



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at Yarl's Wood IRC

**For reporting year
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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1 Statutory role of the IMB

1.1 Statutory role in the IRC

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 requires every immigration removal centre (IRC) to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the IRC is situated.

Under the Detention Centre Rules, the Board is required to:

- monitor the state of the premises, its administration, the food and the treatment of detained persons
- inform the Secretary of State of any abuse that comes to their knowledge
- report on any aspect of the consideration of the immigration status of any detained person that causes them concern as it affects that person's continued detention
- visit detained persons who are removed from association, in temporary confinement or subject to special control or restraint
- report on any aspect of a detained person's mental or physical health that is likely to be injuriously affected by any condition of detention
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated, as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the IRC has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every detained person and every part of the IRC and all its records.

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 persons deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such persons 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 persons and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMBs are part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

1.2 Statutory role in the RSTHF

The Yarl's Wood Independent Monitoring Board is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the welfare of persons in a residential short-term holding facility (RSTHF) through observation of their treatment and of the premises in which they are held.

The Board conducts its work in line with the Short-Term Holding Facility (STHF) Rules 2018, which place the day-to-day operations of STHFs on a statutory footing. Part 7 of the Rules sets out the responsibilities of the Independent Monitoring Board

(referred to in the Rules as the Visiting Committee). The Board has unrestricted access to every detained person and all immigration detention facilities and to most records. IMB members have access, at all times, to all parts of the facility and can speak to detained persons outside of the hearing of officers. They must consider any complaint or request which a detained person wishes to make to them and make enquiries into the case of any detained person whose mental or physical health is likely to be injuriously affected by any conditions of detention. The IMB must inform the RSTHF manager about any matter which they consider requires their attention. and report to the Secretary of State about any matter about 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 persons, 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.

2 Description of the establishment

Yarl's Wood IRC ('the centre') is a purpose-built establishment for the detention of single men and women under immigration legislation. The centre is managed on behalf of the Home Office immigration and enforcement unit (HOIE) by Serco.

During 2023 the establishment has been used as an IRC and an RSTHF for men and an IRC for women. The maximum capacity of the centre is 410 persons: 314 male IRC, 58 female IRC and 38 male RSTFH/IRC. These are housed in five units: Avocet, Bunting, Crane, Dove and Nightingale. In July, Bunting was repurposed to an IRC unit for male time-served foreign national offenders (TSFNOs) who have committed sexual offences. The repurposed Nightingale unit started as a standalone IRC facility for women in March. Avocet, Dove, and Crane are used for IRC men. Most of the accommodation is in ensuite twin rooms, although single rooms are provided when necessary. All units provide access to a garden area.

The care and separation unit (CSU) is used for IRC rules 40 and 42 and RSTHF 35 and 37 and comprises 10 single rooms. Since 2018, it has sometimes provided more relaxed and temporary accommodation for detained persons requiring a greater level of support and those who struggle to cope on a main unit. In addition, the CSU is used at times as a pre-departure area for those subject to removal. In these cases, IRC rule 15 and RSTHF rule 13 (which are descriptors for standards of accommodation) are used.

In 2023, the number of detained men leaving the centre was 2,872 and the number of detained women leaving the centre was 657. There was an average monthly occupancy of 310, with a maximum of 363 persons in December 2023.

Onsite healthcare is provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT), commissioned for the centre by NHS England.

The Home Office detention engagement team (DET) communicates with detained persons and helps them understand their cases and detention. During 2023, drop-in surgeries were held on Bunting unit, Nightingale unit, and in the social visit's hall. Detained persons have been contacted by phone as well as having face-to-face meetings in the legal corridor and on units. The Home Office detention and escorting services (DES) compliance team is responsible for all onsite commercial and contract monitoring.

The welfare office also runs daily surgeries to support detained persons and further services are supplied by external organisations: Hibiscus, who advise on resettlement; the Red Cross, who help trace families; and Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), which advises on bail applications. Beyond Detention provide emotional and practical support both to detained persons in the centre and post-detention in the community. Finally, the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group support detained persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more.

Spiritual support and counselling for pastoral purposes are provided by the religious affairs team, with representatives from all the main faiths. If not a regular visitor, then arrangements are made for specific faiths.

Educational opportunities are provided by the contractor.

3 Key points

3.1 Background to the report

The population of the centre has changed, the implementation of Operation Safeguard (the policy to reduce pressure on space in the prison estate) during 2023 led to TSFNOs representing an increasing proportion of the persons detained at the centre.

3.2 Main findings

Safety

- There has again been a marked increase in violence at Yarl's Wood over the course of 2023. There have been many altercations between detained persons. There has also been an increase in damage to property, as well as physical and verbal assaults on both female and male officers. Data provided to the IMB suggests that there is a link between the level of violence and the increased occupancy of the centre, and the proportion of the centre that are TSFNOs, which has at many times been more than 50% of the male population.
- The Board has observed and commends the efforts of officers to diffuse potential altercations and engage in mediation between residents. Significant efforts have been made by mediation to keep the time spent in CSU to a minimum and after a cooling off period, return detained persons to their units as quickly as possible.
- There were five major incidents during the year when the command suite was opened. Two were major incidents where significant damage was made to units and the sports facilities, and in one of these there was an escape of detained persons from the centre.
- In two other incidents, a detained person climbed on a fence and another on a unit roof to prevent their removal. In another incident a detained person broke through the wall of his room at night and set fire to curtains in the unit corridor.
- The fragility of the centre's fabric has been exposed by the above incidents and the Board questions the fitness of Yarl's Wood for the purpose of detention.
- Length of detention remains an issue with the average detention in 2023 being 53 days for men and 13 days for women. The Board has noticed an increase in the length of stay and the percentage of persons detained more than two months, increased to 23% from 14% in 2022. By the end of the reporting period, one detained person had been in the centre since 6 November 2022 and in the immigration estate since 25 February 2022. The longest stay for a detained women is 106 days.
- Throughout the year, the centre continued to see increasing numbers of detained persons arriving with mental health issues, including those transferred from the prison estate. Information coming from prisons about the mental health and vulnerability of men being transferred to Yarl's Wood could be improved. The poor information sharing creates unnecessary risk in

ensuring the safety and wellbeing of detained persons and increases the work for the staff, both Serco and healthcare.

Fair and humane treatment

- The centre is showing distinct signs of wear and tear. This is partly due an increase in violent incidents, during which damage to the centre is caused. The Board has questioned whether the buildings are now sufficiently robust. The relative ease with which substantial damage was caused during the two incidents in April and October supports this view.
- When the Nightingale unit was being prepared to reopen as a women's unit, the Board was concerned that it might be easy for the men on the Crane unit to have access to the women. Despite assurances that this would not be a problem, some of the women have told the Board that they feel exposed and uncomfortable with the behaviour of some of the men who are able to see them in the outdoor exercise area from the first floor Crane unit windows.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board welcomes the additional posts to the healthcare team.
- The Board welcomes the health promotion campaigns and point of care testing.
- The Board acknowledges the quality of care that is provided by the in-house mental health professionals. However, the Board is concerned that persons with severe mental health crises are being kept in the CSU whilst waiting to be transferred to mental health beds outside of the centre. The CSU does not provide a suitable environment for managing persons with severe mental health crises, both for their own safety and that of the staff.
- The Board is concerned that there appears to be little or no oversight of Rule 35 applications. It is unclear which governing body oversees the quality of the Rule 35 process.

Preparation for return or release

- . The IMB continue to question why the removal process for FNOs is not started in prison before the end of an individuals' sentence. The IMBs concerns for the length of time that TSFNOs spend detained at Yarl's Wood, having served their sentence continues.
- In March 2023, the HO introduced a reintegration programme, eligible to all categories of returning persons. The programme is available to nationals of 11 countries and provides a package of support services both in the UK and in-country.
- The Board welcomes the increase in the number of skype terminals, supporting contact with families and friends.

3.3 Recommendations

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board repeats the recommendation to introduce a time limit for immigration detention.

TO HOME OFFICE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

- The Board acknowledges that Home Office staffing has increased. However, there has been no evidence that there has been any reduction in the length of stay for detained persons. This has been a major contributor to unrest in the centre. The Board once again recommends that:
 - The removal process for FNOs is started in prisons well before their sentence is due to end and in advance of their transfer from prison to the immigration estate.
 - The length of stay is reduced by improving the processes related to asylum status/and or removal.

TO THE DIRECTOR/CENTRE MANAGER

- Whilst the majority of staff are skilled and professional in their conduct, the Board again notes that there have been a small number of complaints about officer's conduct, including bullying and racist comments, some of which have been upheld. Consequently, the Board again recommends that the culture of professional conduct and behaviour is maintained through the officer's training, inductions and ongoing review of culture amongst staff.

TO NHS ENGLAND

- The Board is concerned with the length of time between identification of need and the sourcing of mental health beds and/or secure mental health beds for vulnerable persons. The Board does not consider the CSU to be an appropriate place for a detained person who is having a mental health crisis.
- R35 medical reports should be audited. The IMB should have access to oversight of this process.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
Introduce a time limit for immigration detention.	Recommendation rejected.	
Start the removal process for FNOs in prison before they are transferred to an IRC.	This recommendation was accepted and progress was stated to be ongoing with a dedicated Custodial Decision	The Board has seen no evidence that there have been any positive results from this initiative. FNOs continue to be frustrated by the

	Team to focus on this.	length of time they are spending in the IRC estate once they have been transferred from prison.
Reduce length of stay by improving processes relating to asylum status and/or removal.	Partially accepted. The Board was advised that reforms have focused on ensuring, with adequate safeguards in place, that detention is for the minimum period necessary.	As above, the Board has seen no evidence that there has been any progress in reducing the length of stay. The percentage of persons detained for more than two months has increased to 23% from 14% in 2022.
Staff recruitment and retention should be a priority and culture of professional conduct and behaviour maintained through training.	Recommendation accepted.	Recruitment and training have been maintained.
Increase the number of languages available for the induction video.	Accepted. Serco will develop two new induction videos for men and women in the 5 most popular languages encountered in the centre.	This has not been completed.
NHFT maintain the excellent staffing levels.	Accepted.	Recruitment has been maintained and staffing levels increased.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4 Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

- 4.1.1 The Board continues to observe the reception area. The accuracy of information received on the IS91 forms continues to improve although the spelling of names always needs rechecking. The men and women arriving are largely from other detention centres or from the prison estate. Information regarding those transferring has improved. However, the Board continues to observe the arrival of men and women with mental health issues and other vulnerabilities, where information has not been made available. There was only one incident of a new arrival claiming to be under 18, indicating the need for a more rigorous assessment procedure prior to arrival at Yarl's Wood.
- 4.1.2 The IMB have observed that officers interviewing new arrivals have been calm, respectful and professional. Systems have been put in place and appear to be working efficiently. All the men and women have their belongings thoroughly searched and recorded. All arrivals are seen by a member of the healthcare team and are provided with clean towels, bedding, new clothes, shoes and toiletries. The IMB have spoken to many of the men about their arrival into Yarl's Wood and their responses have been largely positive.
- 4.1.3 The induction takes place once the men and women have been placed on the units. Pamphlets which are available in 19 different languages are also distributed. The IMB have recorded that it takes a few days for individuals to find out where everything is and to understand systems and procedures.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

- 4.2.1 There were no deaths in custody during 2023.
- 4.2.2 There were 29 reported incidents of self-harm during 2023 compared to 18 reported in 2022. There were no serious self-harm injuries during 2023. Members of the IMB have observed that in cases of self-harm, officers have responded in a proportionate manner and have used the ACDT System where deemed necessary [see 4.2.4]. There has been an increase in the use or suspected use of ligatures and efforts have been made to remove all potential equipment in the gardens that could be used to self-harm.
- 4.2.3 There continues to be a high level of stress and anger amongst men regarding the length of time they have been kept at Yarl's Wood. There is much evidence that the prolonged length of time and uncertainty takes its toll on the men's mental health and has resulted in poor sleep, violence, depression, and self-harm. Deep frustration is evident regarding the length of time that their case is held between HOIE and their solicitor, with delays all the way through. Keeping individuals in indeterminate detention cannot be considered humane. Until this situation improves there needs to be greater transparency and more realistic explanation by SERCO and HOIE staff as to how long they may be held in detention. There is also frustration expressed regarding the length of time it takes to return home those detained persons who have volunteered to return.

- 4.2.4 Assessment Care in Detention and Teamwork (ACDT) is the process used to manage detained individuals identified to be at risk of suicide or self-harm. The number of ACDT cases opened during 2023 was 181 compared to 148 in 2022. As a percentage of the average occupation in Yarl's Wood this varies from 2.7% in May to the highest at 6.6% in March. 103 of these were opened due to thoughts of self-harm, 29 for actual self-harm and 29 following a statement of intention to self-harm. The IMB and senior Serco management regularly monitor the ACDT paperwork, and this appears to be generally of a good standard. Training has been provided for officers working with the new ACDT paperwork. The officers' response to the effectiveness of the new paperwork has been mixed.
- 4.2.5 The safer detention group meets monthly and tries to identify patterns and triggers about the number of ACDT cases. It tracks referrals both in and out of Yarl's Wood. It has identified that information coming from prisons about the mental health and vulnerability of FNOs being transferred to Yarl's Wood could be improved. This has created additional work for the professionals in the health department. Communications with the prison estate regarding this area is ongoing. It is Scottish policy not to include a referral when an individual is transferred from the prison or IRC estate.
- 4.2.6 There were 70 incidents of constant supervision during 2023 involving 57 individuals, compared to 27 in 2022. It is evident that the officers respond confidently both to self-harming incidences and detained persons talking of self-harm. It is the Board's experience to date that appropriate support and supervision is put in place in a timely manner. However, in 2023 there has been an increase in the number of men detained at Yarl's Wood with complex mental health needs. The Board is concerned that this is placing pressure on officers and the health department to ensure that these men and women's needs are met and that they and the centre's population are kept safe.
- 4.2.7 The higher numbers of men and women held within the centre will inevitably result in more limited one to one communication between officers and those detained regarding their situation and the support they can get. Language barriers also isolate individuals making it difficult for detained persons to express low mood. The Board understands that Big Word and hand-held translation devices are being used as much as possible, but these also have their limitations.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

- 4.3.1 There were five major incidents during the year when the command suite was opened to manage the incident. Two were major incidents where significant damage was made to units and the sports facilities. In one of these there was an escape of 13 detained persons from the centre, five of whom were immediately located with the remainder being apprehended over the course of several weeks. In the other major incident, detained persons broke through several units causing significant damage before being returned to their units.
- 4.3.2 In two incidents, a detained person climbed on a fence from the garden of the CSU area in an attempt to prevent their removal on a charter flight. In one of these incidents the detained person climbed further onto the roof of the units.

On one occasion, the detained person surrendered their position once the coach carrying the detained persons to the airport had left the centre. On the other occasion, the resident was handed over to the escorts once disembarked from the fence. Following these incidents, razor wire was installed on the fencing to prevent a further occurrence.

- 4.3.3 In another incident a detained person broke through the wall of his room into the unit corridor and after trying unsuccessfully to set fire to some curtains, lit a fire in the corridor. Detained persons who were locked in adjacent rooms were subjected to smoke, and whilst they were not in imminent danger, they were seriously unsettled by the incident.
- 4.3.4 The above incidents have demonstrated that the fabric of the centre is vulnerable to determined efforts of detained persons to break out of their rooms, the units and cause significant damage in the centre. The Board questions whether the infrastructure of Yarl's Wood is sufficiently robust for the purpose of detention.
- 4.3.5 The Board attended all occasions when the command suite was opened and observed that the incidents were effectively managed and concluded without injury to staff or detained persons.
- 4.3.6 The centre operates a system of opening anti-social behaviour booklets (TABs). The aim of the TAB is to monitor and reduce tensions and maintain a safe and peaceful atmosphere within the centre. In 2023 a total of 287 TABs were opened, an increase of 180 from 2022. The IMB were informed that the main reasons for opening TABs were physical/verbal altercations, damage, and non-compliance with centre rules.
- 4.3.7 There has again been a marked increase in violence at Yarl's Wood compared with 2022. There have been many altercations between detained persons. There has also been an increase in damage to property, as well as physical and verbal assaults on both female and male officers. There have also been two major incidents where significant damage was made to units and the sports facilities. Data provided to the IMB indicates a link between the increased violence and both the increased occupancy of the centre, and the proportion of the population that are TSFNOs, which has at many times been more than 50% of the male population. The centre continues to see increasing numbers of detained persons arriving with mental health issues amongst all the residents as well those transferred from the prison estate. As in previous years, the Board observes there is no preparation for dealing with immigration issues in prison so when told they are being removed from the country, the men deal with their situation in a variety of ways, with some becoming violent. IMB members have all reported tension and anger throughout the year in the IRC units where men have been held for several months without any idea of when their immigration status will be resolved. This has resulted in several peaceful sit-down protests demanding action from the Home Office. It has been a challenging period for officers managing these units.

- 4.3.8 Exit surveys were completed by those leaving the centre between January and December. Numbers completed were lower than expected. Eight concerns were raised by detained persons about bullying between January 2023 and November 2023 compared to two in the previous year. Analysis of the complaints suggest that detained persons of different ethnic groups complain about different issues. Focus groups for certain ethnic groups have been arranged by officers to listen to their specific concerns and promote understanding and tolerance. This situation will continue to need careful monitoring.

4.4 Detained persons with specific vulnerabilities, safeguarding

- 4.4.1 The wellbeing of detained persons identified as vulnerable is managed under vulnerable adult care plans (VACPs) which detail the specific needs of the individual and any support or adjustments they require. There were on average 12 VACPs in operation each month, an increase from eight in 2022, with a total of 153. The majority were for mental and physical health issues and reflects the increase in vulnerable persons entering the immigration detention estate.
- 4.4.2 There was a total of one age dispute during 2023 (10 in 2022). The low number reflects that the centre is no longer operating as a STHF. If there is any suggestion that a detained person is a minor and they have not already been age assessed, then they are released to social services for an age assessment. Whilst this is being arranged the detained person is placed on an age dispute care plan.
- 4.4.3 340 individuals were identified as potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery during 2023. This is a decrease of 11 from the 2022 figures. With the detained person's staying for a longer period, it is hoped that potential victims of trafficking are either identified or feel able to identify themselves and be interviewed.
- 4.4.4 Detained persons that are considered especially vulnerable to harm as a result of their detention are regarded as an 'adult at risk' (AAR). An individual may be regarded as being an adult at risk if they suffer from a medical condition, physical disability or they have been the victim of torture or trafficking. There were 16 adults at risk AAR level 3 during 2023 (12 in 2022). Data for adults at risk at other levels has not been provided.

4.5 Use of force

- 4.5.1 Force was used 140 times against persons detained at Yarl's Wood in 2023. This is an increase from the 53 occasions when force was used in 2022. Of these cases, 99 were spontaneous and 41 were planned to assist with operations to remove persons from the country. In line with the increase in other measured parameters in the centre, the IMB have been told that the increased use of force (UOF) reflects the change in population with the significant increase of detained persons transferring from the prison estate. The Board reviews videos of UOF incidents before most Board meetings and considers that the UOFs have been justified and proportionate.

- 4.5.2 The Board are informed that the reasons for the unplanned UOFs were to prevent harm and to maintain safety. Thirty incidents (21% of total incidents) were recorded as for the detained person's own safety including to prevent acts of self-harm, 61 (44%) were recorded as necessary to maintain good order and discipline, 17 (12%) were recorded as force used protect other detained persons and 17 (12%) were recorded as necessary to protect staff. Other recorded reasons for UOF were to prevent damage to centre property and to prevent escape. UOF incidents are reviewed in the security committee. Handcuffs were used on 12 occasions with control and restraint methods used on the remainder. The centre does not use body belts.
- 4.5.3 There has been an increase in incidents involving violence towards staff and detained persons during UOF and other incidents. During 2023, there were 31 incidents involving violence against staff and/or detained persons (29 in 2022). This resulted in 14 injuries to staff (15 in 2022) and eight injuries to detained persons (six in 2022). 14 members of staff and one detained person required hospital treatment.
- 4.5.4 Five UOF incidents were referred to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) and two were upheld.

4.6 Substance misuse

- 4.6.1 In 2023 there were eight cases of detained persons suffering from substance misuse which required support from healthcare. This is the same number of cases as in 2022. Healthcare can conduct routine urine drug screening on new arrivals, but it is not currently mandatory.
- 4.6.2 With the large number of detained persons transferring from the prison estate there has been an increase in substance abuse. It is noticeable that at times there is a smell of cannabis having been smoked and there are cases where detained persons have made hooch in their rooms. There have been finds of hooch, cannabis and other controlled substances during intelligence led searches of rooms and officers are diligent in observations during visits to prevent substances being given to detained persons by visitors. Letters and parcels sent to detained persons through the postal service are also monitored and there have been finds of controlled substances.
- 4.6.3 Healthcare runs a detoxification programme, and medicines are available from the medicines administration point. 39 detained persons were on a methadone programme during 2023.

5 Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Escort, transfer and transport

- 5.1.1 Throughout the year, there was an increasing number of detained persons, mainly women, who refused to leave for transfer to other removal centres. This raises two issues: the use of an unsuitable crew and the reasons for the transfer.
- 5.1.2 When a two-person crew is sent, they are unable to complete the removal of someone who refuses to leave. The IMB understand that this is neither cost-effective, nor time effective. It also increases the stress of detained individuals who are already anxious about their immigration situation. Several of the women told the Board that they had already been transferred from prison to one IRC and then to another, and felt they were simply being 'shunted' around the detention estate. They feared a further move would lead to a lack of continuity in their case management and delay their release even more. Constant relocation made it very difficult for them to receive visits from family and friends.
- 5.1.3 This is unfair on several levels and in the last week of December, some of the women staged two small peaceful protests to highlight their dissatisfaction with this treatment by the Home Office.
- 5.1.4 The Board has previously expressed concern about the unsuitability of nighttime arrivals. In 2023, 1062 men and 350 women arrived at the centre between 19.00 and 07.00. In 2022, 855 men and 152 women departed between the same hours.
- 5.1.5 The Board received a complaint from a man who was not happy that he had had to be handcuffed to be taken for a hospital visit. When this was raised by the IMB, assurance was given that all cases are individually risk-assessed before the decision is made to use handcuffs.

5.2 Accommodation, clothing, food

- 5.2.1 The re-role to a predominantly male IRC has had an impact on the fabric of the centre. Barriers have been set up to prevent detained individuals from moving between units. These were damaged by some of the men however these have now been repaired. Entrances to the units are physically manned by staff if the barriers are not working.
- 5.2.2 The centre is showing distinct signs of wear and tear. The Board has questioned whether the buildings are sufficiently robust to accommodate the men held there. The relative ease with which substantial damage was caused during the two incidents in April and October supports this view.
- 5.2.3 When Nightingale unit was being prepared to reopen as a women's unit, the Board was concerned that it might be easy for the men on Crane unit to have access to the women. Despite assurances that this would not be a problem, some of the women have told the Board that they feel exposed and uncomfortable with the behaviour of some of the men who are able to see them from Crane unit windows.

- 5.2.4 Staff with previous experience of the centre as a women's IRC told the Board that the women on the small Nightingale unit came out of their rooms more often and mixed more readily, than had been the case on the larger units. The Board considers this an important factor in helping to reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness felt by those in detention.
- 5.2.5 Intermittently the Board has noted that centre did not look clean, and that plates and rubbish were left lying about. At times, the communal gardens were littered. The Board has observed that the rule banning smoking indoors was not enforced adequately by staff: units smell of smoke and some of the men have complained about this. In combination, these things all create a less pleasant environment for those detained. However, when some of the men had paid activities as cleaners and litter pickers, there was a noticeable improvement.
- 5.2.6 On several visits, the Board noticed that the centre was unpleasantly loud. Staff told the IMB that some of the men seemed to like creating nuisance by turning up the volume of the television in the main corridor and that they were constantly having to adjust the volume. Fortunately, this did not continue for more than a few weeks.
- 5.2.7 In November, some of the men complained to the Board that the tumble dryers on their unit were not working. More than four weeks later, this was still the case. The Board considers that such a basic maintenance issue should have been resolved within days.
- 5.2.8 Occasionally, there were complaints about missing laundry. Usually, these were quickly resolved by use of CCTV footage.
- 5.2.9 The IMB often receives verbal complaints the food. A few men have said that portions were not big enough, but the Board inspects the food and considers that meal sizes are generous, although quite stodgy, with little fresh fruit or vegetables.
- 5.2.10 A significant proportion of persons detained at Yarl's Wood in 2023 were Albanian which led to their requesting more Albanian dishes on the menu. A Residents' Information and Advisory Committee (RIAC) meeting was held to discuss food complaints. Catering tried out a revised menu with two Albanian dishes per week.
- 5.2.11 Food is pre-ordered via the kiosks on each unit and then collected from the serveries in the dining rooms. In June, staff said that some of the men were not ordering food and so would have to be served the default (vegetarian) option. Staff described this to the IMB as a ploy to create a conflict situation at the serveries and that the men would become aggressive if they did not get what they wanted. This did not become a major issue, although there were several incidents throughout the year when frustrated men threw their food at another person or on the floor.
- 5.2.12 Good use of the cultural kitchen is made by different groups. For many, this is a valuable social activity which allows them to prepare and eat food more to their taste.

5.3 Separation

- 5.3.1 The Care and Separation Unit (CSU) is intended to provide basic accommodation for detained individuals who are removed from association under Detention Centre Rules 40 or 42.
- 5.3.2 In 2023 there were 306 removals to CSU. This is a significant increase compared to 2022 (100). Of these, 277 were men removed under Detention Centre Rule 40 (separation) and 16 were women. Thirteen persons, 12 men and one woman, were placed under Rule 42 (confined temporarily in special accommodation). This is fewer than in 2022 (14).
- 5.3.3 Detained persons should only be removed from association for reasons of security and safety, both individual and of the centre. In cases of very aggressive behaviour (towards staff or fights between detained persons), it became practice for them to be removed to CSU to defuse the situation. In these instances, staff made good use of mediation to facilitate prompt reintegration to the main units.
- 5.3.4 As in 2022, the total number of removals from association seemed to reflect the increased number of persons detained in the centre. Information provided to IMB records that frustration on the part of the detained person led to their removal from association. Reasons for their frustration were similar to some of those in 2022: frustration at the lack of progress of their case, particularly amongst those who had already served a prison sentence, only to be further detained in an IRC; conflict with other detained persons; refusal to abide by centre rules, leading to conflict with staff; hostility towards those of different nationalities; misunderstandings.

As in previous years, the IMB considers that the lack of case progression and poor communication about cases contribute significantly to the sense of frustration felt by detained individuals and for some, subsequent challenging behaviour.

- 5.3.5 The Board expressed concern that there was no separate CSU on the women's unit, so CSU had to be used for both men and women simultaneously. However, the Board noted that great care was taken by staff to safeguard those held there and prevent contact between the men and women.
- 5.3.6 The Board observed that an increasing number of persons held in CSU exhibited behaviours suggestive of mental health problems. Even a few days in CSU triggered negative changes in their behaviour. Sometimes, after they had been returned to their units, they had to be brought back to CSU after a subsequent event, showing a marked deterioration in their mental health.
- 5.3.7 There were five cases of detained persons who were sectioned under the Mental Health Act (MHA) and were held under Rule 40 for extended periods of time (beyond the statutory limit of 14 days) while waiting for a hospital bed. The CSU environment is not suitable for such vulnerable persons. The Board understands that it takes time to find a bed for them but is concerned about the impact on their health of a lengthy stay in CSU.

- 5.3.8 There is a team of staff who work in CSU and this consistency has allowed them to develop an understanding of the needs of those in separation. The Board has observed empathetic and supportive interactions.

5.4 Staff/detained persons relationships

- 5.4.1 The recruitment and retention of suitable staff is a constant challenge. During the year there have been several initial training courses (ITCs) for new recruits and the Board commends the appointment of an increasingly diverse staff who bring with them a range of important additional language skills.
- 5.4.2 The Board received many comments about the kindness of staff and observed many positive and caring interactions between officers and detained persons. To have specific staff on each unit, when possible, helps to establish an atmosphere of understanding and trust.
- 5.4.3 The Board notes that there was often a small number of confrontational detained persons. The reasons for this appear to be numerous: disregard for rules, conflict with specific staff members or fellow detained persons, frustration with their situation. At times, this caused tensions on the units, especially between detained persons of different nationalities.

5.5 Equality and diversity

- 5.5.1 General information is sometimes available in a range of languages, but there are still lots of gaps in what information is available for detained persons, in a language they can understand. The Board has noted that there has been an increase in the amount of information in Albanian, in proportion to the number of Albanian residents.
- 5.5.2 During the year, new display boards were put up to give information about support for different faiths and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 5.5.3 Telephonic interpretation services are used regularly. Sometimes there are delays while a suitable interpreter is found. The Board was present at interviews or reviews when it took more than twenty minutes before an interpreter was available, creating frustration for all involved.
- 5.5.4 When persons with disabilities were detained, appropriate measures were put in place to support them. All had a personal evacuation plan (PEEP) and appropriate adjustments were made to their regimes.
- 5.5.5 The centre has organised events to promote tolerance and celebrate diversity, including celebrations of Pride month, Eid and Black History Month.

5.6 Faith and religious affairs

- 5.6.1 There is a very active religious affairs team, representing most religions. They celebrate significant dates in spiritual calendars and provide great support by visiting individuals.
- 5.6.2 There is no rabbi and nowhere, other than one of the multi-faith rooms, which could be used for acts of worship by those of the Jewish faith. To the Boards knowledge, there has not been anyone detained during the reporting year that have identified themselves as of Jewish faith.

5.7 Complaints

- 5.7.1 During the reporting year, there were 156 complaints, marking an increase of 45 from the previous year. Two of these were group complaints. The Board are unable to determine the reason for the rise in complaints and whether this reflects greater awareness of the complaints system or an increased sense of dissatisfaction with treatment at the centre.
- 5.7.2 The majority of complaints related to information on immigration cases and lack of communication on the status of immigration cases.
- 5.7.3 The Board was satisfied that all complaints were followed up within the target timescales. Outcomes were as shown above.
- 5.7.4 Responses to complaints were detailed, giving reasons for the decision to uphold the complaint or not and outlining the procedure for appealing against the decision.
- 5.7.5 In the reporting year, there were more complaints about staff than in previous years. Some of these complaints alleged bullying and racist comments, a number of which were upheld.

Total number of complaints	156
Upheld	8
Partially upheld	12
Not upheld	124
Withdrawn	2
Under investigation	9
Resident discharged so told not to investigate	1

5.8 Property

- 5.8.1 There has been an increasing number of problems related to property. Some persons who have been held at police stations before being brought to the IRC have had real problems retrieving their property. One man did not have his phone which contained information essential to his case and was told by the police that he could not have it until they had finished examining it. After several months and a lot of effort by the welfare team, the police said that they had finished with the phone, and he could fetch it whenever he liked – totally impossible for someone in detention. After arriving from a different police station, a married couple still had none of their own clothes or belongings after three days of detention. Instances such as these are not acceptable.
- 5.8.2 From time to time, detained individuals arrange for money or other items to be sent to them by family or friends. All items which arrive have to be carefully examined for security reasons.

6 Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

- 6.1.1 There are two healthcare centres, one is located close to the centre of the building, the other is on Nightingale unit and is for the exclusive use of women in the centre. The facilities include rooms for consultations, clinical treatment and administration. There are no formal inpatient facilities. During rota visits, the Board have observed healthcare facilities to be clean and well maintained. The appointments system appears efficient. Frequently, detention officers escort a detained person as far as the waiting room.
- 6.1.2 Healthcare is provided by Northampton NHS Foundation Trust. Turnover in staff continues, albeit at a slow pace. This is possibly because of the isolated location of the centre. Appointments are available generally within three days with a doctor and same day with a nurse. Appointments with a mental health nurse are on average available within three days and a psychiatrist visits Yarl's Wood weekly.
- 6.1.3 There are GPs, nurses, mental health nurses and a pharmacist. There is also regular access to psychologist, dentist, physiotherapist, sexual health, podiatry and ophthalmologists. Healthcare regularly attends multi-disciplinary meetings and provide clinical updates to staff.
- 6.1.4 Healthcare manages their own complaints process. They had 48 complaints in the year, of which two remain under investigation, two were informally resolved on meeting with the nurse and 44 were not upheld. None of these complaints are shared with the IMB on the grounds of medical confidentiality.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- 6.2.1 All arrivals are offered a physical health screening with a nurse within two hours of arriving at the centre. If necessary, a VACP is opened during this assessment. All arrivals are offered point of care services such as HIV testing, hepatitis B and C screening and information on the drug misuse clinic.
- 6.2.2 Healthcare has at times been hindered in their health assessments by the lack of detained persons medical history, particularly those arriving from the prison estate. Healthcare also has lack of handovers from other IRCs and police custody. The records are often not provided by detained persons arriving from the Scottish prison estate.
- 6.2.3 If an individual requires specialist care they are transferred to external services such as at Bedford General Hospital where detention officers may stay with detained person as a patient. If a bed watch is required that will be facilitated by Serco.
- 6.2.4 The healthcare team has facilitated a range of health awareness sessions throughout the year, providing information on a variety of issues such as hepatitis and blood pressure.

6.3 Mental healthcare

- 6.3.1 The Board acknowledges the care that is provided by the mental health team.
- 6.3.2 The Board is concerned that appropriate mental health beds do not appear to be available in a timely manner to detained persons assessed by a psychiatrist to require specialist treatment under the Mental Health Act (MHA). Five detained persons were sectioned under the MHA. Prior to leaving the centre, they were at times held in the CSU due to both the patient's safety and the safety of other residents. Patients are reviewed daily by healthcare and a VACP opened. The IMB acknowledges the safety reasons for holding detained persons in the CSU, but it is clearly inappropriate for persons having a mental health crisis.
- 6.3.3 All other cases of mental illness are managed by in-house mental health professionals. This comprises counsellors, mental health nursing staff and a psychologist with the support of a weekly visit by a psychiatrist. Mental health staff provide treatment, including counselling support and the prescription of medication, and includes cognitive behaviour therapy and similar treatments.
- 6.3.4 Mental healthcare services are in high demand. There were 979 mental health appointments made in 2023, compared with 995 the previous year. The average waiting time for appointments is three days to see a counsellor or mental health professional.
- 6.3.5 In 2023 there were four applications made under rule 35(1) of the Detention Centre Rules (2001) which requires healthcare practitioners to report the case of any individual whose health is likely to be affected by conditioned detention. There was one application under rule 35(2) which requires medical practitioners to report the case of any individual suspected of having suicidal intent and requiring increased supervision. This is concerning considering that 181 persons were placed on ACDTs due to their identified risk of suicide or self-harm [see section 4.2.4]. There have been 496 assessments submitted under rule 35(3) which relates to potential victims of torture. The Board is concerned that the quality of reports is variable and monitoring the quality of the reports is made impossible by medical in confidence rules. It is unclear who has oversight of the process and quality of Rule 35; CQC are the regulator for healthcare, but this is a Home Office process.

6.4 Welfare and social care

- 6.4.1 Detained persons are also able to book an appointment with the welfare team during the daily open office hours. This service is valued by detained persons and the table below shows the numbers and type of support.

2023	Welfare			
	No. of appointments booked		Inductions	Removal Directions Consultations
	Male	Female		Referrals to other Organisations
Jan	755		176	98
Feb	613		150	83

Mar	829		162	117	9
Apr	689	64	113	124	16
May	914	119	145	171	16
Jun	931	111	237	124	20
Jul	916	141	248	105	18
Aug	895	94	203	94	30
Sep	957	99	223	116	16
Oct	762	97	205	135	13
Nov	903	125	249	121	14
Dec	839	134	166	87	6
Total	10003	984	2277	1375	158

6.4.2 The welfare team provide information and support on issues such as access to solicitors, legal aid, access to the Home Office or missing property.

6.5 Exercise, time out of room

6.5.1 For the period of the report, detained individuals were locked in their rooms from 9pm to 8am (8:30am at weekends). There was also a one-hour lockdown for roll count each day.

6.5.2 Outside of these periods, men were able to freely associate in the residential units, use the gym or take part in the programme of education and activities.

6.5.3 The women's unit is run separately to the male units with similar provision. Women have access to the sports hall at specific times.

6.6 Soft skills

6.6.1 There is a library which is stocked with books, newspapers, DVDs and magazines all in a sufficient range in languages. The music and art rooms are popular with residents. There are cultural kitchens which are particularly popular amongst detained persons, as well as gym, games room and football pitch.

6.6.2 The Board welcomes any reasonable diversion from aimless days in indeterminate detention which is well recognised not only to be averse to good order but also adverse to the mental health of detained persons (Locked up Locked out Immigration Detention Report BMA2017).

6.6.3 The Board welcomes the expansion of employment of detained persons in the centre. These jobs are in the kitchen, library and cleaning. The Board welcomes the NVQ level 1 training that is available to detained persons working in the kitchen. The table below shows the breakdown of paid employment.

Paid Employment 2023		
		Total for the Year
Average age		35
Employed		
Females		35
Males		375
Top 3 Nationalities		
1	Vietnam	
2	Albania	
3	Poland	

7 Preparation for return or release

7.1 Activities including education and training

- 7.1.1 English lessons for written and language skills, IT and Maths continue to be provided for the detained persons. Generally, uptake of the classes is not very good, this may be in part because education is a paid activity in prison. Those that do attend need a lot of support. Due to the unpredictable length of detention, it makes it difficult for the residents to engage and for the staff to create suitable structured training programmes. The table below shows the number of attendees for educational sessions.

Education Stats			
2023	Total no. of attendances		
	Male	Female	Total
Jan	262	0	262
Feb	295	0	295
Mar	214	20	234
Apr	153	114	267
May	197	59	256
Jun	189	43	232
Jul	169	44	213
Aug	216	91	307
Sep	116	49	165
Oct	223	7	230
Nov	169	16	185
Dec	252	89	341
Total			2987

- 7.1.2 The arts and crafts room is well used. It is well-resourced, with residents having access to a comprehensive range of art and craft materials. The wall serves as a quasi-gallery and typically displays a range of artwork, some of high quality that reflects the amount of time and care that has been invested in the pieces by residents.
- 7.1.3 The cultural kitchen continues to be available for groups of residents to prepare and enjoy traditional meals of their choice in a quiet companionable environment. It continues to be very popular amongst detained persons. Residents on Bunting unit have raised concerns that they do not have access to a cultural kitchen facility and feel that this has a negative impact on morale.

7.2 Case management

- 7.2.1 Detention Engagement Teams (DET) are responsible for providing feedback and progress on an individual's case on behalf of the Home Office. During the year, it has again been a recurring theme that residents are frustrated by what they see as delays in their casework or a lack of communication from the team.
- 7.2.2 Some of the issues related to a lack of communication highlighted by detained persons was being caused by staff shortages. The IMB spoke to a man and woman who had not received a communication on their cases for nine days, which is unacceptable.
- 7.2.3 These delays due to staff shortages is also evident for those who wished to use the voluntary return scheme. There have been a few instances of residents desperate to return but having to wait weeks for the relevant procedures to be completed.
- 7.2.4 There were several applications and verbal complaints to the Board where detained persons expressed frustration at the lack of information about their case and the lack of progress. The DET (Detention Engagement Team) did hold regular surgeries on each unit and the times were well publicised, but sometimes they were cancelled without notice, aggravating the stress of those detained. As well as the weekly surgeries, individuals were also able to request to be seen by completing a form. However, this option was not always effectively communicated, and some women told the IMB they were unaware of the forms having had to wait a week to see someone from DET.
- 7.2.5 The Board acknowledges that DET increased their staffing throughout the year, that DET engagement with detained persons did improve towards the end of the year, and that many of the delays reside with responses from caseworkers who are not located at Yarl's Wood.
- 7.2.6 The issue with TSFNOs being sent to Yarl's Wood and being detained further after they have served their sentence continues. In December 2023, 43% of the population at the centre were TSFNOs. Having served their criminal sentence, they face an indeterminate time detained at Yarl's Wood. This creates many challenges both for the individual and for staff. The IMB strongly believe that this could be avoided if the Home Office started the removal process whilst the individual was still in prison, toward the end of their sentence, minimise their stay at Yarl's Wood. One man had served a two-month prison sentence but had been detained at Yarl's Wood for a further seven months. He stated that he preferred prison as he knew how long his sentence would be, whereas he had no idea how long he would be detained at Yarl's Wood.

7.3 Family and outside contact

- 7.3.1 Detained persons have access to mobile phones to keep in touch with relatives and legal advisors. There are ongoing issues with the phone signal during the year that led to some frustration.

- 7.3.2 Yarl's Wood is not easy to reach from Bedford train station but is facilitated by a free shuttle service to and from the train station provided by Serco without which, relatives would incur substantial taxi costs.
- 7.3.3 The facilities for online meetings via skype continue to be very well utilised with an additional six terminals being made available in the visit's hall. These have been very popular and critical to some residents. They helped one man who said that his wife was feeling suicidal due to not seeing him for such a long time.

7.4 Preparation for return or release

- 7.4.1 Prior to leaving the Centre on removal directions, all IRC detained persons are given an appointment with Welfare. This allows them an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have, and so support may be given to help them plan their return. During this time referrals may also be made to Hibiscus for resettlement advice and potential funding.
- 7.4.2 Upon removal, IRC detained persons are seen by healthcare and given a copy of their medical notes, and their medication is handed over. Anyone on medication or with health concerns will also be given a letter to help them register with a local GP. Detained persons are also given a copy of their release paperwork from HOIE.
- 7.4.3 In March 2023, the HO introduced a reintegration programme, eligible to all categories of returning persons. The programme is available to nationals of 11 countries and provides a package of support services both in the UK and in-country. Details of the programme are advertised in the centre and leaflets are available in Welfare. The programme complements existing HO financial incentives, namely the Voluntary Returns Service (VRS) and Facilitated Returns Scheme (FRS).
- 7.4.4 When a resident is granted bail, she/he must have a suitable bail address. The IMB have been notified of delays due to the time to check and find suitable bail accommodation. One person who was assessed as not fit to be detained, had to wait weeks before a suitable address could be verified, which was having a negative effect on his mental wellbeing.

8. The work of the IMB

The Board made weekly rota visits throughout the year, during which members monitored the Centre and dealt with applications from detained persons. Issues were raised immediately with Serco, HOIE or healthcare, or during monthly Board meetings, as appropriate. Members attended committee meetings within the centre when possible or participated remotely by video or telephone conference. Members have also attended multi-disciplinary reviews to ascertain the best care plans for detained persons.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	174

Written applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation including laundry, showers	0	3
B	Use of force, removal from association	1	0
C	Equality	0	0
D	Purposeful activity including education, paid work, training, library, other activities	0	0
E 1	Letters, faxes, visits, phones, internet access	0	0
E 2	Finance including detained persons' centre accounts	0	0
F	Food and kitchens	1	0
G	Health including physical, mental, social care	5	2
H 1	Property within centre	1	0
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	0	2
I	Issues relating to detained persons' immigration case, including access to legal advice	17	20
J	Staff/detained persons conduct, including bullying	2	3
K	Escorts	0	0
L	Other	4	5
	Total number of applications	31	35



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