



Home Office

Rt Hon Anna Turley MP
Minister for Border Security & Asylum
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Jane Leech MBE
Interim National Chair
Independent Monitoring Boards
3rd Floor
10 South Colonnade
London
E14 4PU

10 September 2026

Dear Jane,

OPERATION HILLMORE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD (IMB) CONCERNS

Thank you for your letter of 13 August setting out the IMB's concerns regarding Operation Hillmore. I would like to reassure you that I take the issues you have raised very seriously.

Detention is used only where it is lawful, necessary and proportionate, and remains subject to regular review. Where concerns are identified, officials act promptly to understand the circumstances, strengthen assurance and make any necessary improvements.

Age Assessments

I note your concerns regarding age assessments, including the number of age disputes raised, the proportion of individuals subsequently released into the care of social services for additional assessment, and the time taken to conclude assessments in some cases. I recognise the importance of identifying age disputes at the earliest opportunity and ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place while those assessments are progressed.

Individuals are asked to confirm their age at multiple points from encounter, through screening and during the detention and removal process. Where a person states that they are an adult, decisions are made on that basis unless information subsequently comes to light which calls that into question. Where an individual claims to be a child but does not provide credible and clear documentary evidence of age, and there is reason to doubt their claimed age, immigration officers are required to make an initial age decision. This is an important safeguarding step, designed to ensure that individuals who are clearly children or clearly adults are routed appropriately and are not subjected unnecessarily to a more substantive age assessment.

As our [Assessing age](#) guidance sets out, where the evidence does not very strongly suggest the individual is significantly over 18, and doubt remains about their age, they are temporarily treated as a child and transferred to a local authority pending further consideration of their age. This does not mean the Home Office has assessed the individual to be a child; rather, it reflects the benefit of doubt principle in our policy, which is applied where age remains uncertain. The Home Office conducts initial age decisions for immigration purposes, while local authorities remain responsible for conducting age assessments to determine whether duties are owed under children's legislation.

My officials will continue to monitor cases closely and seek to ensure that age disputes are progressed as quickly as possible, while maintaining the necessary safeguards. [Interim Operational Instruction 07/2026 'Care and management of age-disputed individuals in immigration detention'](#), published on 17 August 2026, further strengthens this approach by providing clear operational guidance for staff managing age-disputed individuals in immigration detention. Importantly, the IOI provides clear escalation pathways, notification requirements and care planning arrangements to ensure age-disputed individuals are effectively safeguarded and that removal action is not progressed while an individual's age remains unresolved.

Vulnerability and safeguarding

I note your concerns regarding the operation of detention safeguarding processes, particularly given the profile and experiences of individuals detained under Operation Hillmore. It is therefore essential that safeguarding arrangements operate effectively throughout an individual's detention journey.

All arrivals on small boats receive healthcare screenings on arrival at Western Jet Foil. These screenings include identifying communicable diseases in line with NHS guidance and best practice. Any subsequent concerns or new symptoms identified during an individual's time at Manston are prioritised for further assessment. Our healthcare provider remains committed to working with the Home Office to continuously improve the quality of service.

A number of enhancements have been introduced, including increased awareness training for Home Office staff and contractors, strengthened communicable disease screening processes, and improved clinical escalation arrangements. In relation to the transfer of medical records from Manston to IRCs, we are currently moving to a digital solution, which will significantly improve the quality and timeliness of communication.

Vulnerability is considered from the outset of the detention process, including at the Detention Gatekeeper stage where referrals are assessed in line with detention policies. This is supported by a series of further safeguards throughout detention, including, Rule 35 processes, Assessment Care in Detention and Teamwork (ACDT) procedures where appropriate, ongoing casework reviews and wider detention oversight mechanisms. Together, these measures are designed to identify vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity and ensure they are appropriately considered as an individual's circumstances evolve.

All persons detained entering an IRC receive a healthcare screening within two hours of their arrival which identifies any immediate or long-term healthcare risks. Unless they decline, detained individuals in IRCs are given an appointment with a doctor within 24 hours. Clinical pathways into other healthcare services are initiated at this point depending on the outcomes of the reception screen for example, into mental health services.

My officials will continue to keep the operation of the Detention Gatekeeper and associated safeguarding processes under review to ensure vulnerable individuals are identified at the earliest opportunity, that appropriate safeguards are applied throughout detention, and that detention remains necessary, proportionate and consistent with our statutory and welfare obligations.

Access to Information

I recognise the importance of clear information and effective access to legal support. Clear information on arrival at an IRC, the UK-France Treaty and the Detained Duty Advice Scheme (DDAS) has been translated into 26 languages, including those most commonly spoken by people arriving by small boat at Manston. My officials have already taken further action, including better use of interpretation and translation material to improve access to important information.

Legal Advice

DDAS is offered to all residents on arrival and any backlogs are monitored, with additional capacity added if required. Where specific concerns about the quality of DDAS legal advice are raised, these can be escalated to the Legal Aid Agency who will follow-up with contracted providers. Legal providers are also responsible for arranging interpretation where required; in circumstances where an interpreter is not available, the appointment should be rebooked.

You highlight concerns that on 1 April 2026, the wait for a Detained Duty Advice Scheme (DDAS) appointment at Yarl's Wood IRC was 10 days. My officials have reviewed the circumstances and found that the delay affected only a small number of individuals and was exacerbated by the Easter bank holidays. The issue had, in fact, already been escalated, additional surgeries were arranged, and Yarl's Wood prioritised first DDAS appointments and cases with imminent removal directions, which quickly reduced waiting times.

Length of detention

I would like to clarify that individuals are not detained for operational convenience. Published Home Office detention policy is clear that detention for the purpose of removal must only ever be used where there is a realistic prospect of removal within a reasonable timeframe. Officials work to ensure that detention is for the shortest period necessary while removal to France is progressed.

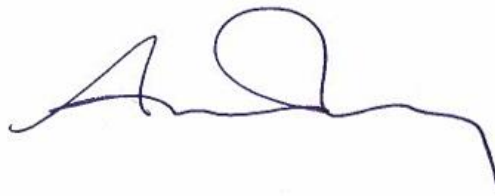
Use of Force

Your letter highlights inconsistent and potentially excessive use of restraints during removals, raising concerns about necessity, proportionality and dignity. The use of force must remain a measure of last resort and as set out in Detention Services Order 11/2025, must be applied only where necessary, proportionate and justified in the individual circumstances. I have therefore asked that the concerns raised by the Charter Flight Monitoring Team about the application of waist restraint belts and handcuffs are considered carefully with escorting providers, with a continued focus on communication, de-escalation and consistent practice.

I welcome your offer to provide further detail and to contribute to any assessment of Operation Hillmore. As this is a pilot, we are keen to learn from operational experience and refine the approach where necessary.

Thank you again for bringing these matters to my attention. I remain committed to ensuring that the operation is subject to proper scrutiny and that lessons are acted upon where improvements are required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Turley', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rt Hon Anna Turley MP
Minister for Border Security and Asylum