

IMB RECOMMENDATION PROGRESS

A: Length of detention

Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs)

The Home Office does not accept the recommendation to introduce a time limit for immigration detention. This would significantly impair our ability to remove those who have breached our immigration laws and refused to leave the UK voluntarily and undermine our ability to maintain effective immigration control and potentially place the public at higher risk, in particular through the release of Foreign National Offenders into the community.

Holding Rooms

Under the Short-Term Holding Facility (STHF) Rules 2018, detained persons in holding rooms can be held for up to 24 hours and, in exceptional circumstances, for a longer time period with appropriate authority. Border Force prioritises the processing of children/vulnerable people and carefully monitors detention to ensure it is kept to the shortest time possible. However, there will be exceptional occasions, due to the complexity of cases, which mean length of detention may need to be extended.

Holding room stays are made as comfortable as possible with the available amenities and provisions, which include fold out mats for lying on, blankets, pillows, and hygiene packs. Where appropriate, consideration will be given to transferring individuals to an IRC or residential STHF which affords better rest, relaxation, and recreation.

B: Infrastructure

IRCs

Work to improve facilities in the IRCs continues. At Harmondsworth IRC refurbishment of Dove unit has taken place and wider improvement works continue at the centre, with Cedar unit currently closed for refurbishment and Gorse unit due to close in January 2025 for similar works. These works will result in improved facilities for residents, including better living spaces, improved ventilation, new showers and toilet facilities. Recent compliance activity conducted across all Harmondsworth units has shown an improvement in the general cleanliness of association areas, unit serveries and showers.

At Brook House, B Wing has recently undergone refurbishment with showers replaced, deep cleaning, damaged flooring repaired and, where necessary, rooms have been repainted. Work taking place at Tinsley House will see improvements to the accommodation.

Holding rooms

Border Force is committed to working with ports and the border industry to set out the standards and requirements for border infrastructure and facilities at ports and has established a comprehensive set of infrastructure standards to define the capabilities, features and legal requirements that are necessary to uphold the UK border, and this includes the standards for STHFs.

More specifically, a project is underway at Heathrow to improve the standard of the holding rooms, including a shower and family room improvements. There is a planned start date of June 2025 for Terminal 5, with the other terminals to follow as part of an anticipated 2-year programme. Work is also in train at Gatwick North to expand its STHF footprint creating space for a shower room and additional toilets. Plans are also being developed for an expansion of the STHF at Luton with the initial design phase due to commence in the near future. Interim work is being taken forward at Stansted STHF to upgrade kitchen facilities and additional accommodation for Care & Custody (Mitie) who manage the STHF. There will be no other changes to the Stansted STHF until the opening of the new terminal extension which will include new Immigration and STHF facilities for BF in Spring 2027.

Improvements are also in train at a number of Border Force managed STHFs, including East Midlands and Immingham. All but a few locations (East Midlands, Felixstowe, Leeds Bradford and Portsmouth) are now able to serve hot food (since February 2024).

C: Communication

IRCs

As part of a pilot to improve connectivity issues, smartphones have been distributed to some residents in Brook House and Tinsley House IRCs. Planning and procurement of smartphone networks at remaining IRCs will follow, subject to assessment of the pilot.

Holding rooms

A trial of regulated internet access at Heathrow Airport Terminal 3 took place August to September 2024. During this period 236 individuals were detained and offered a tablet with internet access, with 5 accepting.

D: Access to medication

Holding rooms

In 2017 the practice of allowing uncontrolled access to medication in these settings ended when it was deemed incompatible with General Medical Council guidelines on remote prescribing and safer to withdraw access without immediate clinical oversight. This is a complex issue, notably around the identification of foreign issued medicine which may be unlicensed and not clearly prescribed to an individual. Unlike IRCs and residential STHFs, non-residential STHFs are not classed as prescribed places of detention for the purpose of NHS healthcare commissioning.

In 2021 a 24/7 paramedic service was introduced at the busiest detention locations, namely Heathrow, Luton, Stanstead, and Gatwick airports, along with the juxtaposed controls in Northern France. This left approximately 40 STHFs without healthcare support, other than 111 / 999 (who are not geared toward such queries).

A National Health Needs Assessment (HNA) for the non-residential STHF estate in 2023 highlighted similarities with HM courts (magistrate / crown) which also have a large number of facilities across the UK with varying volumes. We have been working with HM Prison and Probation Service to better understand the court healthcare model that is in place under the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service (PECS) contracts and a draft service specification is being progressed.

E: Disability access

Holding rooms

The department commissioned a disability access review (via the Ministry of Justice) of the STHF Estate and disability access reports (completed by the commissioned company on each STHF) were received earlier this year. Work is now in hand to consider next steps.

F: Use of departure airports and length of time on coaches

Charter Flight Monitoring Team

A range of different departure airports is used to reduce risk and mitigate against over reliance on one departure point. Airport selection is determined by several factors. This may not always be in close proximity to IRCS, the majority of which are strategically located in the South-east of England, near London airports, from where the majority of scheduled enforced returns take place. Use of Advance parties now including a medic has streamlined collections enabling some of the necessary administration to be completed in advance of detained individuals being collected.

G: Interpretation

Holding Rooms

The Big word interpreting service is being used for induction where English is limited or when an individual accepts offer of an interpreter upon induction. Care & Custody have issued a notice to staff to remind all staff of the translation process which also forms part of the location induction for newly appointed staff. Care & Custody have also reached out to the service provider to ensure there are routes to engage with all languages through the service. We will continue to monitor the use of interpretation processes at STHFs and address any concerns with the service provider.

Charter Flight Monitoring Team

Electronic interpretation is now being used more widely, but accuracy cannot always be guaranteed and for matters of importance cannot replace a real person. In person professional interpreters are provided on charter returns. This includes those who

interpret on the flight and during the collection and journey to the airport, and those who provide support from collection up until the departure but do not fly. We have driven better usage of interpreters, Big Word and the translation app on the C&C devices that colleagues can use in the field as needed.

A new process was implemented in September and is up and running whereby we have increased the number of interpreters initially requested as part of the bulk booking for the following months charter flights. The increase is an attempt to have an in person interpreter at each of the IRCs/STHFs used for collection ahead of the charter.

This process also includes the utilisation of the language need information identified from the IRC induction to determine the requirement of an interpreter.