- obfuscation or late asylum claims
- awaiting responses from third parties (e.g. universities, employers or social services and police)
- shortage of Border Force staff
- long waits for collection by Clearsprings. We note that in many asylum cases delays are a result of the unavailability of transport and/or accommodation.

Some examples we have noted:

- A family couple spent over 5 hours in the CWA and were then taken to the holding room. They had a total stay of 37 hours 40 minutes before being bailed. BF confirmed that the finding of accommodation and waiting for transport caused the delay. (03.08.23)
- A man spent 45.05 hours in the holding room before leaving on a flight. He was not transferred to an IRC for overnight accommodation as there was 'no bed space at HIRC'. C&C was contacted and they had 'no resources to move him off port tonight'. (09.08.23)

Accommodation and food

All the holding rooms are in good decorative repair. They have rows of standard airport seating and fixed tables with seats for eating meals. However, the rooms are windowless, with no natural light or fresh air.

Those held in the CWAs have no or very limited privacy and are visible to other passengers awaiting their turn to approach the Immigration desks, other than in Terminal 4, where the frosted glass partition affords some privacy. The CWA at Terminal 2 appears to be too small and is often crowded.

Usually, the holding rooms are clean and tidy, but at times standards do slip and discarded food packaging and used blankets are not removed in a timely fashion.

- "The empty holding room looked untidy, with used blankets and mattresses on the benches. There were used masks and towels on the floor in the multi-faith room". (14.10.23)

Mattresses and blankets

Passengers arriving from long-haul flights, unsurprisingly, need to rest and, in cases of long stays, need to sleep. At the beginning of the year, mattresses were not available, having been removed the previous October. Anyone wanting to rest or needing to sleep had to lie across the extremely uncomfortable upright seats or on one of the very few recliner chairs. The Board consistently raised the issue of mattresses and these were made available in March 2023. However, the Board is concerned about the number and quality of the mattresses. They are thinner than those previously used and there are not enough for all those who want them when holding rooms are busy.

- 'The DCOs informed me that detained people often use two mattresses together in order to be able to gain some comfort while sleeping or resting on them'. (06.03.23)

We are informed that thicker mattresses which meet the fire standards for environments such as the holding rooms are not available. We would like the search for more comfortable mattresses to continue.

The Board is also concerned by the number of mattresses available in each holding room. It is not clear that in busy times, additional mattresses are sought from other holding rooms. This question has been raised in our reports:

- One report noted that between 02.00-11.00, there were up to 15 people present in the holding room and there were only 9 mattresses. (14.10.23)
- "There were 19 people recorded on the log, 11 of whom had stayed overnight. The response to this concern stated that if a request had been made, the DCOs could have looked into taking some mattresses from a less busy holding room." (24.07.23)

Our concern is that the detained people would not be aware that such a request could be made.

The blankets provided are very thin and hardly protect against the cold. Especially with the low temperatures sometimes experienced in the holding rooms, they do not seem to be thick enough.

London City Airport benches and table

After over two years of requesting, the child-sized benches in the main holding room have been replaced. However, the family room still has an adult-height table and child-sized benches.

Showers and toilet seats

There is no shower in Terminal 5. Border Force and HAL are in the process of negotiating and planning a restructuring of the accommodation, which will include a shower. Plans were not seen during the year covered by this report but were shared on 09.04.2024.

The showers in T2 and T3 were frequently out of order during this period. There is no feasible option of using the hand basins in the toilet cubicles to wash since they are very small.

When holding room showers are unavailable, C&C can escort detained individuals to Cayley House for a shower. However, this can only happen when C&C has sufficient vans and escorts available.

- “Neither of the showers was in working order. Advised the shower in the main holding had been fixed but had broken again. The shower in the family room was apparently working but got too hot to use.” (22.08.23)

The Board would like to see a permanent solution to ensure the showers are in working order.

Some toilets are just metal bowls, and the Board would like to see that all have a proper toilet seat attached.

Heating

The temperature in the holding rooms, both at London Heathrow and London City Airport, is sometimes too low and DCOs are unable to control it directly. This often causes discomfort for the detained people. Some extracts from our reports:

- “A father of a family with a three-year-old child complained about the temperature in the family room. The family were bailed after a stay of 12 hours 11 minutes.” (14.03.23)
- “At London City, the main holding room was cold and there was a strong draft. Requests have been made to the port to install a temperature control panel but this has been rejected.” (28.04.23)

The Board would like to see the DCOs at both LHR and LCY be given some form of control, either by being able to directly adjust the temperature or by asking someone to adjust the temperature at their request.

Food and drink

The water fountains have not been in use since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and have yet to be restored; instead, cartons of water and cartons of fruit juice are provided. Hot drinks are available from a machine.

There are pictures on the walls showing what food is provided. People can help themselves to snacks and fresh fruit. A good selection of microwaveable meals is available; these include vegetarian, halal, kosher, vegan and gluten-free meals.

In the Controlled Waiting Areas, the Board is concerned that there appears to be no clear and regularly observed protocols for offering food and drink at reasonable pre-defined periods. We no longer visit the CWAs on a regular basis so are unable to comment on whether this is still the case.

Access to telephones

Those who are detained are not allowed to use their smartphones which contain cameras. They are allowed to make a five-minute call in the office area to family or friends either in the UK or abroad, to give them either the number of the payphone in

the holding room or the number of a C&C loan phone. Each holding room has roughly 10 loan phones available.

Detained people do not always remember what they are told at their induction in that they are entitled to make a phone call. Reports noted the following:

- 'A woman seemed not to know or had forgotten, that she could make a telephone call to a friend in the UK who she told me would be worried about her. DCOs were spoken to, who provided her with a telephone and helped her find the number.' (24.07.23)

We have asked that DCOs are aware that they may need to remind detained people of their right to make a call as often they cannot assimilate all the information given at the time of their induction.

Newspapers

For the first half of the year, we were concerned about the irregular supply of newspapers to the holding rooms. While not a statutory requirement, IMB considers newspapers are a welcome additional recreational activity. We raised this in our reports and are pleased to note that there is a much greater level of consistency in the supply of papers and magazines.

Staff relations with those in detention

Border Force officers

The Board observed Border Force officers interacting with those in detention as they escorted them to and from the holding rooms or gave them information. They almost always treat people with respect and consideration, even when faced with anger, reluctance or distress:

- One report noted that a female Border Force officer came to take a woman for an interview, explaining this using the tablet translation device. The officer noted that the woman was clutching her stomach and asked if she was menstruating, or needed to go to the toilet. She then offered to come back in half an hour so that the detained woman could rest first. (03.05.23)

However, there are occasions when officers do not show the same care and consideration and on one occasion witnessed by an IMB member an officer disclosed confidential medical information about a detained person and spoke extremely disparagingly about him:

- 'Whilst in the holding room, a border force officer arrived to inform the DCOs that they had fifteen people seeking asylum in the CWA and they wanted to start bringing them in. The DCOs were already aware that this was the case and had sought additional staffing to support them. They had been told that none was available. The officer continued to talk about the people. He said *'The problem is that there's one that no one will go near as he's got crabs-genital warts -personally I wouldn't touch him.'* I asked him how he had been made aware of this and he explained that the person had disclosed this on interview and had medication. He went on to say *'He started to bite the handle of his bag and his hands been all over that'*. *'There's a couple of them that are not all there'*. During the second induction, the same border force officer

brought another person to the door but was informed that there was still an induction taking place. He gestured to the man to go back. Some twenty minutes later, the man was standing alone outside the holding room.’ (21.02.23)

We were informed that Border Force were following this up but no further details were forthcoming.

Detention custody officers

Frequently those detained have told us that they have been treated kindly and respectfully and have all they need. We have observed some very good practice from DCOs interacting with those detained, and we have noted these in our reports for feedback to the staff. One such example:

- ‘He spoke fluent English and a thorough, clear, kind and thoughtful induction by the female DCO was observed. She offered him a drink straight away and he accepted a cup of tea. He said he would like to call a relative waiting for him and she advised him to warn the relative of very high car parking charges if he turned out to have a long wait.’ (06.06.23)

At other times, we have witnessed less than good practice as described below:

- “She said that it was her first time away from home, had no family in the UK., and although she could not say anything bad about the way she was treated, she would expect warmer and more caring treatment from the DCOs given that she was locked in a room in a foreign country. She was almost in tears while talking to me. When asked her whether she had been given anything to eat or drink She said she was given rice, but it was too hard to eat, and the biscuits and snacks made her feel sick. When asked whether she wanted more food, she said she was hungry but was scared to ask as she had already asked for a couple of things. Asking the DCOs, they said she had been asking for stuff so they could not understand why she was scared to ask. I was in the reception area for 20 minutes waiting for the DCOs to give her a hot meal. They were not busy, just chatting among themselves and with me. The DCOs were reminded again after some time, and then the female DCO brought her out of the holding room to show her the available food options.” (13.04.23)

In past reports, we have recommended that DCOs are reminded to engage regularly with people during their long periods of detention because people do not remember everything they have been told during their induction and therefore are not always aware that they can ask for food, a shower or an extra phone call. This year again, we observed people who would have benefited from a reminder:

- “An older Zimbabwean couple who had been there since the morning were spoken to. They said their son was waiting for them, but they could not contact him. It was explained they could access their phones to get his number and he could call into the holding room. When the DCO was spoken to, she said she had access to the son's number. So, she called him and he phoned into the holding room and spoke to his father.” (20.11.23)

Equality and diversity

Our ability to monitor equality and diversity issues was severely hampered by the failure to supply data on vulnerable people and use of force.

Access to information

C&C provides information for those detained in 20 different official languages, both on paper and on video.

Recently we have observed that cut-out photographs are displayed on the walls in all the holding rooms, showing the available items such as blankets, pillows, wash-kits, prayer books and prayer mats, as well as available meals.

Access to Wi-Fi and the internet

The Board finds it unsatisfactory that despite previous recommendations, those in detention still have no direct access to the internet. The Board was informed by the Home Office that a trial with internet access was likely to take place in one of the holding rooms in 2022, but at the time of writing this report, the trial has not taken place.

In addition to the lack of Wi-Fi in the holding rooms, there is a related issue:

- There is no Wi-Fi reception in Terminal 2, even in the reception area. This makes it impossible to use the translation tablets. These sometimes have to be used for the induction when languages are not available on The Big Word. (14.10.23)

The Board repeats the recommendation from last year that, even if it takes place under the supervision of the DCOs, detained individuals should have internet access to access personal information.

Access for wheelchair users

All the holding rooms at Heathrow terminals are wheelchair accessible. However, non-independent wheelchair users could be denied access to the holding rooms if they are not accompanied by a carer. The reason given is that C&C staff are not trained to lift and carry a disabled person from and to a wheelchair. IMB has observed a wheelchair user accompanied by a carer being refused entry to the holding room.

Access to legal advice

Legal advice sheets listing the phone numbers of legal advice centres and local solicitors are provided in all holding rooms next to the payphones. The Home Office is responsible for ensuring that they are regularly updated. Visits to the holding rooms have found these generally up to date, although this can slip over holiday periods.

Faith and religious affairs

All holding rooms have either a separate multi-faith room or at least a cupboard containing prayer mats, a qibla and a selection of sacred books relevant to many faiths. We are pleased to note that the religious texts are now stored in separate files

avoiding religious text being mixed. The current arrangement gives a much tidier, more respectful impression.

Children and families

The IMB is concerned about extended waits in the CWA for children. There are no facilities for children in the CWA and the Board would like to see children being accommodated in the holding room when long waits can't be avoided.

All detained children and all detained families with a member under the age of 18 should be accommodated in a family room.

A total of 1614 children were detained in the terminal holding rooms at Heathrow Airport. This compares with 1677 children in the previous reporting period. Of these 144 had stays that were longer than 12 hours. The Board is pleased to note that this number has gone down from the previous year when 214 children had stays longer than 12 hours.

In Terminals 2, 3 and 4, there are separate family rooms situated directly beside the DCOs' office. 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.

In Terminal 5, the family room is a small, partitioned area within the main holding room. 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. In addition, to use the toilets and baby-changing facilities the parents and children have to go into the main holding room, where adults are being detained, to use their facilities.

There are times when the number of families with children raises capacity issues.

- "The log indicated that four family groups had been admitted to the holding room from the same flight. There were 7 adults and 6 children and they had holding room stays of between 2.30 and 5.05 hours. The Board member raised the question as to how they had all been accommodated and whether there was sufficient privacy and enough mattresses. We were informed that some of the families were placed in the main holding room." (18.10.23)

We repeat our recommendation from previous reports that improved facilities for children are urgently required in Terminal 5. At the time of writing this report, in March 2024, we are informed that there is a plan in place, which we have since had sight of. Facilities for children in Terminal 5 holding rooms continue to be a matter of concern.

Toys and activities for children

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.

We are able to report that during the year some new toys have been purchased and distributed across the holding rooms and new colouring books have been ordered. We advise that the presence and condition of the toys should be regularly checked.

Complaint forms

11 complaints were received in boxes within the holding rooms of which 8 related to time spent in services under the London STHF IMB remit.

Complaints related to:

- alleged excessive use of force in transit; safety during transit,
- holding room conditions; lack of privacy; having to sleep on the holding room floor,
- conduct and manner of staff.

In the last year, there have been improvements in the basic complaint handling process in terms of collection from complaint boxes, logging and timely response.

Although complaint responses have become more comprehensive, the quality and tone of responses are variable. In some complaints which were not substantiated the conclusions reached appeared to lack reasoning.

In some complaints that were upheld, the reasons for service deficiencies or possible improvement steps were not openly explored. This indicates the provider's lack of interest in learning from complaints.

One such example is a wide-ranging complaint from a disabled man in the Terminal 3 holding room about the conduct of staff which was partially upheld. The overall tone was dismissive despite addressing individual points.

Home Office contract monitoring services are now taking a more active role in oversight and quality assurance of complaints, and we welcome this.

We have previously expressed concern about disjointed complaint responses - where the matters raised relate to more than one agency, to Border Force and to Care & Custody, for example. Complaints typically receive partial responses from the different agencies rather than a co-ordinated response. This continues to be an issue. The Board is of the opinion that a dedicated person or team should be appointed to oversee that all complaints are replied to in full, in one letter.

6. Health and wellbeing

Access to medical assistance

As of 1 February 2022, AeroMed has been contracted to provide a 24/7 paramedic presence, working from Cayley House. These paramedics assist with any medical issues in the Heathrow Airport holding rooms and CWAs. The appointment of the AeroMed medic has been widely welcomed, and it appears to be working well. The Board has seen many examples of good practice:

- “The mother from the family group was being attended by a medic. She was complaining of fever. She had little English, but the medic was using the translation device and the female DCO assisted with interpretation. She seemed satisfied with the attention and returned to the family room.” (17.07.23)
- “Her husband said she was sick with a urine problem and needed medication. He said he had spoken to the DCOs, but when spoken to again and asked if a medic could be called, the DCO pointed out that on the IS91, it was indicated “no medication”, and no medical issues had been reported at induction. She called the paramedics immediately and confirmed that they were on their way.” (20.11.23)

The Board receives monthly updates on AeroMed. (See figure 2). In total 28 people were taken to hospital. The majority of people requiring AeroMed’s services did this for administration of their own medicine.

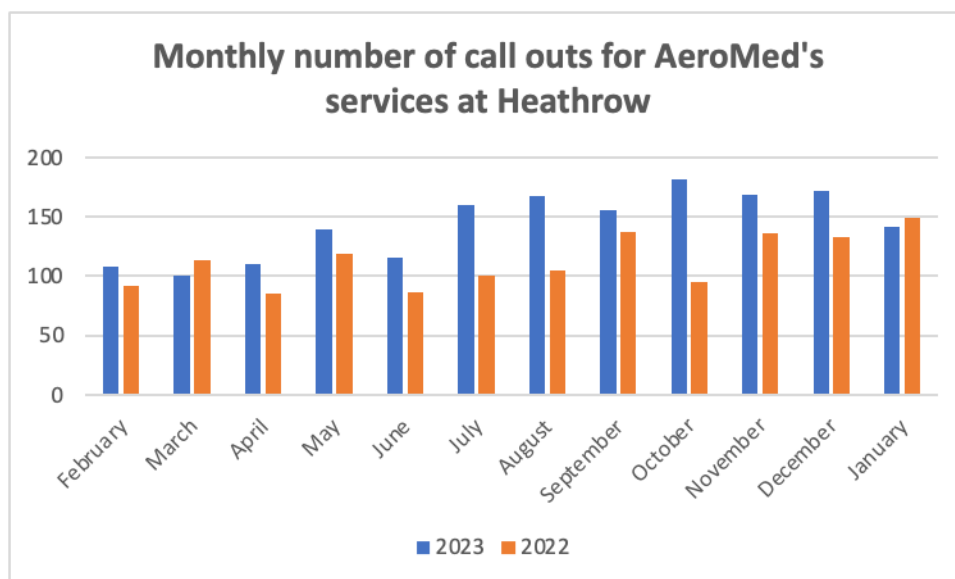


Figure 2: AeroMed’s callouts for Heathrow airport

London City Airport and Eaton House have no access to a service like AeroMed and rely on calling an ambulance service instead.

7. London Heathrow Airport – escorted removals

Safety

Use of Force

During the course of the year, some removals were observed where restraints were used. Often the calm and compassionate approach of the escort team enabled either minimal use of force or de-escalated a challenging situation.

Below are some examples we have observed:

- ‘The person is described as being disruptive in the IRC, and WRB in restricted position, and leg restraints had to be used. He had to be carried to the van. Leg restraints were removed in the van. Exemplary interactions between the escorts and the person being removed. It is clear that this had helped the person calm down from being disruptive at the beginning of his journey to calm and compliant.’ (08.02.23)
- One report noted that in view of a violent history, indication of non-compliance and self-harm risk factors, a WRB had been used in transit from the IRC. A rapport had built up between the person and the escort team and they were able to walk up the aircraft stairs with the WRB in the restricted position in place but with minimal verbal guidance needed. (18.10.23)

Fair and humane treatment

Family removal

Family removals resumed during the year for the first time since the Covid-19 restrictions. We are informed in advance of a proposed family removal and try to ensure that a member of the Board is available to monitor. At present family removals from Heathrow are scarce. Below is an example of the care shown to all members of the family:

- “The team was a dedicated family removal team and it was apparent that their experience in dealing with such sensitive and emotional removal made the whole process a lot smoother than could otherwise have been. It was felt that the entire team dealt with the family in a very caring and compassionate way. It was not believed that anything more could have been done to facilitate this removal. This was a potentially difficult removal but the LE and team clearly thought through the potential risks and planned accordingly. Based on the PER and what was witnessed during the time on board, it is believed that the primary objective was the family’s welfare. Multiple positive interactions were witnessed with the mother and children. The two DCOs that remained with the two eldest children were very engaging and caring.” (18.04.23)

Staff and detained person relations

A significant majority of removals went very smoothly because the people seemed content to be going home. This was often the case when a FNO was returning home. Even when people were less willing and compliant, we witnessed good interactions between them and their escorts.

A typical comment is:

- “This appeared to be a well-executed removal, with good communication between the LE and airline staff, and the escort team building a respectful rapport with the person.” (18.10.23)
- “This was a very challenging situation, but the LE, the escorts, and the medic maintained a calm and compassionate approach to Mr AD. It was felt this was handled well, with a good level of care under very challenging circumstances. Highlighted was the calm conduct of the escorts.” (failed removal 11.11.23)

Healthcare

We were concerned when we monitored a removal to note that the person being removed did not have the medication he had been assured would be available to him. This added to the person’s levels of anxiety and potentially put him at risk. It transpired that this was owing to an administrative error at the IRC. (07.03.23)

Case management

Administrative delays or mistakes have resulted in some removals being either cancelled or at risk of cancellation at the last minute.

Some examples are:

- A person being removed to Iraq was very frustrated at being sent to Sulaymaniyah as he was from Erbil. Given the political conflict between these two regions, he felt his life would be at risk during his onward journey. (18.10.23)
- A man had arrived at Cayley House at 15.15, due to go on a flight at 20.35 but he was subsequently returned to detention at Yarl’s Wood due to lack of documents. The paperwork stated he was travelling with his passport, but it became clear only at Cayley House that an error had been made and he did not have the passport, so could not fly. (02.11.23)
- A man was being removed to Colombo, Sri Lanka. The LE had some concerns about the short transfer time (1hr 10 mins) at Istanbul airport, given that the arrival and departure gates can be at a considerable distance from each other. The LE told me that the next flight from Istanbul to Colombo was not for another 48 hours, so if they did miss it, a management decision would have to be made either to return to the UK or wait for 48 hours in Istanbul. (19.01.24)

The Board feels that an earlier flight to Istanbul could have been arranged to avoid the potential disruption and anxiety.

8. The work of the IMB

On most weeks a Board member made an unannounced visit to the holding rooms at Heathrow Airport to monitor the facilities and to talk to people in detention. In addition, at least every two weeks, an OSE removal was observed, and London City Airport and Eaton House were visited once a month.

Reports were written after each monitoring visit and circulated to the Home Office, Border Force and C&C. We are concerned by the length of time it has taken to get responses from agencies to our reports.

BOARD DATA	
Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of Board meetings in reporting period	12

VISIT DATA	Actual visits
London Heathrow Airport	
	Holding rooms 49
	Removals 42
London City Airport	12
Eaton House	6
Total amount of monitoring	109



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