



Detainees under escort: Inspection of escort and removals to

France

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

20–21 January 2026

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Introduction

This report sets out the findings from the second inspection of a ‘one-in, one-out’ removal flight to France (see Glossary) in January 2026. The inspection followed close behind a similar operation the week before that had been disrupted by a detainee protest, which required deployment of specialist national resources to make sure the planned removal could proceed.

Despite the concerns of some detainees about the potential use of force during this subsequent operation, inspectors observed that escort staff remained consistently professional and respectful in all interactions. No force was used during the removal, and in our review of previous cases – including several from the earlier disrupted flight – we found that any past use of restraints or control techniques had been justified based on assessed risks.

The inspection does highlight shortcomings in communication with interpretation services, whether in person, by telephone or via digital tools, often limited. In addition, detainees had little information about what would happen upon arrival in France.

Charlie Taylor

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

February 2026

Summary of key findings

What needs to improve

During this inspection we identified one key concern. Leaders should make sure that all concerns identified here are addressed and that progress is tracked through a plan which sets out how and when the concerns will be resolved. The plan should be provided to HMI Prisons.

Key concern

1. **Access to interpreting services was limited.** There was not enough use of interpreters, whether in person, via telephone, or by the use of electronic devices.

Progress on concerns

At our last inspection we raised one area of concern. At this inspection we found that this concern had not been addressed.

Notable positive practice

Inspectors found no examples of notable positive practice during this inspection.

The removal in brief

Thirty-two male detainees were collected from Brook House, Harmondsworth and Tinsley House immigration removal centres (IRCs) and transported to Stansted Airport. They were accompanied by 73 escort staff and two paramedics. The flight destination was Paris.

The longest individual journey – from boarding the coach at Harmondsworth to arrival in Paris – was just under nine-and-a-half hours.

Leadership

Leaders continued to promote respectful and decent treatment of detainees. Staff briefings emphasised professional standards, and inspectors observed caring and respectful interactions throughout the operation.

Section 1 Safety

Preparation and departure from removal centres

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.

- 1.1 Detainees knew they were being removed to France and were aware of the date but did not know the time of departure or what to expect on arrival. Many were worried about becoming homeless or being removed onward from France, and some remained concerned about the possibility of being taken from the IRC by force, given what had happened during the previous week's protest by detainees against removal.
- 1.2 The staff briefing at the muster point was clear and informative, covering expectations about conduct and detainee welfare. Staff were told that interpreters would be available, although details about the languages available were not provided.
- 1.3 At the IRCs, coach commanders introduced themselves. Interpreting services were inconsistent: face-to-face interpreters were not always present, interpreting by telephone was sometimes delayed, and digital tools to aid interpreting did not always support two-way conversation. Some multilingual escort staff helped bridge language gaps.
- 1.4 Escort staff were allocated detainees and provided with background information, but movement orders did not include the detainee's spoken language, which staff found unhelpful. Staff generally behaved professionally.
- 1.5 Health care staff at the IRCs provided verbal handovers to paramedics. One incomplete handover at Harmondsworth was quickly identified and corrected.

Safeguarding adults and personal safety

Expected outcomes: Detainees are escorted in safety with due regard for their vulnerability. Security and good order are maintained through proportionate operational arrangements and force is only used as a last resort.

- 1.6 Searches at the IRCs were proportionate, respectful and conducted privately, although interpreting was not always used. Some detainees had been held briefly on the day in care and separation units (see

Glossary) due to disruptive behaviour the previous week, but staff engaged positively and no incidents occurred during collection.

- 1.7 No force was used during this operation. Records from the previous three 'one in, one out' removals (see Glossary) showed force had been used during two operations, and the uses seemed justified. In total, force had been used on five occasions, four in the previous week. Waist restraint belts (see Glossary) were applied on three occasions. In one case the belt was removed quickly just after take-off. In the remaining two cases, both detainees remained in the belts for the duration of their removal because they demonstrated continuing resistance, although the belts were loosened at various stages when their compliance was tested. These two detainees, however, also had leg restraints applied to enable one of them to be carried on to the transporting vehicle and the other one on to the plane. In the first case, the leg restraints were removed quickly once they were on the vehicle, but for the latter detainee they remained on while they travelled. A paramedic saw all three detainees once the belts and restraints were removed. In the two latter cases, arm holds were used to restrain the detainees in their seat when they became disruptive after the plane landed in France.

Legal rights

Expected outcomes: Detainees can exercise their legal rights. Removals are conducted in accordance with law.

- 1.8 Six detainees had their removals cancelled following legal intervention. Many reported difficulties in securing representation, as solicitors either declined to take on their cases or did not respond.
- 1.9 Detainees had access to mobile phones before departure and during the journey, enabling contact with legal advisors, family or friends.
- 1.10 No Home Office staff were present at IRCs to answer questions about removal decisions. A chief immigration officer was available on the flight and spoke with some detainees, but the shortness of the flight made it impossible for them to reach everyone who requested this.

Section 2 Respect

Physical conditions and property

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

- 2.1 We observed dirty conditions in wings and some shower areas at Brook House and Harmondsworth when detainees were collected from their rooms.
- 2.2 Detainees had their private cash returned before departure and were allowed to change clothes if they wished. Cold food was offered at Brook House, and refreshments were provided regularly on coaches and during the flight. Hot drinks were not always offered, and hot water sometimes ran out during long waits on the coaches.
- 2.3 Detainees were able to use toilets on the coaches and aircraft with adequate privacy.

Respectful treatment

Expected outcomes: Detainees are treated with respect by all staff. Effective complaints procedures are in place for detainees. There is understanding of detainees' diverse cultural backgrounds. Detainees' health care needs are met.

- 2.4 Escort staff treated detainees well during transfers and the flight, and we noted positive interactions even where there were language barriers.
- 2.5 The detainees had recently arrived in the UK from France, spoke many different languages and only a few understood basic English. Interpreter provision was insufficient; for example, no interpreter was initially available at Brook House or on one of the coaches. As a result, detainees sometimes interpreted for each other, which was not always appropriate. Four interpreters attended the operation, but their languages did not match all detainee needs. Staff used various interpreting aids with mixed success, and there was no consistent approach to ensure understanding.
- 2.6 Detainees received complaints forms when they were collected from the IRC, although these were not always in the correct language. No complaints were made during the flight.
- 2.7 Paramedics were present at each IRC and on the flight. A few detainees required medical treatment during their removal for minor

ailments or the administration of prescribed medications. Personal medical notes were returned to most detainees during the flight, but some declined to accept these.

- 2.8 The person escort records (see Glossary) that we sampled were generally well completed but often lacked key details, such as the detainee's spoken language, and there were gaps in records of staff interactions with detainees.

Section 3 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.

- 3.1 Home Office information given to detainees explained their right to a judicial review and that they would be accommodated by the French authorities for their 'first days'. Some detainees remained anxious about the possibility of onward removal from France or that they would be homeless as they had no support or connections in the country.
- 3.2 French authorities were present on arrival in Paris to receive a handover from the chief immigration officer. Disembarkation was calm and incident free.

Section 4 Progress on concerns from the last inspection

Concerns raised at the last inspection

The following is a list of all the concerns raised in the report of our last inspection of an overseas escort to France in November 2025.

Respect

Concern

Detainees did not have access to sufficient interpretation throughout key points of the removal process. There was not enough use of interpreters, whether in person or on the telephone, or of electronic devices, according to what would have been appropriate in each situation.

Not addressed

Appendix I About our inspections and reports

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.

All Inspectorate of Prisons reports carry a summary of the conditions and treatment of detainees, based on the tests of a healthy establishment that were first introduced in this Inspectorate's thematic review *Suicide is everyone's concern*, published in 1999. For inspections of escorts and removals the tests are:

- Safety
- Respect
- Preparation for reintegration.

Our assessments might result in identification of **areas of concern**. Concerns identify the areas where there are significant weaknesses in the treatment of and conditions for detainees. To be addressed they will require a change in practice and/or new or redirected resources. Concerns are summarised at the beginning of inspection reports and the body of the report sets out the issues in more detail.

We also provide examples of **notable positive practice** in our reports. These list innovative work or practice that leads to particularly good outcomes from which other providers may be able to learn. Inspectors look for evidence of good outcomes for detainees; original, creative or particularly effective approaches to problem-solving or achieving the desired goal; and how other providers could learn from or replicate the practice.

This report

This report outlines the priority and key concerns identified during the inspection. There then follow three sections each containing a detailed account of our findings against our *Expectations for immigration detention. Criteria for assessing the conditions for and treatment of immigration detainees* (Version 4, 2018) (available on our website at [Expectations – HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)). Section 5 lists the concerns raised at the previous inspection and our assessment of whether they have been addressed.

Inspection team

This inspection was carried out by:

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| Fiona Shearlaw | Team leader |
| Martin Kettle | Inspector |
| Alice Oddy | Inspector |
| Chelsey Pattison | Inspector |

Appendix II Glossary

We try to make our reports as clear as possible, and this short glossary should help to explain some of the specialist terms you may find.

Care and separation unit (CSU)

A unit for detainees removed from association with others on the main residential units, under rule 40 (removal from association) or rule 42 (temporary confinement) of the Detention Centre Rules 2001.

'One in, one out' removal

Removal of migrants from the UK to France under a migration treaty of August 2025. This allows the UK to detain and remove back to France individuals who enter the UK illegally via small boats across the English Channel, in exchange for the transfer to the UK of people who apply legally with appropriate documentation.

Person escort record (PER)

The key document for ensuring that information about detainees' risk and health issues is communicated to escort staff, and that their mood, actions and interactions with escort staff are recorded during their removal.

Waist restraint belt

A device that allows a detainee to sit and travel comfortably but still be restrained.

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