



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

**For reporting year
1 February 2025 to 31 January 2026**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

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

The Board conducts its work in line with the Short-Term Holding Facility Rules (‘the Rules’), which place the day-to-day operations of STHFs on a statutory footing. Part 7 of the Rules sets out the responsibilities of the Board (referred to in the Rules as ‘the visiting committee’). The Board has unrestricted access to every detained individual and all immigration detention facilities and to most records for the STHFs that it monitors. Board members always have full access to all parts of the facility and can speak to detained individuals outside of the hearing of officers. Board members must consider any complaint or request that a detained individual wishes to make to them. They must also make enquiries into the case of any detained individual whose mental or physical health is likely to be injuriously affected by any conditions of detention. The Board must inform the relevant STHF manager about any matter that it considers requires attention, and report to the Secretary of State about any matter about which it considers the Home Office needs to be aware.

The Board’s duties also include the production of an annual report, covering the treatment of detained individuals and the state and administration of the STHFs it monitors, as well as providing any advice or suggestions it considers appropriate. This report has been produced to fulfil that obligation.

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

2. Description of the holding rooms

The STHFs at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted airports and the immigration reporting centre at 2 Ruskin Square in Croydon are all managed by Mitie Care & Custody (C&C), a private company that oversees immigration detention facilities.

Each of these STHFs has broadly similar facilities, including a main holding room, a family room, access to hot and cold food with drinks, TVs, newspapers and religious texts in a selection of languages and children's toys and books, plus a phone for both outbound and incoming calls.

In each of the airport STHFs there is limited space for people to sleep on the floor, with room for only a few mattresses to be laid out, if they are available. When there is no space on the floor, the only alternative is to sleep or rest on the chairs. Unrelated men, women and vulnerable detained individuals may have to sleep in the same area, unless the family holding room within the location is free.

There is no private space for C&C to conduct induction interviews with detained people at the airports or 2 Ruskin Square.

Aeromed healthcare professionals are available at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted Airports, but not at other location monitored by the Board. There is no private space for Aeromed to conduct medical assessments.

The STHFs at 2 Ruskin Square and Gatwick are the only holding rooms with a disabled toilet, which is unisex. There are no other support systems for people with limited mobility, sight or hearing impairment available at the airport STHFs.

There are shower facilities at Gatwick South terminal, Southend and now at the recently re-opened (in January 2026) STHF at Gatwick North terminal.

Detained people are monitored by staff through observation windows. CCTV monitoring is available at all airports, except Southend.

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

Gatwick North Terminal: In the main holding room, there are 15 seats. In the family holding room, there are seven seats. There are unisex toilet and shower facilities in both holding rooms. The shower in the main holding room is also suitable for those with limited mobility. Detained persons' luggage and personal effects are not stored securely.

Gatwick South Terminal: In the main holding room, there are 28 seats, separate male and female toilets and a separate shower. In the family holding room, there are 12 seats and a unisex toilet with separate shower.

Luton Airport: The main and family holding rooms have 10 seats each. Toilets are available in each room, but there are no showers. Luggage is stored in a room, alongside food. There is no hot food apart from instant noodles.

Stansted Airport: In the main holding room there are 14 seats and separate male and female toilets, with baby changing facilities in the female toilet. Within the main holding room is a small family holding room with no separate toilets. Detained

persons' luggage and personal effects are stored in lockable cupboards in a storeroom with CCTV.

Southend Airport: This facility is managed by Border Force (BF). There are two separate holding rooms, with capacity for eight and four people respectively; neither room has CCTV monitoring. Each holding room has a unisex toilet. The larger room has a shower in the toilet.

Neither holding room contains a TV or DVD player. The facility includes two interview rooms, where inductions can be conducted in private.

There is a kettle for hot drinks and pot noodles. In addition, there is a small supply of bottled water, and hot and cold ready meals and snacks are available.

2 Ruskin Square: (Immigration Reporting Centre): In the main holding room at 2 Ruskin Square, there are 28 seats. In the separate family holding room, there are 22 seats. Both rooms have unisex toilets and disabled access, but no showers.

There is natural light in both holding rooms.

Summary of the shipping ports

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

London Tilbury Port: There are two distinct port areas. Tilbury 1 which is the original facility, and Tilbury 2 which is operated by P&O Ferries. The facility is only staffed when individuals are detained. Tilbury 1 is only used as overflow and was not used during this reporting period.

Tilbury 2's holding facility is in a large modern portacabin with separate male and female toilets, showers and wash handbasins. There are two holding rooms and detained people are easily monitored through windows in the observation and control area, which is situated between the rooms. CCTV cameras cover both holding rooms. BF interview rooms are situated within the same portacabin. There is no access to natural light or an exercise area.

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

Drinks, and in addition, hot and cold food are available within the facility.

Port of Purfleet: The STHF is located within a larger building, and detainees stay within the Purfleet site.

The observation and control area sits between the holding rooms, one of which is larger and designated as a family room. Officers can monitor residents through a one-way window, as well as via a CCTV system. BF interview rooms are located within the same building. There is no access to natural light or an exercise area.

Each holding room has shower and toilets as well as tables and chairs. Cold food and hot drinks are available within the facility.

Port of Felixstowe: In the opinion of the Board, this STHF does not provide a humane place for holding people. The STHF is a small, dilapidated portacabin sited in a huge hangar. There is a freestanding chemical portable toilet outside the facility, to which detained persons need to be escorted. There is no light in the toilet. There are two sleeping mattresses and pillows. There is no disabled access. The previous port authority had agreed to relocate the STHF to an existing building, which is adjacent, but the Port of Felixstowe was taken over by a consortium in 2025 and the new owners have failed to make any meaningful progress. Relocation has therefore stalled and the Board considers that the position is untenable.

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

The facility is staffed by BF officers only when detained persons are being held there. BF interview rooms are available close to the arrivals area. Officers may monitor detained persons through windows into the holding rooms and supported with CCTV.

There are four sleeping mattresses and seven pillows.

3. Key points

3.1 Background to the report

The Board has monitored activity across all the above locations throughout the reporting period. At sites where there is less activity, in Southend, Tilbury, Purfleet, Harwich and Felixstowe, Board members contact the site through phone and/or email interview and when appropriate (for example when the site has a detained person), BF staff make contact directly with IMB members.

The data used in this report is provided monthly by the Home Office escort contract monitoring team. Data gathered during monitoring is clearly identified.

3.2 Main findings

Safety

- There has been a reduction of the number of people held in the last year. The Board continues to be concerned about the size of the accommodation, especially at Luton Airport. Every month the Board observes people sleeping on the floor, restricting the movement of others.
- The Board is very concerned about the lack of urgency to resolve problems in a timely manner, see section 5.1.13. It is doubly concerning when it involves the potential for self-harm. The Board identified in July 2025 a jagged piece of plastic white trim around a pillar at 2 Ruskin Square, which was finally resolved in January 2026.

Fair and humane treatment

- As reported in the previous year, the Board has observed C&C officers, sometimes in situations that are stressful and emotional for those in their care, carrying out their duties with tact and sensitivity. Those members of staff with multi-language skills have been observed using these skills to support detained persons and other members of staff.
- For the fourth year in succession, the Board draws the Home Office's attention to the capacity issues at Luton and Stansted airports' STHFs and the fact that the needs of those with mobility, hearing or sight impairment issues are still not being adequately addressed across all facilities.
- In the opinion of the Board, the STHF at the Port of Felixstowe does not provide a humane place for holding people. Despite Ministerial assurances over the last two years, the Board has seen no evidence that this will be resolved and with the change of ownership at the port of Felixstowe, there seems even less likelihood that this will be resolved.
- Under the STHF rules, passengers should not be detained for longer than 24 hours, other than where a longer period of detention is authorised by the Secretary of State (in practice, this is delegated to a Home Office official).
- There are limited numbers of sleeping mattresses in the STHFs and the Board considers that it is inhumane that there is sometimes no provision for rest or sleep other than sleeping on the floor or on chairs. People are regularly detained for long periods (17.7% were held over 12 hours), sometimes over 24 hours, in STHFs, which are designed to hold individuals for short periods.

- The STHFs the Board monitors are not residential establishments and do not have facilities for sleeping or physical exercise and offer limited privacy. Showers are available at Gatwick South, Southend, Harwich, Tilbury, Purfleet, Southend and at the recently reopened Gatwick North. The STHFs at Stansted and Luton do not have adequate facilities for washing.
- The Home Office stated that recommendations made in the Disability Access Review would be shared with port operators when improvements were being planned. However, the Board notes that there have been two opportunities for the Disability Access Review recommendations to be implemented, which have not been taken up by the port operator. The Board has seen no evidence that the recommendations were shared with Gatwick Airport Limited or the owners of 2 Ruskin Square. (See section 5.3.3)
- The Board continues to be very concerned about the lack of privacy afforded to detained persons during the initial induction at some of the STHFs or while being examined by an Aeromed health professional. This concern is reflected in the HMIP report on Immigration Reporting Centres, dated October 2025.

Health and wellbeing

- The Board is pleased to note the continued availability of Aeromed at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted airports providing 24/7 cover.
- Work needs to continue to strengthen the Aeromed process to ensure detained people are given medication at the correct time or to state no further action unless their condition changes.
- The Board is concerned that there were inadequate processes to cater for uncovered food. It was noted that an opened uncovered box of dates at Gatwick South was reported in November 2025, which if people sneezed or coughed near them, or handled them, could easily have spread disease.

Removal, transport or transfer

- The Board has noted a continued improvement in the process of transferring persons to asylum accommodation, with a very limited number of concerns raised about the Clearsprings service (Clearsprings Readiness Homes is a government approved sub-contractor of accommodation and transfer for those who are bailed, having sought asylum).

3.3 Recommendations

TO THE MINISTER

- The Board notes the commitment given by the Deputy Director, Immigration and Customs Custody at Border Force, to disability standards being addressed at the new facilities at Luton and Stansted. The Board is very disappointed that commitments made by the Home Office to address concerns raised in the Disability Access Review (August 2023) with the relevant port authority when a significant project was planned either did not happen or Gatwick Airport Limited dismissed the requests as they were not commercially viable. Refurbishment at Gatwick North was significant and would have been a significant cost, as noted in section 5.3.3.
- The Ministerial response in September 2024 stated that works were expected to start at Felixstowe by end of Q2 in 2024. Again, in September 2025, the

Minister stated that: *“There has been a delay in the commencement to Felixstowe’s renovations due to the pending approval for necessary CCTV and security works, essential to the facility’s security features which have still not been delivered on.”* The Board recommends that the Minister publish a credible plan for the completion of the Felixstowe STHF or detail what alternative arrangements will be made to detain people in a humane manner.

- We are disappointed that it has taken over a year to complete the snagging at 2 Ruskin Square, and the Board recommends that the Minister ensures that there are robust project plans with clear deliverables and timescales for all future STHF projects.

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

- The Board recommends that action should be taken to reduce the number of detained persons staying in airport STHFs overnight and to reduce the number of detained persons held for longer than 24 hours, as noted in 5.0.
- The Board recommends that the Home Office review the handover to Children’s Services at Luton. The Board finds it unacceptable that social work staff are not allowed to be escorted to the STHF at Luton, whereas at other facilities social work staff are escorted to the STHF.
- The Board is disappointed that there seems to be no sense of urgency on issues raised that affect how people are fairly and humanely held. The Board recommends that realistic targets are put in place and that departments and service providers are held accountable, noting potential health and safety issues raised through the year, as noted in 5.1.13.
- The Board recommends that areas should be provided so that C&C inductions and Aeromed assessments can be conducted with privacy to allow sensitive information to be shared confidentially. This is also noted in the recent report dated October 2025 from the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons.

3.4 Progress since the last report (Ministerial response, 4 September 2025)

3.4.1 Response to two commitments: Gatwick North refurbishment and Felixstowe

- The Gatwick North refurbishment was completed in January 2026, despite a commitment to complete in August 2025.
- Felixstowe: the Ministerial response in September 2024 stated that necessary works, including CCTV and other essential security works, were expected to start by the end of Q2 in 2024. The subsequent Ministerial response to the following year’s annual report stated, in September 2025, that the planned implementation was now for May 2026. The Board has seen no credible progress to start the necessary works.

3.4.2 Holding room capacities

The Board is disappointed that the target dates for the resolution of accommodation issues at Luton and Stansted are not expected until March and June 2027.

3.4.3 Use of handcuffs

The Board is pleased to see that STHF staff are now following STHF Rule 11 and that restraints are only used after a dynamic risk assessment. The Board notes this

same comment was made in the most recent HMIP Report on Immigration Removal Centres.

3.4.4 Strengthening the relationship between BF and Children's Services

The Board continues to monitor this and notes that during 2025 there have been eight minors passing through the seaports and airports operated by BF. The Board has seen improvements between Suffolk and Essex Children's Services in accepting responsibility for minors.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Arrival and induction

4.1.1 Continuing from previous years, the Board has regularly monitored C&C officers carrying out inductions efficiently following a common standard, including the use of translation services such as Big Word and translation tablets. The inductions are carried out sensitively, assessing risks and the medical needs of the detained person. C&C officers encourage the detained person to share information regarding those risks or needs.

4.1.2 The Board continues to be very concerned about the lack of privacy, also identified by HMIP, for inductions and Aeromed medical assessments, which are either carried out behind a drawn curtain or in the open office area at Luton and Stansted, which may inhibit disclosure of vulnerability or sensitive information. There is no privacy if the speech is loud or a speaker phone is used for Big Word translation.

4.1.3 Induction involves personal searches and normally private conversations. These conversations can often lead to the disclosure of sensitive information (see section 5.1.1), which can be heard by other members of staff or, indeed, other detained persons. When searches are required, these take place behind a drawn curtain.

4.1.4 A new security camera was installed behind the curtain area in the Stansted STHF which is used by both C&C and Aeromed staff. This camera could be inhibiting to anyone who may be asked sensitive questions. Consideration should be given to restricting those who have access to the recordings from that camera.

4.1.5 There have been relatively low numbers of people being detained over the reporting year at the shipping ports. Border Force generally call the appropriate member of the Board if someone arrives at a shipping port.

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

4.2 Vulnerable adults, safeguarding

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

4.2.2 It has been noted, specifically at Stansted and Luton, that the IS91 (the authority to detain) form does not always identify those with vulnerabilities or medical needs.

4.2.3 The vulnerable adult warning forms and notes on MEDS (Mitie Escort Detention System) that members have reviewed are well documented, with clear observation notes, in many instances every 15 minutes.

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

4.3 Children and families

4.3.1 As we reported last year, the current size and capacity of the holding rooms at Luton and Stansted do not allow for multiple families, or a family and other vulnerable adult who are detained at the same time, to be cared for safely and decently.

4.3.2 At Stansted the only access to the very small family room and the toilet facilities for those detained families, is through the main holding room, which the Board considers inappropriate. Families use the same toilet facilities as those held in the main holding room. It is not known if this layout presents a risk to children. The family room has very little floor space as the seats take up most of the room.

4.3.3 The Board has reviewed a sample of the childcare plans and noted that these are well documented and, where appropriate, the local authority Children's Services were notified.

4.3.4 Although the numbers are small, the percentage of unaccompanied children arriving through the seaports is significantly higher than through the airports. Board members have reviewed the documentation for these children and the involvement of Social Services and our monitoring indicated that there is a system in place.

4.4 General safety

4.4.1 In the late spring of 2025 the Board noted that C&C had changed the application of their use of force policy. All residents who were moved from a STHF to an aircraft or other transport were handcuffed in an incorrect application of the policy. The Board was pleased to note that in July C&C reversed the application of the policy and where appropriate, restraints are now used based on a risk assessment.

4.4.2 The Board has observed that there is a regular testing regime for panic and fire alarms which is well documented. The Board has monitored the response after asking staff to press the panic alarm, the response being acceptable.

4.4.3 As is noted in section 5.1.13 and in previous reports, the Board is very concerned about the lack of commitment to resolving outstanding issues relating to the fabric at each of the STHFs. It is unclear to the Board the extent of the legal requirement of the port operator to provide STHFs where people can be held fairly and humanely in a safe environment and to resolve issues in a timely manner.

4.4.4 The Board observed in July 2025 a hard ragged plastic trim around a pillar in 2 Ruskin Square that a resident could use to self-harm. We noted it again in October and November 2025, with action finally being taken in January 2026 to resolve the issue. The Board is very concerned by the length of time it took to remedy a serious health and safety risk.

4.4.5 The Board raised concerns in our last annual report about the clear glass wall between the two holding rooms in Ruskin Square. Although two panels were replaced with frosted panels, the Board continues to be concerned and will monitor any further concerns raised by detained individuals who may feel intimidated by people in the other room.

4.4.6 A serious incident took place at Gatwick South between 25 and 26 March 2025. It took until the January 2026 Board meeting for the Board to be given an

assurance that lessons had been learned, showing a lack of urgency from those responsible.

4.4.7 The Board was disappointed that it took over a month for C&C to respond to a health and safety issue, namely that a packet of dates was left open at Gatwick South STHF. The open packaging was a risk to food hygiene standards with the risk of cross contamination and the spread of infection, for example, if people touched, sneezed or coughed over the product. Again, the Board is very concerned by the length of time it took to provide an adequate response giving assurance that proper processes were in place to ensure this health and safety risk did not reoccur.

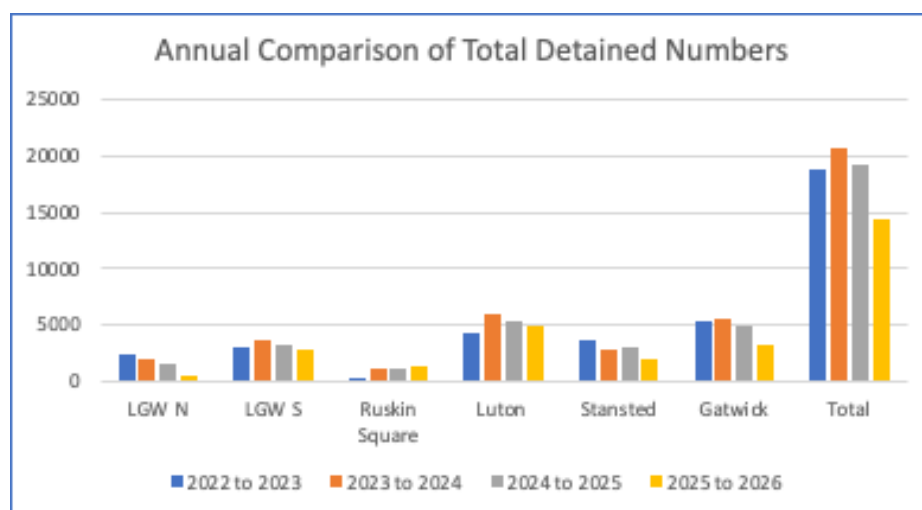
4.4.8 It took three months for a missing ceiling tile to be replaced in the STHF at Stansted after concerns were raised about whether this compromised the fire safety within the STHF.

4.4.9 The Board first reported a potential slip hazard in the STHF at Stansted in April 2025 where water puddles under very small basins in the toilets as detained people try to wash themselves. This continues to be a hazard and there has been no proposal to rectify the problem.

5. Fair and humane treatment

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

5.0.1 There has been a decrease in the number of people detained over the last three years, from over 20,000 in the period 2023 to 2024, to 10,018 in this reporting period, 2025-2026.



5.0.2 At the airport STHFs that the Board monitors, only Gatwick South and Southend had showers throughout the reporting period. Gatwick North was reopened in January 2026 with showers. There are inadequate facilities to enable detained people to sleep or rest when detained for lengthy periods. There is no access to fresh air or an exercise area. There are inadequate facilities for people to wash at Stansted and Luton.

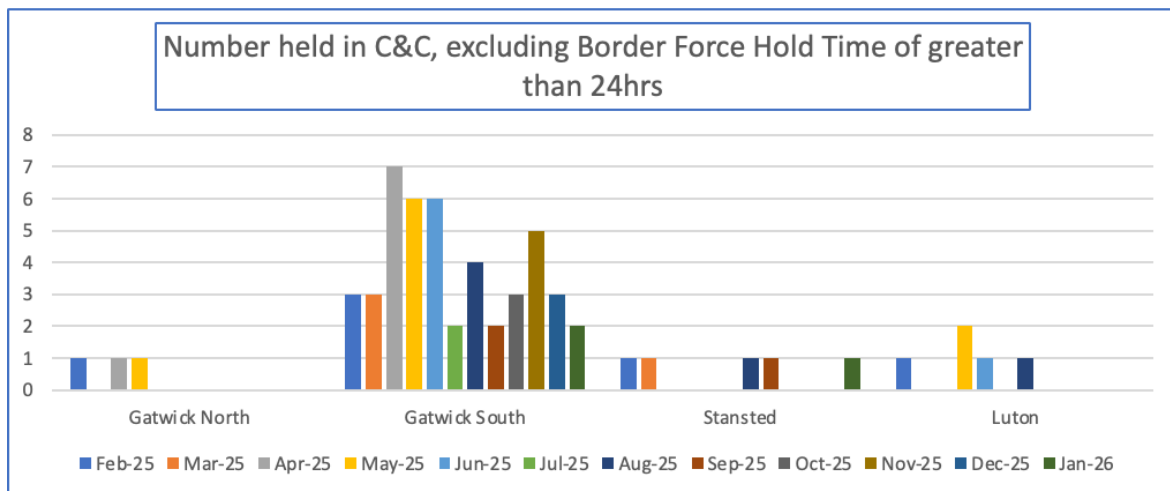
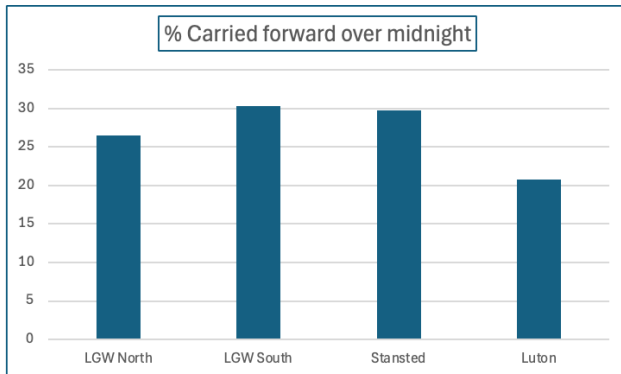
5.0.3 The total duration of detention may increase substantially when the period an individual is held by BF is combined with the time held in the STHF.

5.0.4 The Board does not consider it is humane to detain people for long periods (over 24 hours or overnight) in these conditions.

5.0.5 There has been a reduction in the number of people held for more than 24 hours compared with previous years. A total of 59 people (0.58%) were detained for more than 24 hours in the reporting year; 13 (22%) were in facilities with no showers.

5.0.6 Gatwick continues to detain a higher percentage of people for more than 24 hours than the other airports, 46 people (1.69%) for this reporting period. 5.5% of those held at Gatwick South in April 2025 were held for more than 24 hours. Two people were held for more than two nights at Gatwick South in September and in January someone was held for more than 37 hours in a facility that is not fit for detaining people for that length of time.

5.0.7 It is the Board’s view that people continue to be held in facilities that are not suitable for detention overnight. Over 2,496 people were detained overnight and although this is an improvement on previous years, more than 25% of those detained are held overnight every month, peaking at 35% at Gatwick South, 36% at Stansted and 25% at Luton.

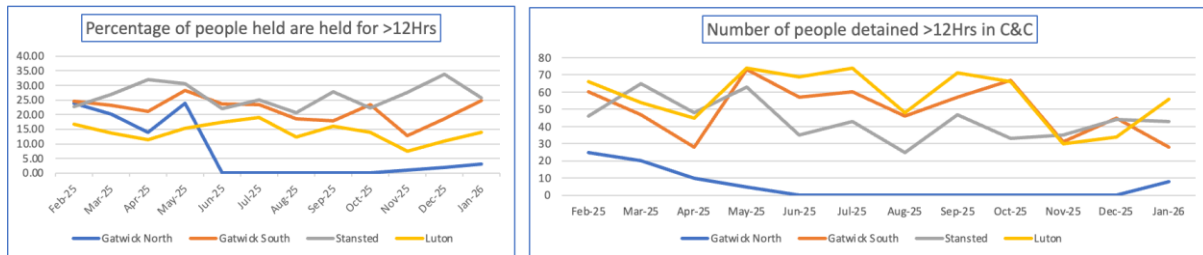


5.0.8 The Board notes, for example, that in September 2025, 112 people at Luton, 96 people at Gatwick South and 53 people at Stansted were detained overnight.

5.0.9 The operating capacity at Luton is 20 and the Board has observed that more than 20 people per day are processed through the STHF, peaking at 26 people on one day. This affects the care provided, as staff are constantly either performing inductions, preparing people to be transferred or escorting to return flights. This has improved from the previous year, when the Board would observe consistently more than 20 people being processed in any one day.

5.0.10 Although the Board recognises there is a safety concern with having too many sleeping people on the floor, there is equally a concern about the decency for those detained overnight who are unable to sleep or rest due to the overcrowded accommodation. The Board does not consider it humane to ask people to sleep or rest in a fixed chair or to lie on the floor with a mat and blanket.

5.0.11 The STHFs are not residential facilities, but each month people are detained for a prolonged time, for example over the past year 665 people at Gatwick, 709 at Luton and 517 at Stansted have been held for more than 12 hours.



5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 As we reported last year, there is limited privacy, particularly for induction, where newly detained persons are asked very personal questions, such as, for example, their gender orientation or whether they have suffered abuse. There is limited private space for Aeromed to provide medical support. The Board considers this to be a complete lack of respect towards those who have been detained. During busy times, the Board has observed C&C inductions taking place in opens area at Luton, except when searching is required. At Gatwick South, conversations have, at times, been overheard, including when the Big Word is being used on speaker-phone, with discussions conducted behind a drawn curtain. Aeromed assessments are held in open areas during busy times at Luton, unless the Aeromed professional wishes to do further examinations, which is conducted behind a drawn curtain.

5.1.2 The Board's concern on lack of privacy is reflected in the most recent HMIP report on Immigration Reporting Centres, dated October 2025.

5.1.3 The Board continues to be concerned about arrangements for sleeping and rest across all locations, as there is very limited provision for individuals of different genders to sleep or rest in separate spaces.

5.1.4 The Board has remained concerned about the inadequate sizes of most of the holding rooms.

5.1.5 The Gatwick North refurbished STHF finally re-opened in January 2026 after being closed seven months. It is disappointing to note that none of the new seating takes account of the British standards document BS8300-2, seating of varying heights and guidance document PAS-6463 lighting control for those living with neurodiversity challenges. These issues were highlighted in the assessments commissioned by the Home Office on Disability Access Review in 2023. Although showers have been installed, the shower in the North terminal assumes the user will be sitting down as the shower head is very low and, secondly, the seat is off centre.

5.1.6 At Luton, the overall space provided for the holding room is far too small. When the main holding room is at capacity (10), there is only space for five people to lie on the floor to sleep or rest. The Board has observed so many people trying to sleep on the floor that it has been very difficult to walk through the area. The Board continues to question whether this space meets health and safety requirements. Observations about the lack of cleanliness of the floors raises further concerns.

5.1.7 The size and layout of the holding room at Stansted is inadequate. When the facility is at capacity, additional detained persons are held elsewhere by BF. The very small family room is within the main holding room. It has no separate toilets with access to the room and the toilets through the main holding room. It provides little or no privacy and is barely adequate to hold a family of four. The Board does not consider it humane for families or vulnerable detained persons to have to pass through the main holding room before they can use the toilet.

5.1.8 On several occasions the Board has reported water on the floors of the toilets at Stansted, probably caused by residents trying to wash in the very small washbasins as there are no showering facilities. This is causing a slip hazard.

5.1.9 C&C staff at Stansted have commented that single women can find it very intimidating if the family space is full, as the main holding room is very small and some detainees can be very loud, which can be perceived as threatening.

5.1.10 At 2 Ruskin Square, the two holding rooms are adjacent, with a predominately clear glass panelled wall separating them. Two of the panels were replaced in the reporting year to frosted panels. The Board will continue to monitor the situation on whether there any further occurrences of detained women feeling intimidated, as men have been gesticulating at them through the clear glass.

5.1.11 The Board is extremely concerned about the lack of progress to resolve the situation with the inadequate portacabin facility at Felixstowe, which is not fit for purpose, despite assurances and responses from Ministers to our two previous annual reports.

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

5.1.13 The table below gives examples of issues we have highlighted and that have an impact on detained people and the delay in resolving these issues.

Location	Problem	Date reported	Status
Gatwick	Requesting if there is a plan to replace or refurbish seats in Gatwick South.	June 2025	Seats replaced in December 2025.
2 Ruskin Square	Snagging issues. E.g. TV not working in either holding room.	November 2024	Partially resolved in December 2025.
2 Ruskin Square	Safety hazard with very sharp rough edges between the plastic strip and the pillar next to the complaints box. This could be used	July 2025	Awaiting final signoff that the problem has been resolved March 2026.

	by someone considering self-harming.		
Stansted	State of repair of the chairs. Missing ceiling tile.	April 2025 April 2025	July 2025 August 2025

There is no hot food, except instant noodles, available at Luton. The Board is concerned about this, especially for those people detained for long periods where the only alternatives are sandwiches, vegetable or tomato cup-a-soup with croutons, or cold snacks.

5.2 Relationships between staff and detained people

5.2.1 The Board continues to be impressed by the care and sensitivity shown by C&C officers to those in their care in what can be both emotionally and physically challenging circumstances. When questioned, detained people generally indicate their satisfaction with their treatment by C&C officers. Staff are from a mixture of cultural backgrounds and previous employment experiences. Some speak different languages, which makes communication with detained people easier and often more productive.

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

5.2.3 Aeromed offer a prompt and professional 24/7 service and work well with colleagues from BF and C&C at the airports. The Board has continually highlighted the need to have a robust process of handover, specifically where there is a need to follow a prescribed medicine regime.

5.2.4 The Board is aware of nine formal written complaints that have been received by C&C during the reporting period, which is an increase from six in 2024 and one in 2023. All were investigated and none were fully upheld. Complaint forms are available in each of the holding rooms and during the induction process, we have observed that officers usually explain the complaints procedure.

5.3 Equality and diversity

5.3.1 There is limited provision for those with mobility problems or who have sight or hearing loss, with the exception of Gatwick South. In January 2026, Gatwick North provided disabled-access toilets and shower facilities at the North Terminal. Our monitoring suggests that unless such limitations are declared by the individual or are obvious, they may not always be recognised. We are also concerned that the mental health of detained individuals, in what can be a challenging environment, may not always be adequately assessed.

5.3.2 It was noted after a recent discussion with a DCOM (detention custody officer manager) at Gatwick South that a motorised wheelchair user was denied access to the STHF as the staff did not feel that they could satisfy the basic needs of the user.

5.3.3 In 2023, Mott MacDonald conducted a Disability Access Review of STHFs on behalf of the Home Office. Disappointingly, the recent refurbishment of Gatwick North did not incorporate the recommendations highlighted in the Mott McDonald review at most STHFs, namely the British standards document BS8300-2, which recommends seating of varying heights and policy document PAS-6463, which recommends lighting control for those living with neurodiversity challenges. This was despite assurance from the Deputy Director, Immigration Detention and Customs Custody that Border Force are regularly reviewing the existing standards and are updating standards for border infrastructure and STHF at ports. The Board had been assured by the Home Office that changes at ports and airports to address issues highlighted in the review would take place when other projects were being planned.

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

5.3.5 Using the phone translation service, the Big Word, or technology such as a tablet loaded with a translation application, most language needs are catered for.

5.4 Children, families

5.4.1 As we reported last year, the family holding rooms at Gatwick North, Luton and Stansted are particularly small and cramped. There is little room to sleep or rest at the Gatwick North family room and the family room at Stansted is often used by non-family members.

5.4.2 The Board considers the family room at Stansted to be unsuitable and inadequate. It has very limited capacity, does not have separate access, offers little privacy does not have its own toilets and is inadequate when there is more than one family in residence at the same time.

5.4.3 The Board's view remains that a separate, secure family room, which should generally be reserved for the use of families, single females, and vulnerable individuals, should be provided as soon as possible at all locations.

5.4.4 The Board notes the provision of family space at Harwich.

5.4.5 Our examination of BF records has indicated that 524 children were detained during the period covered by this report, 74 of whom were unaccompanied minors.

5.5 Faith and religious affairs

5.5.1 A variety of religious texts, including the Bible, the Quran and the Torah, are available at each STHF. The Board notes that religious books are neatly displayed and, where necessary, separated from those of other religions.

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

5.6 Property

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

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare

6.1.1 As we reported last year, the Board is pleased to note that a 24/7 service, provided by Aeromed, has continued to be made available during the reporting year at Gatwick, Luton and Stansted.

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

6.1.3 The Board continues to be concerned, despite assurances, about the robustness of the process in place that records when a person requires regular medication (e.g. for diabetes or high blood pressure). The Board's monitoring has noted that these processes are not robust.

6.1.4 There is no Aeromed cover at 2 Ruskin Square.

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

6.2 Physical and mental healthcare

6.2.1 The Board is concerned about the lack of privacy where medical consultations with detained persons can be overheard. This concern is heightened when the consultations take place behind a drawn curtain.

6.2.2 The Board notes, where an examination is not required, the initial Aeromed consultation often takes place in common areas and can be overheard by everyone. The Board questions whether such arrangements provide the detained person with the confidence to reveal more personal or sensitive matters and finds these arrangements unacceptable.

6.2.3 There is no access to fresh air or an exercise area for detained persons at any of the STHF's that the Board monitors. This is of particular concern when people are held for a long time.

6.2.4 Where people are identified as vulnerable because of physical or mental health conditions, C&C officers are required to prepare a written care plan, and our observations suggest that these are appropriately detailed. Vulnerable adult warning forms (VAWFs), a safeguarding document opened when a detained person is identified as vulnerable, are completed and the individual's record on the Home Office's management of escorted detention system (MEDS) is updated.

6.2.5 As we reported last year, we are concerned that it is not always possible for C&C officers to be aware of those with mental health conditions who have not self-identified, and we believe this may be a potential safety issue.

7. Preparation for removal, transfer or release

7.1 Case management

7.1.1 The Board continues to be concerned about the number of people detained for longer than 24 hours in the STHF, see section 5.0.

7.1.2 There has been a decrease recently in the number of people held over 24 hours at Luton and Stansted.

7.1.3 The Board notes that the small number of children who arrive at Felixstowe are quickly processed by BF and, if necessary, moved to Harwich where facilities are infinitely better.

7.1.4 IS91s, VAWFs, child care plans and MEDS, in the view of the Board, are generally well maintained. There are regular observations noted in MEDS for vulnerable adults and children.

7.1.5 The Board expresses particular concern regarding the extended detention of children and vulnerable adults. Additionally, the Board still acknowledges ongoing concerns about the response from Children's Services in this context (see section 7.4).

7.2 Family contact

7.2.1 C&C officers permit detained individuals to make telephone calls to family and friends during the induction process. After relocation to the holding room, access has been enhanced through the installation of new telephones for UK outgoing calls and inbound calls. Facilitating international calls is more complex; detainees may be provided with a mobile phone and SIM card, or alternatively, they may use their own device if staff are free to monitor the call.

7.2.2 During the first nine months of the reporting year, coin-operated payphones were available in some holding rooms; however, their functionality was not consistently reliable and typically permitted incoming calls only.

7.3 Removal

7.3.1 The Board has consistently observed the process of escorting detained individuals to aircraft. These escort responsibilities are primarily undertaken by C&C; however, UKBF also provides escorts when necessary. We have found that officers typically perform these duties with discretion and, under challenging circumstances, treat those in their custody with compassion and respect. There was a period during which all detained persons, except children, were handcuffed during transfers by C&C staff. This was not compliant with the STHF Rule 11 – Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 amended by the Short-term Holding Facility (Amendment) Rules 2022. C&C changed their practice in July 2025 to ensure that detained persons were individually risk assessed to ensure the use of restraints was appropriate. The use of restraints caused significant stress and anguish, specifically to those with criminal record or risk.

7.3.2 The Board continues to observe good working relationships between UKBF and C&C staff at ports. C&C staff have been observed assisting in explaining removal decisions to detained persons.

7.4 Transfer or release

7.4.1 The Board has noted, through its review of daily logs, that there are instances of significant waiting times – ranging from 16 to 17 hours – for Children’s Services to respond to requests at STHFs located at ports and airports to support unaccompanied minors.

7.4.2 At Luton, delays often arise because Children’s Services staff lack airside access; however, over several months, UKBF personnel have taken steps to escort the child from the holding room to the landside area where a social worker or equivalent provides the necessary support. The Board is unaware of what privacy may be offered to the child when meeting a local social worker. At other airports and ports, local social workers provide support to the child in the STHF.

7.4.3 The Board does not have the same level of concern this year as it has had over previous years on the responsiveness of Clearsprings.

7.4.4 The Board notes that detained persons (particularly females) are regularly transferred from 2 Ruskin Square to the Manchester area, leaving in the evening and not arriving until after midnight.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

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

Recommended complement of Board members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	10
Total number of Board meetings	12
Total number of visits to Gatwick Airport North. STHF	12
Total number of visits to Gatwick Airport South STHF	42 (1)
Total number of visits to Luton Airport STHF	52
Total number of visits to Southend Airport	12 (11)
Total number of visits to Stansted Airport STHF	46
Total number of visits to Port of Felixstowe	11(7)
Total number of visits to Harwich Port	10
Total number of visits to Tilbury Port	2 (1)
Total number of visits to Purfleet Port	2 (1)
Total number of visits to 2 Ruskin Square Immigration Reporting Centre STHF	29 (3)



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