Detainees under escort:
Inspection of escort and removals to

France

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

2–3 September 2026

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Introduction

This report sets out the findings from an inspection of the charter removal of 21 male detainees under the UK–France returns agreement (See Glossary). Almost all those removed had arrived recently at the Kent coast.

Many detainees knew the date on which they were due to leave the UK but were unaware of any other details and were anxious about what would happen on arrival in France.

Interpretation arrangements had improved since previous inspections but remained inconsistent throughout the removal, undermining staff's ability to communicate effectively with detainees and provide appropriate care and support.

Force was used on three detainees through the application of restraints. In one case the use of restraints was neither necessary nor proportionate to the risks presented by the detainee. In another, we observed a poor application of a restraint technique. Our review of body-worn video camera (BWVC) footage from previous removals also identified an instance of force that had not been formally reported.

Most staff treated detainees with respect and professionalism. However, a small number of escort staff displayed unnecessarily intimidating behaviour when first meeting detainees in an immigration removal centre (IRC).

Although we have identified some concerns, overall, this was a well-organised operation that was conducted professionally.

Charlie Taylor
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
September 2026

Summary of key findings

What needs to improve

During this inspection we identified three key concerns. 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 concerns

1. **Access to interpreting services had improved** but there was still insufficient use of interpreters, whether in person or through electronic devices.

2. **Force was not always used in a way that was necessary and proportionate, and not all uses of force were reported or documented.**

3. **At one centre escort staff crowded around compliant men, and the behaviour of a few escorts was intimidating and unnecessary to ensure safety.**

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

Twenty-one male detainees were collected from Brook House, Harmondsworth, Tinsley House and Yarl's Wood immigration removal centres (IRCs) and transported to Birmingham Airport. They were accompanied by 71 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 hours.

Leadership

Leaders generally continued to promote respectful and decent treatment of detainees. Staff briefings emphasised professional standards and conduct, and inspectors mostly observed caring and respectful interactions throughout the operation. However, leadership of escort collection teams was not always active enough to address some unnecessary and intimidating behaviour.

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 understood they were being removed to France and were aware of the date of their removal, but they did not know the time of departure. Many expressed concern that they had little or no information about what would happen to them on landing in France.

1.2 The staff briefing at the muster point was clear and informative, covering expectations about professional standards and detainee welfare. Staff were told that interpreters would be available at two centres, although details of the centres involved and the languages available were not provided (see paragraph 2.4).

1.3 At the IRCs, coach commanders introduced themselves and were friendly. Escort staff were piloting the use of a new body-worn video camera (BWVC), which doubled as an interpretation tool, but it did not work effectively and interpretation was used inconsistently.

1.4 Escort staff were allocated detainees and provided with background information via a movement order. Some only met their allocated detainee for the first time as they boarded the coach and where there was often limited access to interpretation services. Most staff interactions with detainees were professional and respectful. However, a small number of staff crowded around compliant men, staring at them, and were unnecessarily intimidating in their initial interactions.

1.5 Health care staff provided verbal handovers to paramedics.

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 generally respectful, but interpreting was not always used to explain what staff were doing and why.

1.7 Force was used on three detainees, two at Harmondsworth IRC and one at Brook House IRC. One of the Harmondsworth detainees was placed in a waist restraint belt (WRB; see Glossary) because he had

said that he would not comply with the removal. The belt was removed quickly after take-off, after a period of compliance, when it was safe to do so.

1.8 The other Harmondsworth detainee had been held in the care and separation unit (see Glossary) during the day as he had threatened to self-harm. He was under constant supervision on an assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT; see Glossary) and was placed in a WRB to travel to the airport. On reaching the foot of the aircraft stairs, he began to strongly resist, and staff applied leg and ankle restraints, which allowed him to be carried on to the plane more safely. The ankle and leg restraints were removed shortly after take-off, and his WRB was loosened to allow him to eat during the flight once staff were happy with his level of compliance.

1.9 The third detainee was held in the care and separation unit at Brook House because he had said he was not happy to be removed. There were ongoing concerns for his health, and he was frail and not eating consistently. He had engaged minimally with staff during the day but was polite when he did so and not considered to pose a threat. He had no history of active resistance or violence and had left his cell earlier in the day when encouraged and helped by segregation unit staff.

1.10 In the evening, he once again did not respond when he was initially asked to leave his cell. This time, little attempt was made to encourage or assist him before a team of IRC staff in full protective equipment with shields and helmets entered and placed him in handcuffs. He was carried into the area outside the cell where, with difficulty, the handcuffs were removed and escort staff placed him in a WRB and leg restraints. At no point did he offer any active resistance, and the way that he was taken from his cell was disproportionate to the risks he presented.

1.11 The man remained slumped and non-communicative during the rest of his journey, until he was handed over to the French authorities with the restraints removed (see paragraph 3.1). The technique used to carry him was poorly applied, despite other staff being available to assist.

1.12 Records and BWVC footage from four previous ‘one in, one out’ removal flights showed that force had been used on nine occasions. WRBs had been applied in all nine cases and in addition leg restraints were applied twice. The WRB was usually removed after the flight had taken off, but in one case it remained in place until arrival in France despite no evidence of any ongoing resistance. Leg restraints in one case were removed quickly after the detainee was seated on the aircraft but in the other case it was not recorded when these were removed. In BWVC footage we identified a use of force which had not been reported or recorded. Person escort records (PERs; see Glossary) and officers’ statements often contained limited explanation of why restraints were applied or remained in place, making it unclear if these actions were always justified, necessary or proportionate.

Legal rights

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

1.13 Many detainees told us they had attempted to contact solicitors, but either received no response or were unable to secure representation.

1.14 All detainees had access to a mobile phone on the coach, vans and plane before take-off and after landing, which they could use to contact legal representatives, family or friends.

1.15 No Home Office staff were present at IRCs to answer questions about removal decisions. A chief immigration officer (CIO) was available on the flight and spoke with some detainees who could communicate in English and where an interpreter who spoke their language was available. The CIO provided some detainees with letters explaining their removals. However, the letters were in English, meaning many detainees could not understand the information provided.

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 Escort staff searched all property before detainees boarded the coach and returned private cash where this was held. Detainees were allowed to change their clothes if they wanted to, and one male at Brook House was issued socks and shoes. Food and drink were routinely offered to detainees on the coaches and vans. Hot drinks were available and offered on the coaches.

2.2 On both the coaches and the plane, detainees were able to use the toilet in privacy. On the vans, detainees were offered the use of disposable urinal bags.

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.

2.3 The treatment of detainees during the coach transfers and flight was mostly good, and we noted some positive interactions even when there were language barriers. However, we observed staff discussing the conduct of one detainee in the presence of other detainees, which was inappropriate.

2.4 The detainees had arrived relatively recently in the UK from France. They spoke many different languages, and only a few understood basic English. Interpretation was not used consistently throughout the removal when needed. For example, it was used only intermittently during a use of force with a detainee who spoke no English and rarely during searches. Staff were piloting the use of a new BWVC, which doubled as an interpretation device, but at some centres there was no connectivity and not all languages were supported (see paragraph 1.3).

2.5 Most detainees were given complaint forms in their own language. However, one detainee was given the form in the wrong language, and there were none available that he could use. One complaint was submitted during the flight about a mobile phone not being returned to a detainee before he was removed, but the response was not available at the time of writing.

2.6 Paramedics received handovers from IRC health care staff and two paramedics travelled on the flight. A detainee in restraints was monitored by a paramedic during his transfer to the airport, and during the flight (see paragraph 1.7). One of the paramedics disembarked and stayed with the detainee until he was handed over to the French authorities. All detainees subject to the application of restraints were seen by one of the paramedics after the restraints were removed. Personal medical notes were returned to detainees during the flight, but some declined to accept them.

2.7 Although managers had directed staff to use detainees' names and not numbers, at the point of disembarkation, they were referred to by their manifest number.

2.8 The detainee PERs that we sampled were generally completed to a satisfactory standard. However, some lacked important details relating to 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 Information provided to detainees by the Home Office explained their right to a judicial review and that they would be accommodated by the French authorities for their 'first days', but this was not further explained. Many detainees told us they were anxious about what would happen on their return to France because they had no support network or connections there.

3.2 The French authorities were present on arrival of the aircraft in Paris and received a handover from the CIO.

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 January 2026.

Respect

Concerns

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.
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)). 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
Hindpal Singh Bhui	Inspection Team leader
Rachel Badman	Inspector
David Foot	Inspector
Martin Kettle	Inspector
Jade Richards	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.

Assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT)
ACDT is a case management system for detained individuals at risk of self-harm or suicide.

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.

UK–France returns agreement ('one in, one out')
Under this arrangement, some people who arrive in the UK irregularly in small boats can be returned to France. In exchange, the UK accepts an equivalent number of people from France through a regulated legal route.

Person escort record (PER)
The key document for ensuring that information about detainees' risks 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 (WRB)
A device that allows a detainee to sit and travel comfortably but still be restrained.

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England

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