



Annual Report
of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at
Tinsley House
Immigration Removal Centre

Annual Report 2016

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Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody

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Section 1

1. Introduction

This report is presented by the Independent Monitoring Board for Tinsley House (the Board). Due to the temporary closure of the Centre towards the end of the year, the report covers the period from January to October 2016. The Board sees its primary role as ensuring that all residents of Tinsley House are cared for humanely and with dignity. As Board members we are committed to the task entrusted to us. The figures quoted in this report are based on the IMB's analysis of statistics supplied by the Home Office Immigration Enforcement Team, G4S, and local records. These statistics have not been independently audited and may not therefore appear in officially advertised statistics.

This has been an unusual year for Tinsley House. In the Spring of 2016 all resident men were moved elsewhere in order for the Centre to accommodate up to 53 women for a period of three weeks. The majority of the women were re-directed from another Immigration Removal Centre.

At the end of September all detainees were relocated and a major programme of rebuilding and refurbishment began. The Centre has remained non-operational for the rest of the year.

For these reasons, this report should be seen as a continuation of our 2015 report. It addresses the management of the changes described above, and its effect upon detainees, as well as making reference to the recommendations made in the 2015 report. It makes no further recommendations. We look forward to recommencing our full duties when Tinsley House reopens in 2017.

For ease of reference our key findings are summarised on page 6 and recommendations listed on page 7.

Section 2

2.1 Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC)

Tinsley House IRC is a relatively modern centre occupying a building on the south perimeter of Gatwick Airport. It holds detainees awaiting decisions on their immigration status and possible removal. The Centre was opened in 1996 and mainly provides accommodation for male detainees. During the first nine months of 2016 Tinsley House had a full operational capacity of 154 detainees. A separate, dedicated and secure 'family suite' containing 34 beds within 8 separate apartments was also available although never used to capacity. A number of time-served foreign national offenders were held in the main part of the Centre. At the end of the reporting period these formed approximately 28% of the average population.

Due to an outbreak of infectious illness elsewhere in an immigration removal centre, Tinsley House accommodated only women from 25 February to 17 March.

2.2 Key agencies and management teams at Tinsley House

Tinsley House is managed and operated under contract by G4S on behalf of the Home Office in accordance with Detention Centre Rules (2001), Operating Standards and Detention Service Orders. The Home Office Immigration Enforcement Team maintain a permanent presence at Tinsley House and are responsible for ensuring contractual requirements are met from its sub-contractors. G4S have operational responsibility, including detainees' welfare, and the security of the IRC. Another G4S subsidiary is responsible for the provision of healthcare on behalf of NHS England. Sub-contracted by G4S, Aramark provides cleaning and catering services. Tascor delivers escort and transportation services.

A number of voluntary organisations may provide assistance to detainees. These include: Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group; the Samaritans; Red Cross; Refugee Action; and Migrant Help.

2.3 Population Profile

The population profile varied throughout the year and a total of 116 different nationalities were recorded. Pakistan remained the highest represented nationality, with Islam being the most common religion.

2.4 Detainee Arrivals

During 2016 a total of 1595 male detainees were registered at reception (this number includes repeat returners). The family suite accommodated 38 families, including 21 children, 169 single women and two transgender detainees.

At the end of the reporting period there were no detainees who had been in the Centre for more than 6 months. The majority of detainees had stayed for between one week and one month.

Section 3

3.1 Executive Summary

The Board considers that arrangements at Tinsley House continue to be managed to a good standard. The Centre is well organised, and generally clean. The large majority of staff strive consistently to maintain a calm and cooperative atmosphere. G4S senior management demonstrate a high level of commitment to maintaining an ethos of mutual respect.

The framework for securing the safe welfare of detainees is well established, and detainees are encouraged to provide feedback through a number of forums on issues such as safety and their treatment by staff. However, very few detainees attend these meetings. Similarly, attendance by professional representatives is extremely variable. IMB members continue to rely strongly on the views of individual detainees to inform their knowledge of residents' experiences.

Staff generally rose well to the challenge of the change in population when the Centre accommodated only women. It was disappointing that not all facilities were made use of during this time but the residents appeared to appreciate the space and relaxed atmosphere nevertheless.

3.2 Recommendations

In our 2015 report we made five recommendations. Due to the unusual nature of Tinsley House's year we have chosen not to make any new recommendations in 2016. Rather, we comment below on progress made so far in addressing our earlier concerns and look forward to monitoring the renewed provision when it re-opens.

Recommendation 1

That staff and management work with detainees and the IMB to increase detainee involvement both in meetings and in engaging more fully with the IMB where appropriate, so that all have an increased awareness of issues concerning the detainee population. This should include increased dialogue between Healthcare staff and detainee representatives.

Progress made

Despite the efforts of the Equality and Diversity and Safeguarding teams, attendance at their meetings and at detainee consultative meetings remains patchy, with between three and five detainee attendees being the norm. The Board's efforts to publicise more widely our role to detainees included providing a written and photographic headline version of our annual report. This had some noticeable impact. We saw increased interest from detainees during our visits and we also experienced greater engagement from detainees when we were observing meetings.

Recommendation 2

That there is a concerted effort to encourage and extend opportunities for detainees to broaden their learning and artistic experiences while in the Centre.

Progress made

There has been disappointingly little progress in this area. Due to overlapping absences of teachers for both English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Art and Craft, classes were cancelled or reduced for a period of two months. Some efforts were made to provide cover from officers and a teacher from another IRC within the Gatwick estate. However, detainees were negatively affected by this lack of provision. Our hope that they may be given increased opportunities in other areas, such as music, has so far not been realised.

Recommendation 3

That the practice of more than two officers congregating in corridors while on duty is stopped unless operational demands require it. Individual officers should be more visible while on duty around the centre.

Progress made

We see groups of officers congregating in corridors less often than we used to, and detainees say that this practice has decreased. However, it has not yet stopped completely and on some occasions the group has moved to other areas, such as the welfare office. This is equally intimidating for detainees who encounter such a group when they wish to raise personal matters with welfare staff.

Recommendation 4

That IT issues are resolved promptly and detainees have increased access to other language web-sites and the use of social media such as Skype.

Progress made

The length of time taken to resolve IT issues still causes frustration for detainees and staff alike. We note that the request for the use of visual communication, such as Skype, was rejected but hope that it can be considered more favourably this year.

Recommendation 5

That the transport of families should be arranged so that they spend the minimum of time in a vehicle, have sufficient time to rest, and are with suitably trained Tascor staff for all journeys.

Progress made

We have received no complaints from women or families about their transport this year. However, we have noted that it is common practice for the Tascor transport vans to arrive for families immediately prior to lunch-time. We commend the actions taken by staff to ensure that families are able to eat before they leave the Centre, even if this means delaying the Tascor team, when departures are not time-critical.

Section 4

4.1 Operational management

The collaborative work of the two key agencies, G4S and Home Office Immigration Enforcement, ensures that the Centre runs smoothly. The appointment and efforts of key welfare staff had a very positive impact upon certain detainees who needed extra support. Although the staff group suffered some losses when Tinsley House closed, we are assured that a balanced and competent staff team will be in place when the Centre re-opens. We regard as very positive the appointment of the new Head of Centre and will be interested to see how the staff team develops once the centre is operational.

4.2 Age Disputes

Last year the Board expressed concern that a presumption of adulthood was made unless proved otherwise. As a result, potentially young and vulnerable detainees were living amongst male adults. We were pleased to note that seven possible under-age detainees were accommodated more appropriately in the family suite during 2016.

4.3 Applications to see the IMB

During the first nine months of 2016 until the Centre's closure, the IMB responded to 22 written applications highlighting detainees' concerns. Almost half of the detainees involved were concerned about what was happening with regard to their immigration status. Although Board members take pains to explain that we have no role in challenging Immigration Enforcement decisions, we can make enquiries on detainees' behalf. In almost every case, concerns were resolved by improved communication from or via the Home Office. We are pleased to learn of a pilot process being carried out at nearby Brook House, where certain detainees are involved much earlier in decisions affecting them. Of other concerns, the next highest number (six) were about healthcare issues. Again, in almost every case, time taken to give a clearer explanation about decisions or treatment helped to alleviate detainees' anxiety or anger. We would like to see detainees' healthcare questions and anxieties addressed fully on every occasion.

4.4 Catering

The canteen and café continue to be well used by detainees, staff, visitors and volunteers. Board members eat regularly with detainees and report on the food and its presentation. We are pleased that following building work, the Centre will include a cultural kitchen.

4.5 Complaints

The Centre received relatively few written complaints with a total of 12 for the year. Most of these related to services provided for the detainees, missing items, alleged negative attitude from an officer or an inability to get on well with another detainee. One complaint was made to Healthcare. Although one detainee contacted the Prisons and Probation Ombudsmen while in residence, his issues were carried over from a previous setting and did not concern Tinsley House.

We feel the complaints were promptly investigated and the decisions made in 2016 were generally reasonable, and communicated to the detainees in sufficient detail.

4.6 Education, Learning and Purposeful Activities

As described in paragraph 3.2 we have been concerned about the effect of staff absence on the provision of educational and artistic activities available at Tinsley House. The dedicated music room continued to see relatively little use during the reporting period. Detainees wishing to be involved in more physical activities fared slightly better: special events such as 'The World's Strongest Man' were well attended, and well tailored games and events were arranged when the Centre held only women.

A range of voluntary paid activities existed for detainees who met the medical and security vetting requirements. It has been difficult at times to recruit such volunteers as many detainees are at the Centre for a relatively short time but the new laundry orderlies in particular gained satisfaction from their new roles.

4.7 Environment

The overall environment of Tinsley House engenders a relaxed atmosphere and detainees have been able to associate freely throughout the Centre between 06.00 and 23.00 hours. Families and single female detainees could mix within the family suite or remain in their apartments. We understand that this relative freedom will be somewhat curtailed when the Centre re-opens. Then it is due to follow the system of corridor 'lock-downs' at certain points in the day and from 21.00 to 08.00. Although this system is employed in a neighbouring IRC it would appear to be a retrograde step for Tinsley House detainees and we will monitor its impact closely.

4.8 Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity

As described in paragraph 3.2 we continue to suggest that greater involvement from detainees would be beneficial for all concerned.

Detainees who follow Islam told us last year that the Imam presence was sporadic. This has been addressed by the appointment of a new Head of Religious Affairs who has been able to arrange greater cover. Other faiths that are represented are catered for well by the chaplaincy staff. Detainees who suffered difficult home or personal circumstances have told us that the advice and guidance offered by chaplaincy staff was invaluable. We understand that, following the refurbishment, there will be only one multi-faith room for use by detainees of non-Christian religions. We acknowledge the concern expressed by members of the Religious Affairs team that if this happens, customs, practice, service times and usage are likely to conflict in a way that will impact negatively on the detainees involved. We hope that this can be resolved but if not, will be alert to any effect that it has on different groups.

4.9 Women, Families and Children

The family suite has continued to meet effectively the needs of families, single women and, on occasion, transgender detainees, while they are resident at the Centre. Detainees invariably report that they receive a high standard of care, and that staff are polite and responsive. We engaged with family suite residents during our regular visits but received no direct complaints or requests to see members of the IMB from families during 2016.

During the latter part of February and first two weeks of March, Tinsley House became a removal centre solely for women detainees. Most staff adapted well to the demands of a different population and we were pleased that the usual meetings with detainees continued to be held during this time. Of the total 22 requests and complaints we received, three were from female detainees held during this time. The main cause for concern for these detainees was food and we commend the care taken by staff to address this as quickly as possible.

4.10 Healthcare and Mental Health Care

Commissioned by NHS England, G4S Healthcare provides the healthcare for all detainees across the Gatwick estate but has involved the local specialist NHS mental health trust, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to oversee mental health services.

As in previous years there have been problems maintaining a full complement of staff, especially nurses. We raised in our report last year that there had been talk of establishing a Healthcare Forum where detainees could bring concerns about healthcare. We continue to feel that this would be a positive step forward for addressing some of the broader concerns that detainees have regarding healthcare in the Centre.

4.11 Removal from Association (RFA), Use of Force (UoF) and Temporary Confinement

RFA was used on 22 occasions. Of these, in almost half (10) it was used to isolate detainees suspected of having an infectious illness. The IMB reported in last year's annual report our feeling that the use of an isolation room to contain an ill person is not appropriate even though it was the only room available. We look forward to seeing separate medical accommodation in place following the Centre's refurbishment.

We were pleased to see a decrease in UoF compared to the previous year, even pro-rata, from 31 to 17. Rule 42 (temporary confinement) was invoked twice in 2016. All incidents are investigated, and the reason explained in monthly reports to the IMB.

4.12 Safer Community and Detainee Welfare

Detainees invariably say that they feel safe at Tinsley House. The numbers of reported incidents of bullying, and the number of incidents of a serious nature (self-harm), were 17 and 10 respectively. Ten detainees who reported bullying were appropriately placed on a support plan with positive impact. The intervention of a newly appointed welfare officer had a very positive impact upon the lives of a few detainees, most notably one who was helped to locate his foster family while in detention.

We share with detainees and staff a frustration that IT issues sometimes take weeks to be resolved. We support the suggestions that use of social media such as Skype would be a useful initiative to allow detainees to maintain contact with family and friends. We hope strongly that this may be implemented in 2017.

4.13 Security

During the year there were 79 reported incidents although none were major. A one-day demonstration by outside agencies at the perimeter of the Centre grounds was planned for and managed very well with no discernable impact upon detainees.

The occurrence of illegal substance within the Centre remains rare. There are no residential facilities to address these issues, and detainees with identified drug and alcohol dependency would be transferred to other centres where appropriate resources for dealing with substance abuse issues exist. Unusually across the detention estate, synthetic drugs including Spice and Black Mamba have not posed a major problem.

4.14 Transfer and Travel

As a result of the closure of Tinsley House, we monitored the arrangement made for the transfer of the detainees to Brook House. We were impressed with the efforts made to keep detainees informed of what was happening and to maintain staff consistency when the transfer took place. However, it was disappointing to note that as G4S were only resourced to carry out transfers to Brook House, detainees still at Tinsley House at the time of transfer were not able to move to other centres, even when they requested it.

Section 5

6.1 Statutory role of the IMB

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 requires every Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) to be monitored by an independent board appointed by the Secretary of State. Members of the Board act as representatives for the community in which the Centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in Immigration Removal Centres and Pre-Departure Accommodation (PDA).
- (2) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has;
- (3) report annually to the Secretary of State on how far the Immigration Removal Centre has met the standards and requirements placed on it, and what impact these have on those held in the Centre.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to detainees, the Centre, and also to the Centre's records.

This report has been produced to fulfill our obligation under (3) above.

6.2 IMB Diversity Statement

Members of the Tinsley House IMB are committed to an inclusive approach to diversity, and one which promotes interaction and understanding between people of different backgrounds. Our commitment encompasses race, religion, gender, nationality, sexuality, marital status, disability and age. The Board also recognises that a full and inclusive approach to diversity must respond to differences that cut across social and cultural categories such as: mental health, literacy and substance abuse.

This approach to diversity is incorporated in our recruitment procedures and Board development practices. The Board aims to increase its repertoire of skills and awareness and ensure it is able to positively reflect the diverse needs of the population within Tinsley House.

6.3 IMB activity

During the reporting period IMB members made weekly scheduled and unannounced visits to the Centre. We attended meetings held within Tinsley House as observers, and witnessed arrivals and removals of detainees and families. Much of the work we do is on low profile matters that nonetheless make a difference to detainees.

During 2016 the number of IMB Board members remained below the full complement of 12. We started the year with five members. Sadly our Vice-Chair resigned at the end of the year. It is a credit to serving members that we were able to maintain the regular Board meetings, attend national conference and training events, and fully discharge our monitoring role without interruption or complaint. In the fourth quarter of 2016 we initiated a recruitment exercise with some success and two appointments have been ratified for 2017.

Until its closure in October IMB members made a total of 110 visits to the Centre, including for Board meetings. The Board would like to thank our IMB Clerk for his support and assistance during the reporting period. We also appreciate the willingness of detainees, managers and staff to engage with us in a positive manner.

Anne Duffy
Chair
On Behalf of the IMB Board - Tinsley House IRC