

Detainees under escort:
Inspection of escort and removals to

Turkey

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

7 November 2019

Glossary of terms

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Fact page

Departure airport

Gatwick

Destination country

Turkey

Destination airport

Istanbul

Escort contractor

Mitie Care and Custody

Number of detainees escorted

1

Number of escort staff

4

Health care staff

1

Length of journey

7 hours and 5 minutes

Introduction

We have previously observed scheduled flight removals as a part of other inspections. This is the first time we have dedicated an inspection and full report solely to a scheduled flight removal. Our other inspections of overseas escorts involve charter flight removals when large numbers of detainees are removed on the same flight.

This inspection was undertaken as a pilot to help us establish the value of inspecting removals independently of larger inspections. We may undertake similar inspections in future if we consider them necessary.

This removal was of one man accompanied by four escort staff and a paramedic. The man was considered to pose a high risk. We saw staff dealing with the detainee respectfully and keeping him informed about the process. The man was compliant and there were no incidents during the removal. However, the man was not prepared for his reintegration in Turkey. He had not lived there for over 20 years. Information shared about the detainee prior to his departure did not sufficiently focus on risks or vulnerabilities.

Overall, the removal was handled well and we have identified a small number of recommendations.

Peter Clarke CVO OBE QPM
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

2020

Section 1. Summary

- I.1** A 58-year-old Turkish national was removed on a scheduled flight from Gatwick airport to Istanbul, Turkey. He was accompanied by four escort staff and one paramedic.
- I.2** The operation began with a staff briefing in the vehicle prior to departing from Spectrum House (Mitie Care and Custody's base) and travelling to Brook House immigration removal centre (IRC). We attended this briefing and inspected the entire removal. The briefing was short and did not cover the detainee's vulnerability or custodial history. The person escort record (PER) was not completed thoroughly.
- I.3** The escort staff we observed were courteous and professional throughout the removal. The detainee was compliant and use of force was not required. Guiding holds (which involves holding the detainee's hand and elbow) were sometimes used unnecessarily.
- I.4** Escorts could read the detainee's medical notes, held by the paramedic, which could have breached confidentiality. There was no evidence that the detainee had been provided with any significant resettlement support for his arrival in Turkey.

Section 2. Background

- 2.1** All inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitors the treatment of and conditions for detainees. Escorts are included in this remit. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.
- 2.2** This was the first inspection solely focused on a scheduled flight removal. The previous scheduled removal that we inspected took place during the inspection of Cedars pre-departure accommodation in January 2014 and findings were described in the body of that report.
- 2.3** The entire removal process was inspected – from the staff briefing prior to collection at the IRC to arrival in Istanbul. One inspector travelled on the flight, which left Gatwick airport at approximately 10.45am on 7 November 2019. It landed in Istanbul at approximately 5.17pm (2.17pm local time). The entire journey time was seven hours and five minutes.

Section 3. Safety

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are escorted in safety and due regard is given to individual needs and risks. Removals are conducted in accordance with law. Security and good order are maintained through proportional operational arrangements and force is only used as a last resort.

Preparation and departure from removal centres

- 3.1** The planned removal was for a 58-year-old Turkish national detainee from Brook House IRC to Istanbul, Turkey. Four Mitie escort staff escorted the detainee. In addition, one experienced paramedic travelled on the plane.
- 3.2** At Mitie's base in Spectrum House close to Gatwick airport, the senior detainee custody officer (SDCO) briefed staff in the escort vehicle before departure. The briefing took about three minutes and largely focused on the detainee's health problems and how force could be applied if it was needed. There was no discussion of other potential vulnerabilities. The man had not lived in Turkey for over 20 years and was leaving his wife and children behind. Limited information about his custodial history was available. Staff were attentive during the briefing.
- 3.3** Before leaving Spectrum House, escorting staff contacted Brook House IRC where the man was detained. They confirmed their arrival time and established the detainee's level of compliance. The detainee had told Brook House IRC staff that he was intending to comply with the removal.
- 3.4** Each escort carried a set of rigid handcuffs, and one member of staff carried a bag holding a waist restraint belt and leg restraints.
- 3.5** Centre staff brought the detainee to the discharge area at Brook House IRC without incident. There were no other detainees present and staff could focus on him. He was greeted by the SDCO and the other escorts with a handshake and his first name was used. The detainee was informed that he would receive money for onward travel in Turkey.
- 3.6** All aspects of the removal were fully explained to the detainee who spoke good English, and he said he understood. He was fully compliant and stated he wished to return to Turkey. We were told that, had the detainee been unable to communicate well in English, a telephone interpretation service would have been used.
- 3.7** The detainee was given a rub-down search. He had a small amount of property, which escort staff handled, and the detainee was reassured that it was all going with him. He was offered the use of a toilet before departing from the IRC.
- 3.8** The detainee was advised that the journey in the escort vehicle would be recorded on CCTV, which had been installed in the vehicle. During the journey, the detainee was offered food, water and the opportunity to use a phone; he was also given a Mitie information leaflet. The leaflet was available in a variety of languages but not Turkish. The man could understand the English version.
- 3.9** A second vehicle was used to transport the detainee and staff's property to the airport. The SDCO went in the vehicle directly to the airport to make the ticketing and seat booking

arrangements, while the detainee and other escorts went to Spectrum House and waited in the vehicle for approximately one hour and 10 minutes. Staff did not explain to the detainee why they were waiting there.

- 3.10** The vehicle departed and made the short journey (under 10 minutes) from Spectrum House to Gatwick airport. The vehicle was directed to a control point, which provided airside access. The detainee and staff were transferred to a building to go through security checks, which took place in private and were managed efficiently. The detainee was again offered the use of the toilet.
- 3.11** Escort staff and the detainee boarded to the rear of the plane. The detainee had the window seat in the back row. Two escort staff sat next to him. The other two Mitie staff and the paramedic sat in the row in front. Escort staff used guiding holds on the detainee while boarding the plane.
- 3.12** Escort staff removed lanyards and ID cards during the flight, but not all staff removed their handcuffs or made sufficient effort to ensure other passengers did not see them.

Recommendation

- 3.13** **Briefings should be comprehensive and include all relevant information regarding the detainees' risks and vulnerabilities.**

Safeguarding adults and personal safety

- 3.14** Escort staff were confident and understood the escort process for scheduled removals. All staff had received training on the Home Office Manual for escorting safely (HOMES) and were certified as detainee custody officers (under part 8 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). However, not all staff could recall receiving safeguarding or diversity and equality training, although Mitie informed us that it was part of their initial training and refreshed annually.
- 3.15** The detainee was searched sensitively at Brook House IRC. During the removal, force was not required, but guiding holds were used unnecessarily when entering the security building at Gatwick airport.
- 3.16** The detainee did not use the toilet on the plane. The SDCO stated that it was not routine, as on chartered removals, to ensure the toilet door was left open. However, the SDCO said that a decision would be made in line with a risk assessment.
- 3.17** The PER was misleading about the detainee's health, simply stating 'no medical concerns', although he had identified health problems. The PER also lacked important details regarding the detainee's previous behaviour and vulnerability. Escort staff generally recorded sufficient information regarding the various stages during the removal process, but made little comment on the detainee's demeanour or mood or their efforts to interact with him.
- 3.18** At times escort staff became involved in conversations among themselves, but they still interacted with the detainee and appeared to show genuine courtesy and interest. When the detainee rang his family prior to boarding, he reassured them that the escort staff were helping him.

Recommendations

3.19 Escorts should not lay hands on detainees without a specific cause, justified in writing in each individual case.

3.20 PERs should be completed thoroughly.

Legal rights

3.21 The detainee was informed of his removal six days prior to departure after reporting to the Home Office. There was no Home Office representative in the Brook House IRC discharge area to address any last-minute immigration queries. The detainee's phone, which was provided by the IRC, was removed from him before his departure, but he could obtain his numbers and the SIM card was placed with his property. The detainee was offered the use of the SDCO's phone on the escort vehicle and following arrival in Turkey. It was used once during this time.

3.22 The only paperwork that the detainee had on his person was his notice of deportation, a letter outlining why he had been detained and some immigration bail information.

Section 4. Respect

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are escorted in decent physical conditions and individual needs are addressed.
Detainees are treated with humanity and respect.

Physical conditions and property

- 4.1 The two escort vehicles used were suitable. They had six seats in the rear and one passenger seat in the front. The vehicles were clean and had food, water and space for property. There were no toilet facilities, but, as it was a short journey, this was acceptable.
- 4.2 The time spent in the escort vehicle was not excessive, but the reason for the wait at Spectrum House for ticketing procedures to be completed was not explained to the detainee.
- 4.3 During the flight a breakfast meal was provided on the plane for escort staff and the detainee, as for the other commercial passengers.
- 4.4 The detainee had a small amount of property in two bags. Escort staff checked with the detainee that it was the correct amount when leaving Brook House and they provided a better quality bag while at Spectrum House, allowing him to repack it and seal it for check-in. The detainee was given his bag receipt should there have been any issues at Istanbul's baggage reclaim department.
- 4.5 The detainee's money was retained by escort staff until the flight had departed. On arrival in Istanbul, he was handed all of his personal property, such as personal money, travel payment, passport, medicine and SIM card.

Respectful treatment

- 4.6 The removal we observed was generally relaxed and was not subject to excessive delays. Escort staff interacted positively, which included shaking the detainee's hand on arrival, and, when saying goodbye in Istanbul, they wished him well. Staff also knocked before opening the rear escort vehicle doors where the detainee was located.
- 4.7 Staff generally remained attentive and interacted with the detainee and changed position during the journey, which ensured they remained alert. Staff were sensitive to the detainee's mood and requests. For example, they remained respectfully quiet when he was on the phone to his family before embarkation. They told him he could call anyone in Turkey. The detainee was positive and appreciated staff's behaviour and how they treated him.
- 4.8 The detainee required prescribed medication. A small supply was given to the paramedic to carry during the flight and handed to the detainee on arrival in Istanbul. The confidential medical summary was also held by the paramedic, but escort staff could have read it, which was inappropriate.
- 4.9 The detainee did not receive any information either verbally or in writing about how he could make a complaint about IRC or Mitie staff.

Recommendations

- 4.10 Medical notes should be kept confidential at all times.**
- 4.11 Detainees should be told how to make complaints or submit comments about Home Office or escort staff during or after the removal.**

Section 5. Preparation for reintegration

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are prepared for their arrival and early days in the destination country.

Any unacceptable behaviour in destination countries is appropriately challenged.

- 5.1** The detainee had not lived in Turkey for over 20 years but had visited while resident in the UK (the last time eight years previously).
- 5.2** The detainee told us that he was frustrated he had not been permitted to plan his return to Turkey and go with his family rather than being detained and having to leave them until they could follow him several weeks later.
- 5.3** The detainee's pre-authorised destitute payment of £100 for onward travel in Turkey was the only evidence of the detainee's resettlement plans having been discussed before departure. The detainee told the inspector that he did not know where he would be living as he had no family left in Turkey. The only paperwork he had on him was from the Home Office about his deportation and detention. He said that he had not received any information on possible support services in Turkey.
- 5.4** On arrival at Istanbul, escorting staff and the detainee disembarked last and made their way promptly to passport control, where escort staff said goodbye.
- 5.5** There was no evidence that the Turkish authorities had been informed of the detainee's risks of reoffending or harm.

Recommendation

- 5.6** **Detainees should receive information about their destination country, including the help and support that is available on their return, before their removal. They should also receive help to make contact with sources of support and advice.**

Section 6. Summary of recommendations and good practice

Recommendation

To the Home Office

- 6.1** Detainees should be told how to make complaints or submit comments about Home Office or escort staff during or after the removal. (4.11)

Recommendation

To the Home Office and Mitie Care and Custody

- 6.2** Detainees should receive information about their destination country, including the help and support that is available on their return, before their removal. They should also receive help to make contact with sources of support and advice. (5.6)

Recommendations

To Mitie Care and Custody

- 6.3** Briefings should be comprehensive and include all relevant information regarding the detainees' risks and vulnerabilities. (3.13)
- 6.4** Escorts should not lay hands on detainees without a specific cause, justified in writing in each individual case. (3.19)
- 6.5** PERs should be completed thoroughly. (3.20)
- 6.6** Medical notes should be kept confidential at all times. (4.10)

Section 7. Appendices

Appendix I: Inspection team

Kam Sarai HMIP inspector