



Annual Report of the Short-term Holding Facilities in Scotland and Northern Ireland

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

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Scotland and Northern Ireland Short-term Holding Facilities Independent Monitoring Board is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the welfare of people in a Short-term Holding Facility (STHF) 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 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 people 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 STHF 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 people, the state and administration of the facility, as well as providing any advice or suggestions it considers appropriate. This report has been produced to fulfil that obligation.

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

2. Description of the holding rooms

2.1 Types of STHF monitored

People can be detained at short-term holding facilities whilst a decision is being made on their permission to enter the UK or before they are removed from the UK. The Board monitored three different types of short-term holding facility:

- **A Residential Short-term Holding Facility (RSTHF)** which can hold adults in detention for up to seven days before their removal from the UK or transfer to an immigration removal centre¹. The facility we monitor is called Larne House and is at Larne police station. There are five single bedrooms, two double bedrooms, two triple bedrooms and one quadruple bedroom. It has a dining room, a recreation room and people in detention can spend time in the open air. The Home Office contracts its management to Mitie Care and Custody.
 - **Larne House** is a residential short-term holding facility catering for individuals over 18 years of age including individuals released from the Northern Ireland prison estate. Residents can remain at Larne house for a maximum of 5 days prior to release or relocation to an Immigration Removal Centre in Great Britain, or 7 days if being removed to a third Country.

Airport holding rooms which can hold adults and children in detention for up to 24 hours . unless a longer period of detention is authorised by the Secretary of State (in practice a Home Office official). who have either just arrived from incoming flights, who are returning to the airport for further interview by Border Force, or who have been brought from other places of detention to be removed from the UK. We monitor four of these:

- At Aberdeen Airport a holding room is in the main terminal next to the immigration desks. Border Force runs this facility.
 - At Edinburgh Airport a holding room is in a modular building located outside the terminal building. The Home Office contracts the management of the holding rooms to Mitie Care and Custody (C&C).
 - At Glasgow Airport a holding room is in the main terminal next to the immigration desks. The Home Office contracts the management of the holding rooms to Mitie Care and Custody.
 - At Prestwick Airport a holding room is in the main terminal some distance from the immigration desks. Border Force runs this facility. However, because the holding room at Prestwick has been closed during this reporting period, we have by agreement instead monitored the seated area by the immigration desks where Border Force can direct a passenger to wait. These areas are known as Controlled Waiting Areas (CWAs).
- **Reporting centre holding rooms** which can hold adults in detention for up to 24 hours. People held in reporting centres are either transferred to an alternative

¹ In exceptional circumstances, the Secretary of State may authorise an extension to the maximum periods of detention noted in this section.

detention setting or released on bail. We monitor two such holding rooms. The Home Office contracts the management of both to Mitie Care and Custody:

- At Festival Court, Glasgow, the Reporting Centre is operated by the Home Office which operate facilities within Festival Court for individuals who have been, temporarily, admitted to Scotland that are required to report periodically at the centre.
- At Drumkeen House, Belfast, the main Home Office Immigration Centre in Northern Ireland provides facilities where Asylum Seekers and individuals who have been temporarily admitted to Northern Ireland are required to report periodically.

3. Key points

3.1 Background to the report

- 3.1.1 The Board has carried out monitoring through regular unannounced visits, which include speaking to people in detention and staff. The limitations in the findings we can make are fully discussed in the final section of this report.
- 3.1.2 There can be many reasons people find themselves detained in short-term holding facilities. Most will have never been convicted of, and will not be being accused of, any criminal offence. However, they may not be entitled or permitted to enter the UK and they may be detained whilst a decision is made.

3.2 Main findings

- 3.2.1 Almost all the people in detention at the facilities we monitor have been adults but some, at airport have been children. Some of these have been unaccompanied children. Some people in detention have had pre-existing mental health and physical health problems.
- 3.2.2 Being in detention can be a period of great uncertainty and disorientation. People in detention may not have a clear idea how long they will be detained for, or what the next step in a new and complex process is. People can feel stressed, anxious and scared. Everyone involved in someone's detention has the potential to lessen or to aggravate the impacts of detention.
- 3.2.3 Examples of our findings and concerns include:

Safety

- Given that people who have been convicted of a sexual offence can be detained at Larne House we recommended in our annual reports for 2022-23 and 2021-2022, and the Home Office has accepted, that men and women should be detained in separate accommodation. However, men and women remained detained together at Larne House throughout the year. This demonstrates failings in the Home Office's safety culture. We express several other concerns in areas including reception; vulnerable adults and provision for children in section 4 of this report. As we discuss there, we can only provide limited comment on some aspects, such as the extent to which support for vulnerable adults was appropriate to their needs.

Fair and humane treatment

- When we have visited, we observed that people in detention were treated in a respectful and caring manner by staff. However, there were several features that we consider contributed to people's stress whilst detained. For example, unsuitability of accommodation at airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms. We identified significant failings in respect of accessibility. We express several other concerns in areas such as food; provision for children and complaints in section 5 of this report.

Health and wellbeing

- Healthcare provision varies based on the location someone is detained rather than on clinical need for the individual. At airport holding rooms and reporting

centre holding rooms, people in detention still have their medication removed, this includes prescription medication. which potentially, adversely, risks their health and wellbeing as a result. The Board repeats the serious concerns raised in previous annual reports, for the health risks presented to those who need to take their prescribed medicines regularly. We express several other concerns in areas such as mental healthcare provision and missed opportunities to alleviate stress and upset in section 6 of this report.

Preparation for removal, transfer or release

- People are detained for longer than necessary. For example, we found that people were detained for longer than would be needed if the system was working efficiently in organising asylum accommodation. We express several other concerns in areas such as the sensitivity of case management by Border Force, in section 7 of this report. All the issues we have identified may have impact on people in detention, potentially adding to any stresses.

3.3 Recommendations

- 3.3.1 We reiterate all the recommendations made in our last annual report. If implemented, they would deal with some of the most significant issues we have noted. We also made several new recommendations:

TO THE MINISTER

- We reiterate our previous recommendation regarding the provision of prescription medication. We repeat our urge for the Minister to request that the Home Office carry out an urgent assessment of the risks to detained people as a result of the removal of their prescription medications and design a practical strategy for ensuring that detained people receive their medication. We repeat our request of an outcome that meets the health and wellbeing needs of every detained person.
- We reiterate our recommendation that recommended upgrades following the Disability Access audit is implemented.
- We reiterate our previous recommendation for a review of the appropriateness of stays in holding rooms of eight hours or longer with unacceptable facilities.
- We have recorded areas for improvement in the care provided to people in detention: a number of these areas would not exist if effective continuous improvement structures were in place. Therefore, to improve standards, Government policy should require a continuous care improvement programme is in place for each short-term holding facility. Such programmes should be collaboratively developed, well-documented, appropriately resourced, and transparently reported upon, adopting a quality improvement framework and integrating best practice from other settings.
- Instruct officials to undertake assurance activity, informed by expert input, on the following areas where we cannot reach conclusions based on our observations:
 - Ensuring that vulnerable adults are always identified properly and that their care, and that provided to children, is effective in safeguarding and improving physical and mental health and wellbeing.
 - Ensuring that repairs to accommodation take no longer than necessary and that there exists a robust works programme to respond to our observations and those of HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

- To ensure transparency and drive improvement, require routine proactive publication of performance metrics such as those provided to HM Inspectorate of Prisons in its January 2024 inspection and the results of internal assurance and contract monitoring activities undertaken by the Home Office.
- The Board is concerned about late night moves involving families and children with particular concerns where Taxis are being used. We are very concerned about the potential for a medical emergency arising during a lengthy overnight journey.

TO BORDER FORCE/HOME OFFICE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

- We reiterate our recommendation, which was accepted, for Border Force and Immigration Enforcement to implement standardisation of the use of translation devices across all facilities.
- The detention estate is long overdue redecoration and upgrading in order to improve the quality of the environment. This would provide the opportunity to ensure that the facilities become fit for purpose.
- The use of the Controlled Waiting Area at Prestwick Airport is unacceptable when there is an alternative room that could be brought into use. While it may require additional resourcing bringing this room back use would facilitate hot food to be served to detained persons.

TO THE FACILITY MANAGER/DETENTION CONTRACTOR

- We reiterate our previous recommendation that the provision of safe and private facilities for women within Larne House RSTHF remains outstanding. The Home Office previously committed to undertake work to ensure that women were accommodated separately from men. The Board recommends work is urgently completed with the outcome that the safety and dignity of women in detention can be assured.
- That a schedule of upgrading and improvements such as redecorating and refurnishing, the upgrading of ventilation and the addition of showering facilities, across the estate, is drawn up and implementation dates established.
- We repeat our previous recommendation that Prestwick STHF, which remains out of use, should be brought up to basic requirements.

3.4 Progress since the last report

- 3.4.1 In the annex we report on each recommendation made in our last report, in general there has been either limited or no progress.²

² This, and a failure by the Home Office to accept recommendations, is a feature IMB reports share with HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception

- 4.1.1 Our role does not extend to monitoring the escorting of people in detention before their arrival at a short-term holding facility. This means we cannot comment on matters such as travel conditions.
- 4.1.2 We have observed times when a person in detention has arrived at a facility and an induction happens. This involves a discussion to establish immediate risks and needs and to give key information. At the time of our observations people in detention were treated with respect and sensitivity by staff. However:
- **The physical environment could be improved to make it more supportive for people arriving at the facility.** For example, the decoration and style of entrance and reception areas could be made more child-friendly to reduce the risk of distress associated with detention.
 - **The induction process is not fully effective and does not utilise available resources to ensure information is understood.** There are written resources available to aid understanding of what is discussed in the induction but people must search through multiple folders to find information relevant to them. People in detention could instead be given written information in their own language at induction to aid understanding. This could reduce the numbers of failed inductions, such as when we have spoken to people in detention, and they did not fully understand their right to make and receive telephone calls.

4.2 Suicide, self-harm, deaths in custody

- 4.2.1 The Home Office has undertaken to inform us of any death or serious injury of an individual in detention or member of staff while on duty or as a direct result of an incident occurring at work. The Home office has also undertaken to inform us of individuals in detention who have been subjected to close monitoring in accordance with suicide and self-harm prevention policies. No suicides, self-harm or close monitoring have been reported to us during this reporting period.
- 4.2.2 We observed that:
- **When we visited, sufficient staff were present, and they could observe people in detention.** This was through direct observation and using CCTV. However, at Prestwick the staff monitoring the CCTV are some distance away from the Controlled Waiting Area and it may therefore take a while to respond to an emergency.
 - **Variation exists in measures taken to prevent self-harm.** For example, all door handles at Aberdeen are anti-ligature but the same is not true elsewhere. There appears to be no good reason for this difference.
- 4.2.3 We are unable to assess if suicide and self-harm prevention work reflects best practice because we have not received an update from the Home Office in this

area.³ However, we have noted that while suicide and self-harm prevention work should be undertaken based on multi-agency collaboration and learning, the Home Office does not appear to be fully engaging with potentially relevant initiatives.⁴

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

4.3.1 The Home Office has undertaken to inform the Board of specified types of violent incidents at facilities we monitor. No such incidents have been reported to us during this reporting period. However:

- **The Home Office has not complied with the undertaking it has given.** On 3 July 2023 a violent incident took place at Edinburgh Airport involving a detainee custody officer being attacked by a person in detention. The Board was not proactively informed of this in line with the undertaking.
- **Another violent incident shows environmental improvements could be made to reduce risks associated with violence.** During this reporting period a person in detention broke a window at Drumkeen House. The window was replaced with strengthened material. There is no good reason why this material could not have been installed initially.

4.3.2 Beyond this, we are not able to assess the extent to which violence reduction work reflects best practice. The Home Office has not provided us with information about any work it is undertaking to understand and address the reasons why violence can take place.

4.4 Vulnerable adults, safeguarding

4.4.1 At contractor managed facilities staff should complete a vulnerable adult warning form (VAWF) and follow the associated standardised procedure to ensure vulnerable people in detention receive appropriate support. HM Inspectorate of Prisons has said⁵ that VAWFs are not always opened when needed and can be poorly focused on the individual needs of each person in detention. They have also noted that recorded follow-up checks suggested no or cursory interactions.

4.4.2 We cannot assess from our observations whether VAWFs were always opened when needed or whether the follow-up action was appropriate. From the limited paperwork made available to us during our visits we recorded the following numbers of adults were identified as vulnerable in detention:

Short-term holding facility	Number of recorded vulnerable adults detained during the year
Larne House	35

³ At each monthly Board meeting the Home Office is given an opportunity to brief us on their work regarding relevant policy or operational developments

⁴ For example, the Home Office is not listed as a partner in the Scottish Distress Brief Intervention programme, in contrast with Police Scotland which is listed as a partner in the programme. As we go on to note in section 6.3, information about the Scottish Breathing Space service is not shared

⁵ HM Inspectorate of Prisons, (April 2024). *Mitie Care and Custody Short-term holding facilities*. [online] Available at: https://hmiprison.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/mitie-care-and-custody-short-term-holding-facilities/

Short-term holding facility	Number of recorded vulnerable adults detained during the year
Glasgow Airport	36
Edinburgh Airport	25
Aberdeen Airport	1
Prestwick Airport	0
Festival Court	7
Drumkeen House	13

4.4.3 Larne House can hold people convicted of a sexual offence. We have therefore recommended that men and women be detained separately there to reduce the risk of harm. In 2021 the Home Office accepted this should be the case.⁶ It said that it would provide a separate contained wing for women, with single occupancy bedrooms and a separate association room and that this was expected to happen within 18 months. However, this has not happened, and men and women are still detained together at Larne House.

4.5 Children and families

4.5.1 Children are not held at Larne House. Children and families have been detained in the other facilities we monitor in this reporting period. This included four unaccompanied children at Glasgow Airport and six unaccompanied children at Edinburgh Airport.

4.5.2 We observed that:

- **Children and families are not always given the privacy they deserve, as the area designated for them is not always separated from areas for other adults they do not know.** For example, at Edinburgh Airport, families must walk through the main holding area to access toilets.
- **Unaccompanied children were detained in unsatisfactory conditions and this was not reported to us.** HM Inspectorate of Prisons reported⁷ that at Glasgow Airport, a 17-year-old boy experiencing mental trauma was interviewed alone because no responsible adult was available. This situation should never have arisen. Information about it was not shared with the IMB; this demonstrates a lack of candour by the Home Office.

4.5.3 We cannot provide an expert assessment of practice in this area. The facilities where children and families could be detained have not been visited by a specialist

⁶ It did this when responding to an HM Inspectorate of Prisons report, having previously rejected repeated recommendations from that Inspectorate and us. It did not give an explanation for its change of position.

⁷ Ibid, 4.

in child safeguarding, or by the relevant local authority children's services department, during this reporting period.

4.6 Use of force

4.6.1 The Home Office has undertaken to inform the Board of any cases of use of force in the facilities, except for compliant handcuffing in holding rooms. No such cases have been reported at any facility during this reporting period.

4.6.2 We have not observed use of force in the facilities during this reporting year. However, we have noted with concern that:

- **There is a risk that use of force may not be video recorded in all instances.** Body-worn video cameras are not worn by all staff.
- **There are gaps in training.** HM Inspectorate of Prisons said that in January 2024 no detainee custody officer at facilities, including Edinburgh and Glasgow Airports, had been trained in safe use of force on children.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

In respect of accommodation, we observed that:

- **Facilities are generally clean, however more attention should be given to infection prevention and control.** For example, a deep clean of toilets did not follow at Edinburgh Airport when a person in detention told staff that they had typhoid.
- **Facilities are generally in good repair but there are important exceptions, particularly at Prestwick.** The, former, holding room there has been closed and people in detention have instead sat in the Controlled Waiting Area, in full view of other disembarking passengers. This is a significant deterioration in standards of accommodation.
- **Only one facility, Larne House, has access to the open air. Airport and reporting centre holding rooms have no access to natural light, natural ventilation or the open air.** This lack of provision has the potential to add to stresses.⁸
- **Showers are available at only one of the airport holding rooms.** This is inadequate for people in detention who may have been on a long flight or be detained overnight.
- **Someone in detention at an airport holding room or reporting centre holding room may have very limited privacy, adding to stress.** For example, with the exception of Glasgow Airport, men and women could not be detained separately if the family room was in use.
- **Unnecessary environmental stressors exist at some airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms.** For example, at Edinburgh Airport a conversation at normal volume can be clearly audible in adjacent rooms. This does not help to alleviate stress and anxiety.
- **Sleeping provision at airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms is unsatisfactory.** People rest sleep on the floor with plastic-covered mats, with pillows and blankets also available, we view this as inadequate⁹ for overnight stays. However overnight stays have taken place at airport holding rooms in this reporting period. It appears that good practice exists, such as pop-up beds¹⁰ but it is not implemented.

5.1.2 We observed that where works are planned there have been frequent delays in their delivery. This may be because there is limited accountability as responsibility

⁸ It also falls below standards for police cells e.g. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. (June 2022). *Expectations for police custody*, version 4. [online] Available at: <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/expectations-for-police-custody-june-2022/>.

⁹ Ibid. 4

¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons, (2023). *Short-term holding facilities managed by Border Force*. [online] Available at: https://hmiprison.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/short-term-holding-facilities-managed-by-border-force/

for even the simplest repairs and improvements is spread across many agencies.¹¹ The Board have observed the lack of effective processes in place to ensure coordination and delivery of works. We have not been informed of any efforts to change this.

5.1.3 We have observed that people in detention have adequate access to clean and sufficiently warm clothing.

5.1.4 In respect of food, we observed that:

- **Water and fluids are sometimes only available on request for no good reason.** In some places infrastructure exists to provide water freely, however it is not utilised. For example, at Edinburgh Airport a water fountain is available but placed out of service and not re commissioned
- **Hot meals have not been available for people in detention in all facilities during this reporting period.** Specifically those managed by Border Force where, perceived, issues with Border Force's compliance with food premises registration law prevented the preparation and serving of hot food at Aberdeen.
- **Pre-packed basic snacks are freely available at all facilities.** In addition, fresh fruit is available at Larne House. Suitable provision has been made to store a variety of food, including provision for dietary, cultural, religious and baby needs. We checked that all food was in date.

5.2 Staff and detainee relationships

5.2.1 During our visits we observed that the interactions between staff and people in detention were courteous and fair. Comments received from people in detention were positive about staff communications. Working in the environment of a short-term holding facility is highly demanding on staff and we have been impressed by the kind and caring attitude demonstrated on several occasions.

5.2.2 During our visits we observed with few exceptions, that a gender balance between staff on duty was mostly in place.

5.2.3 We have observed that interpretation services and technology to translate written materials exist across all the facilities. While we have observed staff introducing themselves to people in detention in a positive way, staff do not wear name badges, making it harder to identify staff.

5.2.4 Feedback forms, where available, tend not to be completed by people in detention. We are not aware of work being done to understand and address the barriers to completion. This is a missed opportunity for continuous improvement.

5.2.5 Recommendation 27 of the Brook House Inquiry report says action plans to ensure a safe and healthy culture in immigration removal centres should be developed. This recommendation can also apply to short-term holding facilities but we have not been informed by the Home Office of any work to extend this recommendation in this way.

¹¹ This can involve six agencies and multiple teams within each: Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, Mitie Care and Custody, the Ministry of Justice, the airport operator and any contractor.

5.3 Equality and diversity

5.3.1 Accessibility has been improved during the reporting period, for example by installing an accessible toilet at Glasgow Airport. However, the needs of people with protected characteristics are not always met. We observed that:

- **Facilities are not fully accessible for wheelchair users.** For example, for optimal accessibility, the door opening should ideally be 900mm wide to accommodate wheelchair users. However, at Larne House the width of the entrance door to the bedroom is less than that. At Drumkeen House, the entrance doors do not accommodate the manoeuvre of a standard size wheelchair.
- **Sleeping provision at airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms is inadequate for wheelchair users.** It could be impossible for some wheelchair users to transfer to use the mats provided when these are to be placed on the floor. The lack of accessible showers leads to the risk of harm and compromise to the dignity and humane treatment of an incontinent wheelchair user detained overnight.
- **Provision for people with sensory impairments is poor.** For example, there are no tactile signs at any facilities, induction loops are not fitted to telephones at airport holding rooms, materials such as leaflets are not always available in large print and magnification equipment is unavailable.
- **Provision for people who have non-visible disabilities is poor.** For example, there is limited provision in airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms for a private space free from noises, smells and bright lights to support people with non-visible disabilities.

5.3.2 At Glasgow Airport a disabled person was not admitted to the facility because their care needs were felt to be beyond the ability of the facility to manage effectively. There then followed a period of confusion as the Home Office attempted to secure the involvement of Police Scotland and the local authority social work department. Collaboration and joint working with partners to ensure the best possible standard of care must improve.

5.4 Children and families

5.4.1 At airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms where children and families could be detained, factors noted above, such as the lack of access to natural light, may have particular impacts on children. We also observed that:

- **Some age-appropriate provision is made for children, including a range of toys, written materials and age-appropriate DVDs but there are shortcomings.** For example, written materials for children are not always available in a wide range of languages and sensory/fidget toys are not universally provided.
- **Accommodation has not been designed with the best interests of children and families at heart.** For example, at Edinburgh Airport the nappy changing bench is within the family room. This room has no natural ventilation. Therefore, the room will smell if a nappy needs to be changed. The family room is also visible

from the main holding room, so children have no visual privacy from unrelated adults.

- 5.4.2 The Home Office has not provided us with information about any work it is undertaking to continually improve the facilities so that they reflect best practice in providing care for children. Nor do we understand it to have benchmarked provision in the facilities monitored against comparator facilities, such as secure care in this reporting period.

5.5 Faith and religious affairs

5.5.1 Despite a chaplaincy service being available at Glasgow Airport, chaplaincy was not provided at all facilities. With the exception Aberdeen, there were no dedicated prayer or private contemplation rooms in any of the airport holding rooms or reporting centre holding rooms.¹² However, we have observed that religious artefacts and texts were available at all facilities. Special provision was made for religious materials to be stored respectfully.

5.6 Complaints

- 5.6.1 We have not been informed of any formal complaints at any of the facilities in this reporting period.
- 5.6.2 Confidential complaints boxes are available at all facilities, however we observed that:
- **It can be difficult for a person in detention to make a complaint.** Not all complaints boxes were fully accessible, especially to wheelchair users. Some of the information provided about how to make a complaint is out of date, for example referring to old contact details.
 - **Complaints boxes are in the direct line of sight of staff, making it dissuasive to complain.** It would be easy to mitigate this by providing information about making a complaint after detention on form IS91R given to every person in detention to keep, but this is not done.

5.7 Property

- 5.7.1 We have observed that the property of people in detention is handled sensitively at the facility and tagged to ensure its traceability.

¹² However, at Aberdeen Airport there is a private room, separate from the main holding room, that could be used for private prayer or contemplation.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

- 6.1.1 We are aware that healthcare provision is provided at Larne House and people in detention we have spoken to have complemented it. We cannot provide a qualitative clinical assessment of healthcare and responsibility for who provides independent clinical oversight is unclear.¹³
- 6.1.2 In the other facilities we monitor healthcare is limited to first aid. Any needs beyond this are responded to by calling an ambulance or NHS out of hours.¹⁴ This is unlike other airports where a paramedic works at the short-term holding facility. This means people in detention at the places we monitor do not receive a routine health screening on arrival and their access to healthcare is more limited. Providing different levels of healthcare based on location rather than need is unjustifiable.
- 6.1.3 We are unaware of communication taking place between the Home Office and the relevant healthcare services in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

6.2 Physical healthcare

- 6.2.1 At the airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms, we have observed that medication continues to be removed from people in detention. This can present serious health risks to those who need to take prescribed medicines regularly.

6.3 Mental healthcare

- 6.3.1 At the airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms, we have observed that there is a lack of signposting to available telephone mental health supported services such as Breathing Space provided by the NHS in Scotland. It would be helpful for people in detention to be proactively informed of the mental health support available for them.

6.4 Soft skills

- 6.4.1 At all facilities some distraction interventions are in place to pass the time spent in detention and therefore reduce stress. This is especially important given the features of the environment discussed previously which do not help alleviate stress and anxiety. Distraction materials include access to a television, books and newspapers in a variety of languages. The materials do not, however, include mental health information to help people in detention deal with anxiety and stress.

¹³ The service is not registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority according to the RQIA website.

¹⁴ The only exception is at Aberdeen Airport, where Border Force would transfer a person in detention needing healthcare to a police station with healthcare professional cover.

7. Removal, transfer or release

7.1 Case management

7.1.1 Our role does not extend to monitoring the quality of case management by the Home Office or the appropriateness of specific decisions to detain a person. Unlike the police¹⁵ we are not aware of any independent monitoring of this beyond inspections by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration that take place irregularly and fairly infrequently.¹⁶

7.1.2 We can report the following figures for numbers of people detained at Larne House. People in detention at Larne House have increased by 27.5% compared to the previous reporting year:

Residential Short-term Holding Facility	Number of people detained	Percentage detained for 5 days or more
Larne House	445	1.4

7.1.3 We can report the following figures for numbers of people detained at airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms. Although the number of people in detention at Edinburgh Airport and Glasgow Airport has declined compared to last year by 7% and 21% respectively, the percentage of people in detention for more than eight hours has remained steady:

Holding room	Number of people detained	Percentage detained for 8 hours or more
Aberdeen Airport	35	14.3
Edinburgh Airport	958	20.5
Glasgow Airport	369	13
Prestwick Airport	0	-
Festival Court	62	1.6
Drumkeen House	214	0

¹⁵ Through Custody Detention Scrutiny Panels in England and Wales and the operation of the Scottish Police Authority and Northern Ireland Policing Board.

¹⁶ For example the last inspection of Edinburgh and Glasgow Airports specifically was in 2019.

7.1.4 There have been a significant number of overnight stays at airport holding rooms. The use of airport holding rooms in this way underlines the need for action in light of our concerns, and those of HM Inspectorate of Prisons, with the accommodation.

7.1.5 We have observed that:

- **People can be kept waiting for long periods of time without being given a clear sense of progression.** For example, at airport holding rooms Border Force do not have a policy of regularly and periodically updating people in detention about their case. The lack of such a policy is a missed opportunity to reduce stress.
- **Record keeping is not consistent, and in some cases, there are serious omissions.** At our visits we see a very limited range of records, usually limited to the IS91 authority for detention forms. There have been several occasions when these have not been completed correctly casting doubt on record keeping more generally. In some cases, safety-critical sections such as indicators of vulnerability, have not been completed. These sections are included on the form to ensure safety of people in detention, especially when handed over from one custodian to another.
- **In written communications the Home Office does not make its complex processes clear for people in detention, which adds to stress.** For example, form IS91R is given to every person in detention and explains the reasons for their detention. It uses complicated language and fails to clearly explain the processes people are being put through, creating unnecessary stress and anxiety. HM Inspectorate of Prisons has repeatedly recommended that the form should be made available in languages other than English however the Home Office has not complied.

7.1.6 At airports, we observed:

- **People can wait a very long time in Controlled Waiting Areas before being moved to a holding room.** In practice this means sitting on an uncomfortable bench fixed to the floor with limited privacy. People can be required to wait over two hours in Controlled Waiting Areas. For example, one person was held for double this time at Glasgow Airport.
- **Border Force does not routinely give timings for steps like interviews, meaning people in detention will feel these things happen suddenly and without notice.** This will add to disorientation and stress.
- **Interviews are not audio or video recorded and people in detention tend not to take up legal advice in advance or during interviews.** The Home Office has not provided us with information about any work it is undertaking to understand and address the reasons why this is the case.

7.2 Family contact

7.2.1 At Larne House people in detention have a right to receive visitors in person. People in detention have a right to access the internet, including to make video calls with family. This provision has been working when we have visited. At the

other facilities we monitor there is no similar right to receive visitors (but a broad discretion exists to allow visitors) and no internet access.

- 7.2.2 Mobile telephones with a camera or internet connection are removed from people in detention upon their admission. People in detention can (unless exceptional circumstances apply) make and receive phone calls under supervision. As we noted above, knowledge of this entitlement can vary.

7.3 Removal

- 7.3.1 We have, on a very small number of occasions, monitored a person in detention being escorted from an airport holding room through the airport terminal to an aircraft. When we were been present, we observed that these were carried out calmly. However, some systemic features (such as descriptions on staff uniforms) make it harder for the process to be discreet.
- 7.3.2 Removal processes can be inefficient and time-consuming, with consequent impacts on people in detention. For example, a person who has travelled from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland, and who is detained by the Home Office, may in some circumstances not be able to be removed to Ireland by simple transfer across the land border. Instead, a person in detention is transferred to London before being transferred to Dublin.

7.4 Transfer or release

- 7.4.1 In cases where someone is not removed from the UK, several outcomes can happen including release, transfer to asylum accommodation or transfer to an Immigration Removal Centre.
- 7.4.2 We have observed that people remain in detention for longer because of delays in effecting transfers, adding to their stress unnecessarily:
- **It appears to take many hours to secure asylum accommodation.** This appears to be a systemic problem with particular impacts on vulnerable people.
 - **Transfers by road to an Immigration Removal Centre can take many hours.** This is partly because the vehicle depot is based at Dungavel House IRC. There is no alternative provision to cater for people detained at Aberdeen who therefore must wait three hours for the vehicle to arrive.
- 7.4.3 Except from the limited role concerning airport removals discussed above, our role does not extend to monitoring the escorting of people in detention after they leave a short-term holding facility. However, we have noted journeys can take place late at night potentially adding to people's stress and meaning they may be denied opportunities to rest/sleep.

The work of the IMB

We carry out regular unannounced visits to each of the establishments. We are grateful for the assistance of the Home Office and Mitie Care and Custody in facilitating these. The regularity of visits depends on funding from the Home Office who pay for our travel; visits aim to be in line with the following schedule.

Facility	Visit frequency aim
Larne House RSTHF	Once per fortnight in person
Edinburgh and Glasgow Airports	Once a week in person
Aberdeen and Prestwick Airports	Once a month in person and once a month by telephone. This is pending recruitment of a larger number of local members.
Festival Court	Once per week in person
Drumkeen House	Once per fortnight in person

During this reporting period we have taken account of the work of the Brook House Inquiry and have the following final comments to make in that context:

- It is important to emphasise that this report is based on observations when we visit; it is possible that behaviour may change when we are not present.
- A large part of the Home Office's response to the Inquiry involves delivering more internal audit and other oversight work. All this activity is undertaken on behalf of the public, which has a strong legitimate interest in understanding this work. But at the time of this report the results of this work are not published, nor is a wide range of other information about service performance. This should change because openness can enhance the ability for the system and those who work within it to learn and improve.¹⁷
- We are also concerned that in focusing on audit, the Home Office is not focusing sufficiently on going beyond existing standards. The Home Office should be looking widely and thinking laterally to try to identify changes, large and small, which may improve the system. However, we have noted instances where collaboration with partner agencies could improve.
- Our observations have shown that frontline staff can be a real asset to the system: we have seen examples of impressive care and kindness towards

¹⁷ We are clear that disclosure of information to us – which, as we have reported, can be patchy and insufficiently candid – is not sufficient for this purpose. For example, HM Inspectorate of Prisons found (Ibid, 4) disparities in levels of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism at different locations that it considered worrying. Sharing this data with us would be suboptimal because we could not examine wider trends outside the facilities we monitor.

people in detention. But genuine improvement requires clear and firm leadership. This can be lacking – as can be seen, for example, from how we note the same issues year after year and how accepted recommendations can be implemented at a glacial pace. Such leadership must now follow.

Board statistics

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	11
Total number of visits to establishments	215
Total number of visits to Larne House RSTHF	23
Total number of visits to Aberdeen Airport	19
Total number of visits to Edinburgh Airport	49
Total number of visits to Glasgow Airport	43
Total number of visits to Prestwick Airport	22
Total number of visits to Festival Court	41
Total number of visits to Drumkeen House	18

Annex A

Recommendations from last year's report

Recommendation made by the Board in the last report	Response received	Progress
To the Minister Assess risks from removal of prescription medications from detained people and design a strategy to ensure detained people get their medication.	We understand work is ongoing to consider the issue.	No resolution of this issue.
To the Minister Following the Disability Access audit, implement recommended upgrades.	We understand work is ongoing to consider the issue.	We report on limited progress in section 5.3
To the Minister Review appropriateness of stays in holding rooms of eight hours or longer with unacceptable facilities.	We understand work is continually ongoing to consider the facilities.	A substantial proportion of people in detention are still held for over eight hours, as we record in section 7.1.3
To the Minister Implemented the partially accepted recommendation that a new holding room be set up in Terminal 2 at Edinburgh Airport.	This was previously partially accepted.	There is no new holding room at Edinburgh Airport, and we know of no progress in securing one.
To the Border Force and Immigration Enforcement Consider standardisation of the translation devices across all facilities.	The principle is accepted of standardisation being worthwhile when it adds value or eliminates unwarranted variation.	Standardisation has not taken place.

Recommendation made by the Board in the last report	Response received	Progress
<p>To the Border Force and Immigration Enforcement</p> <p>Appraise ventilation and natural light arrangements at all facilities as a matter of urgency.</p>	<p>We understand work is continually ongoing to consider the facilities.</p>	<p>People detained in airport holding rooms and reporting centre holding rooms still have no access to natural light or natural ventilation.</p>
<p>To the facility manager/detention contractor</p> <p>Give dates to complete work to provide safe and private facilities for women in Larne House, as well as upgrading all bedrooms.</p>	<p>Dates not given.</p>	<p>Men and women are still detained together at Larne House.</p>
<p>To the facility manager/detention contractor</p> <p>Develop a new holding room at Terminal 2 at Edinburgh Airport.</p>	<p>This was previously partially accepted.</p>	<p>There is no new holding room at Edinburgh Airport, and we know of no progress in securing one.</p>
<p>To the facility manager/detention contractor</p> <p>Prestwick STHF should be brought up to basic requirements such as by installing CCTV.</p>	<p>This was, partially, accepted.</p>	<p>Some repairs were made but the STHF is still not in use.</p>



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