

## HOME OFFICE PROGRESS UPDATE AGAINST INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD (MB) 2024 RECOMMENDATIONS (AS AT DECEMBER 2025)

### A: Infrastructure

#### Immigration removal centres (IRCs)

Work to improve facilities in the immigration detention estate took many positive steps forward in 2025, following investment as part of Project Optimise in 2024. At Tinsley House IRC increases in capacity were completed including the renovation and upgrading of toilets and showers, alongside improved drainage to support hygiene and maintenance. A rolling programme of renovations delivered significant improvements across residential units.

At Harmondsworth IRC, new toilets, furniture, showers and basins were delivered alongside significant improvements to ventilation, lighting and flooring on Cedar, Gorse, Fir and Elm units. Across four units in Brook House we replaced flooring, toilets, tv shelves and basins alongside improvements to ventilation.

New reception capacity was built in both Tinsley House and Harmondsworth, adding private interview capability alongside improvements to resident wellbeing on arrival. At Dungavel House IRC showers and toilets were fully refurbished with new sanitary fittings, modern flooring, and improved ventilation for better hygiene and resident wellbeing.

#### Short-Term Holding Facilities (STHFs)

Border Force's ability to require port operators to provide or improve facilities is limited to the powers conferred by legislation. Within those limits, Border Force has worked proactively with port operators to progress improvements to holding room provision at specific locations.

**Felixstowe** – There has been a delay in the commencement to renovations due to the pending approval for necessary CCTV and security works, essential to the facility's security features. Senior Border Force leaders are engaging with the port operator to secure a time frame for completion.

**Luton** – Border Force has been pressing for redevelopment and expansion since 2021 and there are on-going contractual discussions with the port operator and other parties. Border Force await confirmation as to when works, which will provide Luton with an additional third holding room and increase capacity from 22 to 40, will commence.

**Heathrow** – Work continues on the STHF project at Heathrow. This will be delivered over a two-year time frame with work at Terminal 5 due for completion in Spring 26. Dates for work at T2, T3 & T4 are to be agreed.

**London Gatwick** - Building works, including the installation of a new shower room and additional toilets, have been completed and the STHF re-opened in December 2025.

**Edinburgh** - Edinburgh Airport Ltd. (EAL) have agreed to redecorate the STHF. Work is expected to begin in March 2026.

**Stansted** - All possible upgrades to the existing STHF have now been implemented, including a food preparation area, a dedicated fingerprint room, a larger storeroom and daily cleaning. BF will continue to work with Manchester Airport Group (MAG) on designs for the STHF as this work progresses.

**East Midlands** - A television has now been installed and funding provisionally identified to upgrade safety and security features within the STHF. Border Force are currently liaising with its contractors to agree a timeline for planned installation.

- **London City** – issues with the temperature controls at LCY have now been resolved.

## **B: Communication**

### IRCs

The smartphone pilot at Gatwick IRC continues and will be extended to other sites once appropriate infrastructure work has been completed. Infrastructure work is underway at both Derwentside and Yarl's Wood IRCs, with work at Derwentside expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2026.

Additional translation tablets have been in place at Derwentside IRC since summer 2025.

### STHF

Following the completion of the holding room internet access trial at Heathrow Airport in June 2025, the Home Office has decided not to pursue this provision any further. Uptake by the detained population was extremely limited and reflected a general lack of interest in the service. The significant costs associated with a wider rollout could not be justified in the absence of any demonstrable benefit to detained persons.

The issues reported regarding poor mobile telephone signal at Heathrow Airport Terminal 2 have now been resolved.

Regarding response times to IMB queries Border Force continue to work with the IMB to streamline the process for responding to rota reports and has recently suggested changes to the IMB which it is hoped will improve current response times.

## **C: Health needs assessment**

### Holding facilities

Following the withdrawal of access to medication, Immigration Enforcement and Border Force have been working together to identify solutions to mitigate against and reduce risk.

Aeromed were contracted to provide medics at the UK's busiest port holding rooms. Ports without access to Aeromed have local procedures in place to contact a medical practitioner/paramedic, at a minimum this includes the option to call for assistance on 111 (and 999 for emergencies).

Engagement continues with NHS England to identify any transferable learning from HM court facilities and to explore possible alternatives, including telemedicine (remote video diagnosis and treatment).

Legal and policy teams are reviewing the current arrangements and policy position - which disallows detained persons' access to medication- to ensure the arrangements are still appropriate.

#### **D: Disability access review**

Following the assessment of the disability access review on implementing recommendations without impacting infrastructure at reporting centres, immediate action has been taken on several recommendations which can be implemented imminently without major disruption at the reporting centres.

Mobile induction loops have been provided across rooms at Sheffield and Leeds, and these are planned for Frontier House, Eaton House and KIU. Grab rails have been installed at Dallas Court and will be rolled out across other reporting centres sites during the first half of 2026. We continue to work with stakeholders across other reporting centres to identify and implement feasible solutions, including at Croydon.

#### **E: Kent coast**

A cross-cutting review of the systems in place to communicate key information to arrivals throughout the Kent Coast operation has been conducted with necessary improvements identified. The interview script used by officers now includes an additional compulsory paragraph outlining the process at the start of the interview. In due course this information will also be provided in a written form, at the triage stage, following translation. Digital display screens will continue to be updated when requested, with appropriate monitoring in place.

Pictorial references are used to communicate basic information about the process being undertaken at any given time at Western Jet-Foil (WJF), accompanied by written information in the most commonly spoken languages. The cycle of information on the screens at WJF is limited however the system is predicated on flow and onward travel to Manston STHF at the earliest opportunity. This process will be kept under review.

Installation of additional soft furnishings for families at WJF has not been progressed due to the negative impact on capacity within that area, potentially reducing it by up to 50 spaces. As it has been deemed necessary to maintain the wooden benches, two additional interview rooms have been made available to process Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, helping to keep time spent at WJF to a minimum.

Previously where officials had doubts about claimed age, and an initial age decision was required, those interviews were not conducted during the night, with interviews delayed allowing the individual to rest. Following review, interviews now routinely continue through the night, subject to senior official approval and careful monitoring with due regard to the individual's welfare, to ensure that individuals are processed more quickly and the number of potential under 18-year-olds staying overnight at WJF reduced. We are unable to provide sleeping mats at WJF, given the lack of space and potential risk hazard they pose, especially in the event that the area needs to be evacuated quickly.

## **F: Liaison with social services**

While Border Force continue to work with social services at both local and national levels to resolve any emerging issues, a formal Service Level Agreement would be disproportionate to the number of cases concerned.

At a national level the Border Force National Safeguarding team monitors length of stays and presents monthly cases to the Independent Family Returns Panel (IFRP) about any child or family cases held for longer than 18 hours in STHFs, ensuring that actions and lengths of stay are closely scrutinised. Any issues, or actions to follow up raised by the IFRP, are taken forward as a priority.

At a local level, Border Force have well-established relationships with social services and engage on a regular basis as part of business-as-usual activity. When Local Authorities are under resource pressures, they may regard individuals in the care of Border Force as being in a safe location and as such, deprioritise their transfer. Border Force however is committed to reducing collection waits further wherever possible and will always explore any alternative solutions, including escalating any cases for priority collection.

The Child Safeguarding Working Group - established in June 2025 by the Home Office and The Association of Safeguarding Partners (representing local child safeguarding partners in England) - discusses issues of mutual interest, shares best practice, and explores opportunities for collaborative working in relation to children who are at risk of abuse, have come to harm, or may need care and support. Chaired by Safeguarding Advice and Children's Champion (SACC), the group comprises 2 officials from The Association of Safeguarding Partners and a small selection of Home Office operational and safeguarding leads from Asylum; Border Force; Immigration Enforcement; and Passport, Visas and Citizenship. While the group also includes a representative from the Scottish Government, SACC is seeking opportunities, where appropriate, to involve more representatives from equivalent multi-agency groups and safeguarding partner organisations in the devolved administrations. The group has met three times so far, with the next meeting scheduled for March 2026.

## **G: Use of Force**

### IRCs

Detention Services continues to review the Use of Force at IRCs (including the use of handcuffs) and additional guidance has been provided with awareness sessions being provided to DS Compliance Teams enabling them to raise concerns to specialist teams at the earliest opportunity. A new Detention Services Order - (DSO) 11/2025 'Use of Force for adults in detention' - was published in December 2025 and incorporates requirements for increased monitoring and 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Assurance.

### STHF and Escorting

A review has taken place regarding the use of handcuffs at Luton Airport. Contractor staff are now required to conduct a dynamic risk assessment - using professional judgement and situational awareness - when applying handcuffs.

Escorting Operations are planning to publish a new DSO regarding Use of Force for STHF and Escorting by the end of Quarter 1 2026. This DSO will be Home Office Manual for Escorting Safely specific and strengthen requirements around risk assessments.