



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at the South and East Short-Term Holding Facilities**

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

**Published July 2024**



# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the holding rooms	4
3. Key points	7
 <b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	11
5. Fair and humane treatment	14
6. Health and wellbeing	19
7. Preparation for removal, transfer or release	20
 <b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board statistics	23

All IMB annual reports are published on [www.imb.org.uk](http://www.imb.org.uk)

## Introductory sections 1 – 3

### 1. Statutory role of the IMB

The South and East Independent Monitoring Board (the Board) is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the welfare of people in various short-term holding facilities (STHFs) in the South and East of England through observation of their treatment and of the premises in which they are held. Board Members are publicly appointed volunteers.

The Board conducts its work in line with the Short-Term Holding Facility Rules (the 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 Board (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 for the STHFs that it monitors. Board members have full access to all parts of the facility at all times and can speak to detained individuals outside of the hearing of officers. Board members 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 relevant STHF manager about any matter which it considers requires attention, and report to the Secretary of State about any matter about which it considers 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 STHFs it monitors, 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. OPCAT 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 detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Board is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## **2. Description of the holding rooms**

The STHFs at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted airports and the immigration centre at Lunar House in Croydon are all managed by Mitie Care and Custody (C&C). Each of these STHFs has broadly similar facilities including a main holding room, a family room, access to hot and cold food with drinks, TV, newspapers and religious texts in a selection of languages, children's toys and books "and a pay telephone" which will accept incoming calls.

In each of the airport STHFs there is limited space for people to sleep on the floor with space only for a few mattresses to be laid out - if mattresses are available. When there is no space on the floor the only alternative is to sleep on the chairs. Unrelated men, women and vulnerable detainees sleep in the same area unless the family holding room at the relevant location is free.

Aeromed healthcare professionals are available at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted Airports, but not at any other location monitored by the Board.

Gatwick South Terminal STHF is the only airport holding room with a disabled toilet facility, which is unisex. There are no other support systems for people with limited mobility, sight or hearing impairment available at the airport STHFs.

There are no shower facilities at the airport STHFs apart from at Gatwick South Terminal and Southend.

Detained persons are monitored by staff through observation windows. CCTV monitoring is available at all airports other than Southend.

None of the airport STHFs has access to natural light or an exercise area.

Gatwick North Terminal – In the main holding room there are 15 seats and separate male and female toilets. In the family holding room there are seven seats and a unisex toilet. Detained persons' luggage and personal effects are not stored securely. There is limited space for C&C to conduct induction interviews.

Gatwick South Terminal – In the main holding room there are 28 seats, separate male and female toilets and a separate shower. In the family holding room there are 12 seats and a unisex toilet with a shower. There is no private space for C&C to conduct inductions.

Luton Airport – Both the main and family holding rooms have 10 seats each. Toilets are available in each room, but there are no showers. No private space is available for C&C to conduct the inductions for detained people.

Stansted Airport – In the main holding room there are 14 seats and separate male and female toilets, with baby changing facilities in the female toilet, but no showers. Within the main holding room is a small family holding room. Detained persons' luggage and personal effects are not stored securely. There is no private space for C&C to conduct the inductions for detained people.

Southend Airport - This facility is managed by Border Force (BF). There are two separate holding rooms with capacity for eight and four people, neither of which has CCTV monitoring. Each holding room has a unisex toilet.

Neither holding room contains a TV or DVD player.

The facility includes two interview rooms where inductions can be conducted in private.

There are no hot food or hot drinks available. There is a small supply of bottled water and cold and dried food is available.

Lunar House - In the main holding room there are 21 seats and separate male and female toilets. In the separate family holding room there are 10 seats and separate male and female toilets. Inductions are conducted in a common corridor leading from the entrance to the STHF.

There is natural light in both holding rooms.

Summary of the shipping ports - The STHFs at each of the shipping ports monitored by the Board are managed by Border Force (BF).

London Tilbury Port - There are two distinct port areas – Tilbury 1 which is the original facility and Tilbury 2, a considerably newer area, which is operated by P&O Ferries. The facility is only manned when individuals are detained. Tilbury 1 is only used as overflow, but was not used during this reporting period.

Tilbury 2 is a well-appointed large modern portacabin with separate male and female toilets, showers and wash hand basins. Individuals in either of the two holding rooms could be easily monitored from windows in the BF office which is situated between the rooms and CCTV cameras cover the two holding rooms.

Facilities for those with limited mobility are provided within the holding room at Tilbury although no hearing loop is provided.

There is no hot food or hot drinks available.

#### Port of Purfleet

Although a new facility has been in place for the last year this has not yet been commissioned. As a result, detained persons are transported 11 miles to the STHF at Tilbury 2.

Port of Felixstowe – In the opinion of the Board this STHF does not provide a humane place for holding people. The STHF is a small dilapidated portacabin sited in a dark area of a huge hangar. There is a freestanding chemical portable toilet outside the facility, to which detained persons need to be escorted. There are two sleeping mattresses and pillows. There is no disabled access.

Port of Harwich - The STHF has two holding rooms each with a capacity of four people and both have a toilet, shower, drinking fountain and washing facilities. One of the holding rooms is fully accessible and has baby changing facilities. There is also a separate family holding room near the arrivals area with a sofa, bean bag, chair, television, DVDs and games.

The facility is staffed by BF officers only when detained persons are being held there. BF interview rooms are available close to the arrivals area.

Officers may monitor detained persons through windows into the holding rooms and with CCTV.

There are four sleeping mattresses and seven pillows.

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

The Board has monitored the activity across all of the above locations throughout the reporting period. At sites where there is less activity, Board members make contact with the site through telephone interview.

When appropriate, BF staff make direct contact with IMB members at Southend, Tilbury, Purfleet, Harwich and Felixstowe (for example, where there is limited activity).

The data used in the report is provided monthly by Home Office Escort Contract Monitoring Team. Data gathered during monitoring is clearly identified.

#### **3.2 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

The Board is very concerned about the size of the accommodation, especially at Luton Airport, and the potential fire safety implications. The Board observed on one day in January, so many people sleeping on the floor that it was extremely difficult to walk through to the family room.

##### **Fair and humane treatment**

The Board has observed C&C officers, sometimes in situations which are stressful and emotional for those in their care, carrying out their duties with tact and sensitivity. Those members of staff with multi-language skills have been observed using these skills to support detained persons and other members of staff.

For the second year in succession, the Board draws the Home Office's attention to the capacity issues at many of the airports' STHFs and the fact that the needs of those with mobility, hearing or sight impairment issues are still not being adequately addressed.

In the opinion of the Board the STHF at the Port of Felixstowe does not provide a humane place for holding people.

There are a limited number of sleeping mattresses in the STHFs and the Board consider that it is inhumane to require people to sleep on the floor or on chairs. The Board considers it is not acceptable that detained persons, who are often held for more than 24 hours, have totally inadequate provision for rest or sleep.

The Board is very concerned that people are regularly detained for long periods and, in some cases, over 24-hours, in STHFs, which are designed to hold people for very short periods only. Under the STHF Rules, passengers should not be detained for longer than 24 hours other than where a longer period of detention is authorised by the Secretary of State (in practice, a Home Office official).

The STHFs the Board monitors are not residential establishments and do not have adequate facilities for sleeping or exercise and do not offer any privacy. Other than Gatwick South, no airport holding rooms provide showers.

The Board is very disappointed about the lack of progress on the Disability Access Review that was committed to in previous Ministerial Responses, on the 9 August 2022 and 16 June 2023 to our previous annual reports.

The Board is very concerned about the lack of privacy afforded to detained persons during the initial induction at some of the STHFs, or whilst being examined by an Aeromed health professional.

The Board continues to be concerned about the length of time it takes to resolve problems associated with the maintenance and repair of airport facilities.

### **Health and wellbeing**

The Board is pleased to note the continued availability of Aeromed at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted airports providing 24/7 cover.

### **Removal, transport or transfer**

We are concerned about the contractual support provided by Clearsprings and the delays experienced by detained people waiting to be transferred to asylum accommodation. The delays can be caused by a combination of delays by the Home Office, transportation and accommodation availability.

NB: Clearsprings Readiness Homes is a government approved sub-contractor of accommodation and transfer for those who are bailed, having sought asylum.

## **3.3 Recommendations**

### ***TO THE MINISTER***

- The Board is very disappointed that the Disability Access Review has not been completed for the second year and as noted in 3.2 and 5.3 the Minister needs to take steps to ensure that this review is completed and that any recommendations made are implemented. The current STHFs do not provide adequate support for those with limited mobility, sight or hearing impairment.
- The Board recommends that the Minister reviews the accommodation capacity especially as noted in 4.3 and 5.1. There is an increasing number of people held overnight at the STHFs which are not designed for overnight accommodation and in some places do not provide a dignified and humane space.

### ***TO THE DIRECTOR/CENTRE MANAGER & TO HOME OFFICE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT***

The Board recommends that the Home Office review the capacity of each of the holding rooms.

- As noted in 5.1 the Board recommends that the capacity at Luton Airport STHF is reviewed urgently, due to the potential impact on the safety of detained persons and staff in the event of a fire. The facility regularly has luggage over-spilling from the kitchen and the number of residents in a day has been as high as 31, on 12 January 2024. It is not unusual to have more than 20 detained persons in a 24-hour period at Luton Airport, which is the stated capacity.



- The Board recommends where floor space is sufficient such as Gatwick North and South main holding rooms, that the adequate provision of sleeping mattresses should be reviewed.
- The Board recommends that action should be taken to reduce the number of detained persons staying in airport STHFs overnight and to reduce the number of detained persons held for longer than 24 hours, as noted in 5.1.
- As noted in 4.4 the Board recommends that the Home Office gain a contractual commitment from the port authority to resolve issues with the fabric of the STHFs in a timely manner.
- As noted in 7.3, the Board recommends that the Home Office reviews the use of handcuffs at Luton Airport when residents are moved through public areas as the Board considers this not to be in compliance with STHF Rule 11 - Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 amended by Short-term Holding Facility (Amendment) Rules 2022.

### **TO NHS ENGLAND**

- No recommendations.

## **3.4 Progress since the last report (Ministerial response, 16 June 2023)**

### **3.4.1 Airport accommodation**

For the second year in succession the Board expresses its disappointment that problems are not resolved in a timely manner. It is often very difficult to see a plan for resolving problems - see comments in 5.1.

The Board is very disappointed that the commitments to a Disability Access review have not been completed to our knowledge and certainly has not been shared with the Board. The Ministerial response, 9 August 2022, reported that a National Access Disability Review had been commissioned and stated that it was hoped to complete the review by the end of 2022. The Ministerial response, 16 June 2023, again stated a Disability Access Review would be completed by the end of 2023.

### **3.4.2 Holding room capacities**

The Board noted with some disappointment the Ministerial response which stated there were no plans to review the holding room detention capacities.

### **3.4.3 Sleeping Aids**

The Board notes the comments on sleeping mattresses and as stated above is very concerned about the sleeping arrangements.

### **3.4.4 Gatwick North accommodation**

The Board notes there have been some minor improvements at Gatwick North but has seen no evidence of the full review of accommodation committed for Gatwick North which was to be completed by the end of 2023.

### **3.4.5 Disability access and support**

Despite assurances in previous Ministerial responses over the last two years, the Board has not seen evidence that these Disability Access reviews have taken place

and the Board continues to have this same concern, see comments in 5.3 – “The supplier appointed to carry out this work will produce a report for each location, which will set out any identified non-compliance when assessed against the relevant technical standards (Approved Documents/BSI). This national review, which includes more than 50 locations, will be completed before end of year. A further project will then need to be undertaken to review these findings and consider rectification work.”

#### 3.4.6 Stansted accommodation

The Board acknowledges that improvements have been made to the food preparation area. We continue to be very concerned about the accommodation and the impact on those detained, see section 4.4 and 5.1.

## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

The Board is concerned about overall safety at Luton Airport (5.1 and 5.4), due to significant overcrowding and whether provision has been made to evacuate the area in the event of an emergency when the STHF is full, and is exacerbated when luggage is also in the corridor from the kitchen.

#### **4.1 Arrival and induction**

The Board has regularly monitored C&C officers carrying out inductions efficiently, following a common standard including the use of translation services, for example The Big Word. The inductions are carried out sensitively, assessing risks and medical needs of the detained person. The Board has reviewed at each location a sample of the relevant documents and are satisfied that these are generally completed properly.

Board members have observed that C&C officers have coped well when neither The Big Word nor the tablet translation application is able to provide the language support required. However, there is a concern that health needs or other risks may not be identified if adequate translation services are not available, see comment in 5.3.

The Board is very concerned that the C&C offices where inductions are carried out at Gatwick South, Luton and Stansted are not suitable due to the inadequate privacy. During the induction process, personal searches and conversations are carried out in common areas or behind drawn curtains with little or no privacy. These conversations can often lead to the disclosure of sensitive information which can be heard by other members of staff or indeed other detained persons and this problem is worse when a speaker telephone is used for The Big Word translation services.

The Board is very concerned about the lack of privacy across all the STHFs at the airports that the Board monitors while detained persons are being cared for by Aeromed. There are no private facilities for an Aeromed health professional to assess the medical needs of a detained person, which the Board consider lacks the respect that all people should expect.

There have been relatively low numbers of people being detained over the reporting year at the shipping ports and Border Force has exceptionally agreed, outside of the MoU, to inform the Board member on duty when someone is detained. This arrangement works well during the reporting period.

Board members have reviewed all relevant paperwork completed and are satisfied that the inductions appear to follow a process which enable C&C officers to highlight risks.

We have observed generally good working relationships between C&C and BF officers.

#### **4.2 Vulnerable adults, safeguarding**

BF and C&C officers have a responsibility to identify and assess the risks relating to vulnerable adults and young people, and particularly unaccompanied children who

are detained. The Board has noted, specifically at Luton and Stansted, that vulnerability is rarely identified on the IS91 (the authority to detain) and it tends to be the C&C officers who first identify vulnerability and medical needs of detained persons.

The Vulnerable Adult Warning Forms that members have reviewed are well documented with clear observation notes, in many instances every 15 minutes. The Board recommends that vulnerable persons could more easily be identified by a small change in the daily C&C logging documentation.

Although it has not always been the case throughout the reporting period, we have seen a marked improvement of managers signing off on all vulnerable persons' paperwork.

On a recent visit to Luton a Board member observed a resident who had been held for more than 24 hours and was getting very agitated. C&C had locked the women's toilets as he had been making a mess in there (water and tissue). There was a female resident in the holding room at that time - this meant she had to knock on the door to ask for the toilet to be unlocked. C&C handled the situation as best as they could and calmly asked the agitated resident to consider the other residents. The Board considers this another unacceptable example and a consequence of there being no separate facilities for women and/or families.

We are unaware of any vulnerable people being detained at Lunar House, Southend, Tilbury, Purfleet, Harwich or Felixstowe over the reporting period.

#### **4.3 Children and families**

The current size and capacity of the holding rooms at Gatwick North, Luton and Stansted do not allow for multiple families or a family and other vulnerable adults detained at the same time to be cared for safely and decently, when these facilities are nearing capacity.

The only access to the family room at Stansted and the toilet facilities for those detained families is through the main holding room, which the Board considers inappropriate.

We have observed single males, at extremely busy times, sleeping in family rooms, where more than one family is being detained in BF interview rooms, with no facilities for children available.

The Board has reviewed a sample of the Child Care Plans and noted that these are well documented and where appropriate local authority Children's Services were notified.

Although the numbers are small, the percentage of unaccompanied children arriving through the seaports is significantly higher than through the airports. Board members have reviewed the documentation for these children and the timely involvement of Social Services and our monitoring indicated that the system was operating satisfactorily.

#### **4.4 General safety**

As is noted in 5.0, the Board is very concerned about the lack of commitment to resolving outstanding issues relating to the fabric at each of the STHFs. It is unclear

to the Board the extent to which C&C, BF and the Home Office are able to influence the port operator to resolve issues in a timely manner.

The Board has observed a regular testing regime at Lunar House for fire and panic alarms which is well documented. The Board is concerned that there is little evidence of panic and fire alarm testing at Gatwick STHFs.

The Board is concerned that body worn cameras (BWC) are not automatically given to all C&C officers, noting that at some locations Border Force staff wear BWCs whilst working in the same environment. The Board recently highlighted problems where staff were not issued with BWC when detailed to escort duties.

As stated, the Board recognises that improvements have been made to the food preparation area at Stansted, where two C&C officers were scalded in 2022, but the Board considers further improvements need to be made to this area as there is no sink or running water.

#### **4.5 Use of force**

In March 2023 Board members reviewed the detailed Use of Force paperwork for a detained person at Gatwick South Terminal. Detailed notes and observations showed a level of care and empathy by the C&C staff as they tried to calm a detained vulnerable person who was threatening self-harm.

## 5. Fair and humane treatment

The Home Office Short-Term Holding Facility Rules state that – *‘Holding room’ is defined as being an STHF where a detained person may be detained for a period of not more than 24 hours, unless a longer period of detention is authorised by the Secretary of State (in practice a Home Office official)*. The data show clearly that people are often detained for more than 24 hours and, in some cases, for significantly longer.

At the airport STHFs which the Board monitors, only Gatwick South has showers, there are no adequate sleeping facilities, no access to fresh air or exercise space and no privacy, making these facilities particularly unsuitable for children or vulnerable people. The Board does not consider it is humane to detain people for long periods (over 24 hours) in these conditions.

### 5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The Board is very concerned about the sleeping arrangements at all locations, as there is very limited provision for people of different genders to have separate spaces in which to sleep.

The Board is concerned about the inadequate sizes of most of the holding rooms:

- At Gatwick North the family room is too small and can only hold one family with extremely limited space to sleep. The Board has observed families being moved from the STHF to a BF room and vice versa to try to provide adequate privacy and ensure a safe environment. In the Ministerial Response, dated 16 June 2023, to the Board’s annual report, there was a commitment to a redesign to increase the footprint of the family room. The Board has not seen a proposal over the last year that improves the situation with the family room.
- At Luton the overall space provided for the holding room is far too small. When the holding room is at capacity (10) there is only space for five people to lie on the floor to sleep and the Board has observed so many people trying to sleep on the floor, that it has been very difficult to walk through the area. The Board questions whether this space meets health and safety requirements.
- At Stansted the size and layout of the holding room is inadequate when the facility is at capacity, sometimes with additional detained persons having to be held elsewhere by BF. The very small family room within the main holding room has no separate access, provides little or no privacy and is barely adequate to hold a family of four. When the holding room has been very busy, we have observed people sleeping on the floor in the corridor next to the toilets and single males sleeping in the family area. The Board does not consider it humane for families or vulnerable detained persons to have to gain access to the main holding room before they can use the toilet.
- At Felixstowe the Board is very concerned about the toilet arrangements where a detained person is required to be escorted to use the freestanding chemical portable toilets outside the facility.
- In September 2022, the sleeping mattresses were removed from all the airport STHFs monitored by the Board. Two sleeping mattresses were provided for

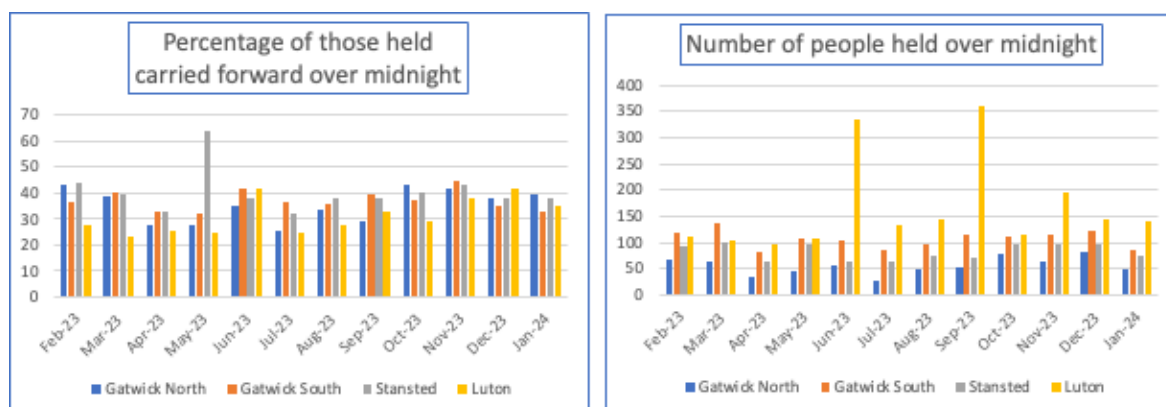
each holding room in March 2023 and this was increased later in the year but in the opinion of the Board, four or five mattresses is not sufficient. The Board is regularly noting many people being detained overnight – for example, in January 2024, at least 207 people at Luton, 54 people at Gatwick South and 80 people at Stansted were detained overnight.

Although the Board recognises there is a safety concern with having too many sleeping people on the floor, there is equal concern about the decency for those detained overnight who are unable to sleep due to the overcrowded accommodation.

The data shared with us show that individuals are currently being held for periods more than 24 hours on a regular basis each month, in conditions where it is almost impossible to sleep. At Luton over 100 people every month are held overnight and exceptionally over 350 people in September 2023. In November 2023, seven detainees were held for more than 24 hours in Gatwick North and 13 in Gatwick South. The daily average for Gatwick South for detainees being held overnight is four detainees. Over 30% of those detained are held overnight.

The Board does not considerate it humane to ask people to sleep at a fixed chair with their head on a table or to lie on the floor with a mat and blanket.

The STHFs are not residential facilities but each month people are detained more than 30 hours (for example 37 hours at Luton 17 November 2023, 36 hours at Gatwick South on the 27 November 2023).



The Board continues to see problems in resolving problems with the maintenance and/or repair of the STHFs which resides with the airport owner. The Board has regularly highlighted this in monitoring reports which are shared with the Home Office and C&C.

The table below gives examples of issues which we have been highlighted that have an impact on detained persons.

Location	Problem	Date	Status
Gatwick North	Wash hand basins holding wastewater which is unhygienic and possibly unsafe.	2021	<b>Resolved in August 2023</b>



Gatwick North	No toilet seat in male toilet	August 2023	<b>Finally Resolved December 2023</b>
Gatwick North	BT pay telephone unable to make outgoing calls	October 2023	Unresolved
Gatwick North	Water Fountain	August 2023	Unresolved
Luton	Toilet handle in female toilet not working	February 2023	<b>Finally Resolved April 2023</b>
Stansted	BT pay telephone coin box is full which means that detained persons are unable to use the telephone to make calls.	2021	Unresolved

The portacabin at Felixstowe (see section 2.0) is not fit for purpose. This is acknowledged by BF. It is in a very poor state of repair externally and is intimidating as a place to be taken to for interview. The structure is in a dirty and dilapidated condition with no disability access. There is a chemical toilet located outside the portacabin but no shower facility or running hot water. Internally, the portacabin is clean but is very small and cramped and the Board feels strongly that it should be replaced as soon as possible with new facilities that are fit for purpose, for example, with a new portacabin similar to that at Tilbury 2.

In June 2023, it was decided Border Force Officers were not able to serve hot food or drinks to detained individuals, as the STHFs they managed did not comply with UK Food Safety requirements. This was unresolved at the end of the Board's reporting year in January 2024 and detained people were still only being offered cold food and, in some locations, cold drinks.

## 5.2 Staff and detainee relations

The Board continues to be impressed by the care and sensitivity shown by C&C officers to those in their care in what can be both emotionally and physically challenging circumstances. When questioned, detained people generally indicate their satisfaction with their treatment by C&C officers.

During our visits, we have found that C&C officers are generally open to our questions, are candid in their responses and will volunteer information should they have concerns relating to those in their care.

The Board is aware of only one formal written complaint that has been received by C&C during the reporting period, in January 2024. Complaint forms are available in each of the holding rooms and during the induction process we have observed that officers usually explain the complaints procedure.



### **5.3 Equality and diversity**

There are limited facilities to support people with mobility issues and sight or hearing impairments, only at Southend, Tilbury, Harwich, Lunar House and Gatwick South.

As a priority, the STHFs need to be properly assessed and re-configured to meet the needs of those with limited mobility, sight or hearing impairments.

The Board has observed at each of these airport facilities C&C provide a culturally diverse range of food and drinks and make reasonable efforts to provide appropriate information in a wide range of languages.

Using the telephone translation service “The Big Word” or technology such as a tablet loaded with a translation app, most language needs are catered for. Georgian is a notable language that is not supported, and “The Big Word” translation services only offer a service for Georgian if booked up to 48 hours in advance.

### **5.4 Children, families**

The family holding rooms at Gatwick North, Luton and Stansted are particularly small and cramped. There is effectively no room to sleep at Gatwick North family room and the family room at Stansted is often used by non-family members.

Although the family room at Stansted has been refurbished and now has soft seating and colourful murals on the walls, the Board considers it still to be unsuitable as it has very limited capacity, does not have separate access, offers little privacy and does not have its own toilets.

The space available for families, single women and vulnerable people continues to be inadequate when there is more than one in resident at the same time.

The Board’s view is that a separate, secure, family room, which should generally be reserved for the use of families, single females, and vulnerable individuals, should be provided, as soon as possible.

There has been a limited need for family space or support at the other STHFs that the Board monitor although the Board notes the provision of space at Harwich.

Our examination of BF records has indicated that no children were detained during the period covered by this report at Southend, Harwich or Lunar House.

### **5.5 Faith and religious affairs**

A variety of religious texts including the Bible, the Quran and the Torah is available at each STHF. The Board notes that religious books are neatly displayed and where necessary separated from those of other religions, but we have observed at busy times these can become mixed together. We have however not received any comments or complaints in this regard when speaking to detained persons.

A small selection of halal and kosher ready meals is generally available at the airports and we have seen evidence of C&C officers visiting the local supermarket to provide other food when required. C&C officers are aware of the dates and requirements of various religious festivals and appropriate catering needs.

## **5.6 Property**

The property of detained persons is held by C&C for the duration of their stay in the STHF and is checked and security tagged, although the level of security at each of the holding rooms varies. Mobile telephones and prescribed medication are removed from the detained person as part of the induction process and kept in their checked property.

At Stansted the property of detained persons is stored in metal 'cages' in a room adjacent to the Detainee Custody Officer (DCO) office. Detained persons property is tagged and placed in the cages. The metal cages should be kept locked although Board members have observed times when the cages have not been properly secured. The cages are out of sight of the holding room and DCO office.

At Luton, luggage is stored in the kitchen and adjoining corridor as overflow. This is not secure and further restricts an already insufficient space.

In our view the current arrangements are generally inadequate across the STHFs and when a facility is reconfigured, a separate secure storage area for the property of detained persons should be provided, ideally within view of the holding room.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare**

The Board is pleased to note that a 24/7-hr service, provided by Aeromed, has continued to be made available during the reporting year at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted.

Board members' interaction with Aeromed staff has always been positive and the Board have observed Aeromed health professionals dealing with medical needs in a caring and compassionate manner.

There is no Aeromed cover at Lunar House. In our view the C&C officers at Lunar House should have access to the advice of healthcare professionals as with the other STHFs. Consideration should be given to the health requirements when the facility expands to a seven-days-a-week operation. Consideration should also be given to the healthcare support when the STHF moves to a new location.

At Southend and the shipping ports various arrangements are in place to provide medical support, including the use of first aid trained fire fighters at Southend to the use of the 111 and 999 service in the event of an emergency at other holding facilities.

### **6.2 Physical and mental healthcare**

Detained persons at most of the STHFs have no access to fresh air or an exercise area and this is of particular concern when people are held for a long time. Data shared with the Board shows that people are increasingly being held for longer periods and we recommend that the Home Office should address this issue.

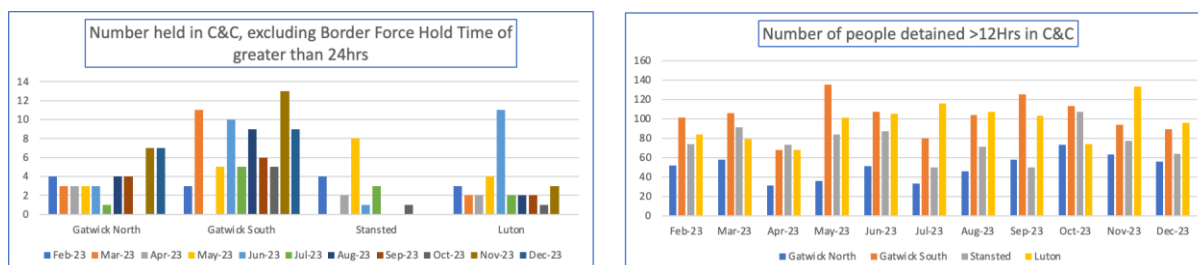
Where people are identified as vulnerable because of physical or mental health conditions, C&C officers are required to prepare a written care plan and our observations suggest that these are generally appropriately detailed.

We are concerned that with the increasing numbers of people being detained it is not always possible for C&C officers to be aware of those with mental health conditions who have not self-identified and we believe that this may be a potential safety issue.

## 7. Preparation for removal, transfer or release

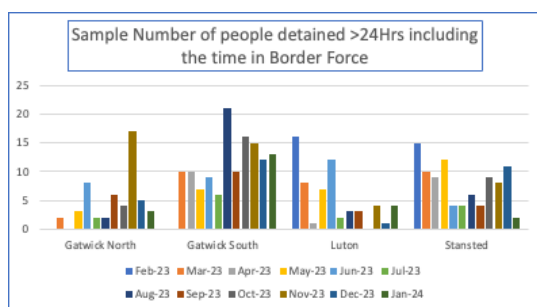
### 7.1 Case management

The Board is concerned about the number of people detained for longer than 24 hours in the care of C&C. The following charts show the number of people detained for greater than 12 and 24 hours and this excludes the time held by Border Force.



We do not consider it to be dignified or humane to detain people for more than 24 hours in a Short Term Holding Facility.

The Board gathers information on each visit, so this is sample data only. The total time a person is in detention can increase significantly when the time a person is held by BF is added to the time the person spends with C&C.



One specific concern is for those individuals who are being bailed and are awaiting transport to safe accommodation - in some cases over 12 hours.

The staffing arrangement at C&C-managed STHFs can on occasions result in only one member of staff being available whilst others are performing escort duties. The Board believes that there is a risk that this could impact on the care that C&C Officers provide.

### 7.2 Family contact

C&C officers will allow detained people to make calls to families and friends using their office landline or their mobile telephone as part of the induction. Once they have moved to the holding room this is more difficult to accommodate.

Although coin-operated payphones are available in holding rooms, they are not always operating correctly and can take a long time to fix, for example the payphone at Gatwick North was first noted as faulty by the Board on the 5 October 2023 and at the end of the reporting year the fault was still outstanding.

We observed one detained woman become very agitated as she could not contact her partner and young children who were waiting to meet her in the arrivals hall, as their only means of contact was through WhatsApp.

Many people, including international travellers only use internet services such as WhatsApp for both outbound and inbound calls. In the opinion of the Board the Home Office need to increase the pace of the project that they are investigating to allow detained persons access to internet calling, as it is often the only way that they can contact families and friends.

### **7.3 Removal**

During our monitoring at the airport STHFs we have regularly observed the escort of detained persons to the aircraft for return to the country from which they arrived. We have noted that C&C officers have carried out these escort duties with discretion and that often in quite difficult circumstances, they treat those in their care with sympathy and kindness.

At Luton we have observed the use of handcuffs when residents are moved through public areas of the airport and the Board considers this not to be compliant with STHF Rule 11. Body worn cameras are used to record this activity and records are kept. We have not observed the use of handcuffs at other locations.

Delayed take-off has an impact on staff supporting the STHF as C&C staff are required to continue their escort duties until the plane doors close. The Board is concerned that on a number of occasions there may be only one member of C&C staff in the STHF due to escort duties and the Board would consider there is a safety risk when this occurs.

We have observed good working relationships between BF and C&C staff in the escorting of people to a return flight. Although not ideal, there is increasing pressure on the team at Luton with the volume of people being returned through the airport.

The Board is pleased to see that in these circumstances C&C managers have made it clear it should be BF officers who escort the individuals to their flights, ensuring that C&C officers can concentrate on their core role of caring for those within the holding room.

At Luton there have been examples of residents arriving having travelled for up to five days through other STHF centres and on various modes of transport. For example, a woman being removed out of port left Northern Ireland, travelled to Manchester STHF via boat, plane and road transport to Luton for onward travel to Romania. Staff at the receiving centre for removal are often unclear of what has happened during this time. A review of these cases should be undertaken to minimise time and travel. Clear records should be kept to inform C&C staff to ensure an individual's needs are met.

### **7.4 Transfer or release**

The Board is concerned about the contracted service provided by Clearsprings at Gatwick. On many occasions people have been bailed and have had to wait many hours, on occasions over 12 hours in the STHF before Clearsprings have been able to transport people to a safe location.

The Board is concerned that despite repeated requests, the Home Office have not been able to share with the Board the data through its contract monitoring on whether Clearsprings is meeting its contractual obligation. It is difficult for the Board to assess whether the delay is within Border Force after the decision has been made to bail a detained person, or if the delay is with Clearsprings, but there is a significant impact on detained persons.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

The chart shows the total contacts. (The figure in brackets shows where the contact was by telephone).

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12
Total number of Board meetings	12
Total number of visits to Gatwick Airport North and South STHF	47
Total number of visits to Luton Airport STHF	55 (1)
Total number of visits to Southend Airport	2 (1)
Total number of visits to Stansted Airport STHF	48 (3)
Total number of visits to Port of Felixstowe	22 (16)
Total number of visits to Harwich Port	9
Total number of visits to Tilbury Port	16 (12)
Total number of visits to Purfleet Port	1(1)
Total number of visits to Lunar House Immigration Reporting Centre STHF	46 (27)



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [imb@justice.gov.uk](mailto:imb@justice.gov.uk).