

**Annual Report of the  
Independent Monitoring Board at  
Glasgow, Edinburgh and Larne  
House Short Term Holding  
Facilities.**

**For reporting year  
1 February 2020 – 31 January 2021**

**Published August 2021**

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## **SECTION A.**

### **1. STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB**

The Prisons Act 1952 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 require every prison and IRC to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the establishment or centre is situated.

The Glasgow Edinburgh and Larne (**GEL**) Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) Satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within holding rooms: at Glasgow and Edinburgh Airports, Festival Court and Drumkeen House Reporting Centres and the Short Term Holding Facility (**STHF**) at Larne House.
- (2) Satisfy itself about the adequacy of the range of provisions preparing detainees for release from each establishment.
- (3) Inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom she has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- (4) Report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the establishment has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every detainee and every part of the establishment and also to the establishment's records. The Board has, however, been required to make significant adjustments to its methods of monitoring this year because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **Introduction**

This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board at GEL (IMBGEL) for the period 01/02/2020 – 31/01/2021. The Covid-19 outbreak has had a significant impact on the Board's ability to gather information and discuss the contents of this annual report. Under normal circumstances, the Board would consider evidence from observations during regular visits to each establishment, scrutiny of records and of data and informal contacts with detainees and staff. However this approach has not always been possible during this period so we have used a blended approach to gathering evidence: a mixture of site visits and telephone interviews with Care and Custody (C&C) staff at the various locations. The Board has therefore tried to cover as much ground as it can in these difficult circumstances, but inevitably there is less detail and supporting evidence than usual. Ministers are aware of these constraints. Regular information is being collected

specifically on the STHF response to the pandemic, and that is being collated nationally.

## **Main judgements**

We have framed our main overall judgements around whether detainees are:

- a) Treated fairly,
- b) Treated humanely and
- c) Prepared well for removal or release.

Generally, we have observed that detainees are treated in a respectful and caring manner by the detainee custody officers (DCOs) who work empathetically to maintain a caring culture within the holding rooms (HRs) and the Short-Term Holding Facility (STHF). We would note, however, that we have not been able to comment on the overall treatment of detainees particularly as they are moved across the estate.

## **Concerns**

We have, however, some comments and suggestions about how the dignity and respect afforded to detainees within the establishments could be further improved.

Our main concerns are:

- a) The current Covid-19 pandemic crisis has uncovered a number of concerns regarding the safe custody of detainees and those visiting and working in the holding rooms. Directions from the Home Office (HO) regarding the provision of PPE and associated equipment and advice on safe working practices etc., have been reactive rather than proactive. Delays have caused considerable confusion and concern and, in some cases, individual uncoordinated actions have been taken. For example, C&C taking their own initiative to purchase electronic, non-contact thermometers so that the initial temperature of detainees could be measured. This was, in our opinion, a sensible action, given that the presence of a high body temperature is recognised as an indicator of the possible presence of the virus. The HO then instructed C&C not to use the devices until they (HO) made a decision about the use, so, to date, the devices remain unused. Also, instructions for the mandatory wearing of face masks, in all establishments, were issued at a very late stage. It was well into the period when travellers from abroad could have been entering the airport HRs with the Covid-19 infection.

We raised concerns about the provision of hand sanitisers but were puzzled about the reluctance to provide fixed, wall mounted units at each entrance to HRs. Portable bottle hand sanitisers were placed in the HRs but we feel that these are totally unsuitable, particularly since there is evidence that at least one detainee tried to drink the fluid, which contains alcohol.

Space limitations within the HRs have made social distancing particularly difficult. We are also concerned about the lack of air circulation as there are no windows in any of the airport HRs. These factors will severely restrict the future utilization of the HRs, as international travel returns and traveller volume increases. The safe working capacity of each HR will require reassessment.

- b) In our report last year, we recommended that the holding room in Terminal 1 at Edinburgh Airport (EDI) be relocated to the new Terminal 2. This has now become a major issue. Upwards of two thirds of passengers arriving at Edinburgh now travel through Terminal 2 (T2) and this has impacted on the efficiency of the detention process with detainees having to be sometimes walked 20-25 minutes through public areas to the HR. This has implications for both public security and the dignity of detainees. While in the majority of cases detainees are transported by van, there is a limited number of United Kingdom Border Force (UKBF) officers authorised as airside drivers and, in any case, the process impacts negatively on the efficient use of staff. We also understand that, because of the potential time scales involved in transporting detainees between T1 and T2, UKBF may on occasion hold detainees at T2, for example where Border Force are trying to confirm a repatriation flight. We consider the facilities at T2 are not suitable for this.
- c) The accommodation assigned for use by female detainees at Larne House STHF is inadequately separated from the male accommodation. We were assured that the female area was going to be partitioned however this work still remains outstanding.
- d) We continue to have concerns regarding detainees arriving in the HRs with their personal prescription medication, or requiring access to additional supplies of that medication. UKBF officers and C&C DCOs routinely remove the medicines from the individual detainees and are also forbidden, for health and safety reasons, from administering medicines. This was raised in last year's report and we were assured that it would be addressed. We are extremely concerned that this issue is still outstanding and that the health of individual detainees could be jeopardised by this.
- e) DCOs at the EDI HR have a calendar of notable religious festivals. However staff at the other locations do not have this and may not be aware of the significance of special days regarding the faith adherence requirements of detainees.
- f) Access to the toilet facilities at the Glasgow Airport (GLA) holding room is not possible for those with wheelchairs. Disabled detainees would have to be escorted, by a DCO, to facilities elsewhere within the airport terminal building. We feel that the dignity of the disabled person is compromised because of this, and from an operational and safety viewpoint, we are concerned that a DCO can sometimes be left to supervise the detention of a number of other detainees on her or his own.

- g) There is the risk of a fall for those with mobility issues because there are no hand grips beside the toilets in the GLA and EDI HRs.
- h) There are no provisions, such as signs in Braille, for those with sight issues within the HRs, nor is there any magnifying facility.
- i) There are no provisions within the HRs for detainees with hearing loss.
- j) DCOs are often required to escort detainees to a departure flight; however, there are no airport arrival/departure screens within the holding rooms at EDI and GLA. While DCOs obviously have access to the airport internet screen, these are not always accurate so a DCO has to leave the HR and go into the airport area to check the departure time in order to ensure that the detainee can be boarded, discreetly, by arriving either in front or at the end the queue of other boarding passengers.
- k) Although technically only one of the mats has an inbuilt Qibla, there is an additional Qibla located on the shelf alongside the prayer mats at EDI, and at least one at each other location. We are not aware of detainees ever having difficulty in locating the direction of Mecca. However, a jug for water ablutions was not always present in all HRs.

## **Recommendations**

Having raised the above concerns, we make the following recommendations:

- a) That, in light of the experiences learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, detailed epidemic/infection control plans, with actions, are shared with the IMB GEL. This practice should be adopted in any further outbreaks of contagious illnesses.
- b) As a first step, the temperature should be taken of those detainees who have not been tested for Covid-19 as they are accepted into the HRs. We would then expect that appropriate measures be taken to isolate those showing a high temperature.
- c) That wall mounted sanitisers be fitted at each of the airport HR entrances.
- d) That, with regard to Covid-19, an assessment is made of the capacity of the EDI and GLA HRs to provide safe distances between detainees and staff, and that maximum numbers are clearly displayed at the entrance to each HR.
- e) That the deficiencies identified in concern (a) above, be addressed forthwith.
- f) That Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit (DEPMU) undertake to provide a new holding room within T2 at EDI (see concern (b) above).

- g) That a completion date be set for the outstanding work at Larne STHF (see concern (c) above).
- h) That the administration of detainees' personal prescribed medication in airport HRs be resolved forthwith.
- i) That a calendar of notable religious festivals be placed, and be maintained, in each HR and the STHF, and shared with all relevant parties including UKBF officers and C&C DCOs.
- j) That the access to the toilet facilities at the GLA holding room (concern (f)) is addressed and hand grips are also fitted in the toilets at the EDI and GLA HRs (concern (g)).
- k) That the signage deficiencies (concern (h)) are resolved.
- l) That a translation device, such as Babel, giving information in a variety of different languages for the hard of hearing, or some other text relay service, be provided for all HRs and the STHF.
- m) That a full disability access review to ensure that there is proper access and facilities for all detainees with disabilities, be undertaken at all establishments.
- n) That a quarterly report giving the numbers of detainees with disabilities (including the type of disability) be presented to the IMB GEL Board.
- o) That a compass to ascertain the direction of Mecca be available in all HRs and the STHF (see concern (k), above), together with a jug for water ablutions. However, a sign on the wall pointing to Mecca would remove the need for compasses
- p) That airport arrival/departure screens be provided in the holding room offices at Edinburgh and Glasgow airports.

While we believe the above recommendations are appropriate, we nevertheless accept that it is for the HO, UKBF and C&C to devise and implement their own measures to remedy our concerns.

### **Major issues from previous reports**

The Board is pleased to report that a number of issues brought to the attention of the relevant agencies have been successfully resolved during the reporting year.

However, there are some issues which have either only been partially resolved or remain to be addressed.

- a) We are disappointed that the HO did not accept our recommendation for a review by DEPMU of the adequacy of the holding rooms at Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. We think the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to reconsider this, particularly with regard to the lack of air circulation within their confined areas. We are also concerned that the facilities may not cater adequately for detainees with physical disabilities.
- b) We have voiced our concerns about the lack of showering facilities within the HR at EDI and GLA which would facilitate overnight use of both holding rooms. We are disappointed that this was not taken up by the HO particularly given that we suggested that alternative showering facilities could be sourced elsewhere within the airports' secure areas. We appreciate that this suggestion may cause some logistical/operational challenges, but they are not insurmountable with access to facilities elsewhere at both airports possible. We suggested that the provision of a new holding room at Edinburgh airport Terminal 2 should provide an opportunity to address this issue, at least for the HR at Edinburgh Airport.
- c) We are very pleased that the HO is considering the creation of a holding room at Terminal 2 at EDI. We have, however, not received any updates regarding designs and timelines for this. Until then, we intend to continue to monitor and report on the excess time that detainees spend at the entry point/passport control area.
- d) We understand that the partitioning work at Larne House STHF has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and that fresh quotes for the work are currently being sought. We continue to request that the information on the planning and timescales for the works be shared with the Board.
- e) We are pleased that the recommendation concerning the need for an adequate outside exercise area at Larne House STHF was partially accepted. We understand that steps are being taken to redecorate the area and that new equipment is actively being sought to improve the opportunity for exercise. We also understand that a football table has already been installed.
- f) We remain extremely concerned that the issue of the administration of detainees' personal prescribed medication in airport HRs has not been progressed and has still to be resolved. We consider this to be a major health concern.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ESTABLISHMENTS**

The establishments monitored by the GEL IMB Board are:

- a) Edinburgh Airport (EDI) holding rooms,
- b) Glasgow Airport (GLA) holding rooms,
- c) Festival Court reporting centre in Glasgow,
- d) Drumkeen House reporting centre in Belfast and



- e) Larne House short-term holding facility (STHF).

Descriptions of each establishment, all managed by C&C, are given below.

### **Edinburgh airport holding rooms**

Edinburgh airport is the busiest Scottish airport.

The holding room is situated on the ground floor of Terminal one (T1), with UKBF offices on the first floor, in an extension to the main airport building. It is located airside at the south end of the international arrivals hall 1 and the contracted hours of cover are 8am- 1am the next morning. However, the DCOs are contracted by C&C from 7am in the morning, thus staff are on duty from 7am to 1am. Three officers are on duty in the morning, and two in the afternoon. There is usually a mix of male and female staff. If it is known that a detainee will be present outside the usual hours, a C&C night shift crew can be called. If a detainee arrives unexpectedly 'out of hours' UKBF will look after the detainee.

During the serious Covid-19 restrictions on flights, UKBF can agree that the DCOs can remain at home on standby, or may leave early, when it is known that flights will not be arriving.

The holding area is a purpose-built facility with a waiting area, two interview rooms, a fingerprint room as well as two HR areas, two search areas, storage space, and a DCO office area.

As a result of the Covid-19 requirements, perspex screens have been placed on the interview tables in the two interview rooms. One of these rooms also has a phone which allows for easy communication through the perspex screen. There are UKBF notices on the doors of the rooms stressing the need for social distancing.

In the HR area, DCOs can observe detainees through a large window. One of the HRs is set up as a family room, with a baby changing facility, beanbags for children, toys and books. When a mix of non-related men and women are detained, the latter will normally be held in the family room and men in the main holding room. There is a glass panelled partition between the two holding rooms with a door which is not lockable. Both rooms have a number of fixed chairs, a table and a television. There are a number of newspapers available. In pre-Covid times DCOs picked up fresh newspapers and magazines each day from the free selection in the airport. A number of notices and relevant information are available in different languages.

When more regular visits can be reinstated to the HR, the Board intends to review all the posters and information leaflets. We note there are no signs in braille.

We have been advised that it is hoped to change the televisions for two with larger screens, and to position the screens in a way which would make for easier watching for the detainees.

The seating – two benches – are fairly narrow and not ideal for sleeping on. However, lounge type folding mattresses with pillows and blankets are available in both HRs and have been used. They would not, however, be suitable for detainees with physical disabilities. Any bedding used is sent to an outside contractor for cleaning. The rooms do not have windows or access to natural light. The ventilation is limited because there is no access to fresh air. Smoking is not allowed. Nicotine replacement lozenges are available, but detainees are not impressed by the efficacy of these.

There are two toilets in the holding area; however, there are no showering facilities available for detainees. One toilet has a plastic jug which can be used for ablutions. Neither toilet has a grab rail, or an emergency pull cord and audio/visual alarms. Both toilets are wheelchair accessible with adequate turning space.

Two years ago, a new arrivals hall – Terminal 2 (T2) – was built at the north end of the airport because of the increase in airport passenger numbers. Upwards of two thirds of the airport's passengers now arrive at T2 where there is no HR. While the HO has accepted the need to create this, we have, as yet, not been informed of the timelines for this.

The need for this new HR is now critical. In the current situation a detainee has to be driven by UKBF airside, from the entry point, to the HR. However, there is not always either a van, or a UKBF officer qualified to drive such a van, and thus detainees can have to wait a considerable time at the entry point before they can be transferred to the HR. A detainee held at passport control by UKBF will either sit on the hard plastic seats immediately in front of the UKBF passport control desks, in full view of all the other passengers queuing to clear passport control, or if it is a family, there is an interview room in T2 with soft seating. However there is nothing else in this room other than a coffee table and there is no specific provision for food and water. Detainees may have to wait a considerable time before they can be transported in the van to the HR or to other accommodation, or before a repatriation flight can be confirmed. The wait in this area can be long, particularly if UKBF believe there is a flight onto which the detainee might be put and it is more time effective to have the detainee wait by the gate rather than be transported to the holding room. If it is decided that the detainee cannot be transported by van, they would have to be walked by DCOs to the HR. This necessitates a walk of 20 to 25 minutes through what is normally a busy part of the airport and this is repeated when DCOs have to escort a detainee back from the HR at T1 to board a flight. Clearly this situation impacts on the dignity of the detainees and is not an efficient use of DCOs' time. We therefore intend to closely monitor the excess time spent by detainees within the entry point/passport control area, before they proceed to the HR at T1.

While a water fountain is available in the HR (T1), detainees are required to request a cup from the staff. During the Covid-19 restrictions the water fountain has been taped over, and bottled water is available instead for detainees. Hot drinks and light snacks, such as crisps and croissants, can also be provided by the staff. The meals supplied for detainees are of a long-life variety and are fairly basic and limited in choice. They do, however, meet the dietary and religious adherence needs of detainees. In addition, staff are authorised to obtain additional food, such as sandwiches, which are bought with petty cash from airport vendors.

Personal phones cannot be used by the detainees because most mobile phones now have cameras. DCOs do, however, provide mobile phones into which the detainee can place their own SIM card. Detainees are advised to note down the relevant numbers so that they have a separate record. DCOs can also provide access to a landline where detainees can contact legal representatives, family or friends.

All detainees' property including cash and valuables is held securely by the DCOs. Clothing items such as scarves, ties and belts are routinely taken from detainees for health and safety reasons. All such items are returned to the detainee as he or she leaves the HR.

There are two complaints boxes which are checked every day by UKBF staff. While there are few complaints, nevertheless, the IMB GEL receives a monthly report on these from the HO.

There is now a VASCO translation device, which we believe is useful. However, it cannot cover all the various dialects which exist, and then the translation helpline is used.

One of the prayer mats in the HR has an integral compass. The other mats do not, although a compass is available in the staff area. We believe it would be helpful to have a diagram on the wall of the HR indicating the direction of Mecca.

CCTV is used by DCOs, both inside and outside of the HR, to monitor the safety and security of all detainees. There are two panic buttons in the staff area.

With regard to Covid-19 precautions, DCOs have informed us that they have adequate PPE, and sufficient masks and hand sanitizers to meet the needs of the staff and the detainees. There are hand held, non-contact thermometers in the staff area, but staff are not permitted to use them. Space is very limited in the overall holding area and there are currently restrictions on the number of people who can be accommodated safely within the HR.

DCOs are often required to escort detainees to a departure flight; however, there is no airport arrival/departure screen in the holding room. While they obviously have access to the Edinburgh airport internet screen, this is not always accurate so a DCO has to leave the HR and go into the airport area to check the departure time in order to ensure that the detainee arrives either ahead of other passengers, or at the end, so that they can be boarded discreetly. This also impairs the DCO staffing level accordingly.

The number of detainees held in the holding facility in the period covered by this report is shown in the statistics section (see annexe).

## **Glasgow airport holding rooms**

Glasgow airport is the second largest airport, by volume of passenger numbers, in Scotland.

The HRs are situated airside adjacent to the immigration control desks at international arrivals, directly below the offices occupied by UKBF. The area is, like Edinburgh airport's, purpose built, consisting of: a waiting area, interview rooms, a fingerprint room as well as two HR areas, a search area, storage space, a toilet and a C&C office. The office is very small, and can only accommodate two DCOs at a time. It is situated between the two HRs and officers can therefore observe detainees through the one way glass panels. There is also continuously monitored CCTV throughout the facility. There are three interview rooms used by UKBF. They have also been used as holding rooms as required. The facility has, however, been recently reconfigured so that the second, separate HR has been created. This addition now provides for male and female detainees to be held separately.

The HRs are staffed by three DCOs who operate between 8am and 1am each day. Again, like Edinburgh, during the Covid-19 restrictions on flights, UKBF can agree that the C&C staff can remain at home on standby, or may leave early, when it is known that flights will not be arriving.

Detainees have, on a few occasions, been held overnight in the holding room. We have also noticed that detainees have sometimes been held in the HRs for periods of up to eight hours. They are then normally transferred to the Dungavel immigration removal centre (IRC), or removed on a return flight the same day. As with Edinburgh airport, there are no showering facilities available to detainees.

Refreshments and light foods are available for detainees. A landline telephone can be used by detainees and they may also use their own mobile phones, provided no camera is linked to the device. We note that this is not available to detainees within the EDI HR. DCOs can issue a "house" mobile where the detainee uses his or her own SIM card. There are a number of newspapers available, which DCOs pick up along with magazines each day from the free selection in the airport. A number of notices and relevant information are available in different languages. There is also a VASCO translation device available.

There is no natural light in the holding area and no access to fresh air. Smoking is not permitted within the airport which causes problems at times for some detainees, particularly those smokers who have arrived on a long, intercontinental flight. Nicotine replacement lozenges are available, but often do not meet the needs of the smokers.

Lounge type portable beds, with pillows and blankets, are available and an upholstered seating bench can also be used for sleeping on. Showering facilities are, however, not available to detainees.

Seating consists of fixed chairs and the above-mentioned bench. A large bean bag, which has proved quite popular with some detainees, is also available. DCOs have

indicated that these items are cleaned daily after there have been detainees in the HR.

A variety of reading material, in different languages, is available. Basic information and advice on immigration/asylum matters are provided in leaflet and poster form, again in a variety of languages.

With regard to Covid-19 precautions, DCOs have informed us that they have adequate PPE, and sufficient masks and hand sanitizer to meet the needs of the staff and the detainees. There are handheld, non-contact thermometers in the staff area, but staff are not permitted to use them.

Space is again very limited and there are currently restrictions on the number of people who can be accommodated safely within the overall HR. We therefore question whether, when flight traffic returns to normal levels, there is really adequate room for social distancing.

DCOs are often required to escort detainees to a departure flight; however, there is no airport arrival/departure screen in the holding room. While they obviously have access to the Glasgow airport internet screen, this is not always accurate so a DCO has to leave the HR and go into the airport area to check the departure time in order to ensure that the detainee arrives either ahead of other passengers, or at the end so that they can be boarded discreetly. This also impairs the DCO staffing level accordingly.

The number of detainees held in the holding facility in the period covered by this report is shown in the statistics (see annexe).

### **Festival Court reporting centre**

The holding room is located in Building No 2 of a complex of three buildings occupied by the HO/UKBF at Festival Court, Brand Street, Ibrox, Glasgow. Persons who have been temporarily admitted to the UK and are resident in Scotland are required to report periodically at this reporting centre. Some are asylum seekers awaiting decisions about their status. The holding room is used by people detained on reporting, during an operational enforcement visit or who are required for interview from an immigration removal centre (IRC). It is also used, when family removal operations are being carried out, as an assembly point before detainees are transported to an embarkation port. IMB members from the Glasgow, Edinburgh and Larne House Board have authorised entry passes which have been issued by the HO.

The holding facility consists of an office area and the HR. There is also the use of an additional interview room when separate detention accommodation is required. There is an observation window between the control room and the holding room; however there is no such provision for the use of the interview room, so one DCO is deployed to ensure the safe detention of the detainee while in the interview room. The holding facility is currently staffed by two Care and Custody DCOs, from 9am until 5pm Monday to Friday. It is a non-residential facility.

Cold water and hot drinks can be provided for detainees and snacks and light meals are also available.

The HR contains individual, fixed plastic seats and a table. The room has two toilets which are cubicles in each corner of the back of the room, one male and one female. A portable “lounge type” folding bed with bedding is available, making it possible for one detainee to lie down in the unlikely event of detainees being accommodated for a long period. However, detainees are usually promptly moved to other suitable accommodation within a short time.

Appropriate safety measures, to protect against Covid-19 infection have also been implemented within the HR.

Magazines in various languages are available and a prayer mat can be provided on request.

As with the two other non-residential HRs (airports), there is no access to fresh air or natural light. An authorised smoking area is also not available at these locations.

The number of detainees held in the holding room in the period covered by this report is shown in the statistics (see annexe).

### **Drumkeen House reporting centre**

The Drumkeen House complex in Belfast is occupied by HO/UKBF staff and a C&C service delivery manager. Persons who have been temporarily admitted to the UK and are resident in Northern Ireland are required to report periodically at this reporting centre. Some are asylum seekers awaiting decisions about their status. People detained while reporting or detained during UKBF enforcement operations are held in the HR. IMB members from the Glasgow, Edinburgh and Larne House Board have authorised entry passes issued by the HO to the complex.

The holding facility consists of an office area and two small holding rooms to facilitate male and female detainees separately. There is an observation window between the office area and both holding rooms to ensure the safe detention of the detainees. The holding facility is normally staffed by two Care and Custody DCOs on three days per week – Monday, Wednesday and Friday – from 9am until 5pm. It is a non-residential facility with detainees usually transferred to Larne House if detention is necessary.

Hot and cold drinks can be provided for detainees, if required. Light snacks and hot meals are also available.

The HRs’ seating comprises individual plastic seats and a table which are all fixed to the floor. There are toilets in each HR.

Magazines in various languages are available and a prayer mat can be provided on request.

As with the other non-residential HRs, there is no access to fresh air or natural light. An authorised smoking area is also not available at this location. Appropriate safety measures, to protect against Covid-19 infection, have also been implemented within the HRs.

The Board's monitoring experience at Drumkeen House is limited due its low use. No significant issues were recorded during this period.

The number of detainees held in the HR in the full year period covered by this report, is shown in the statistics (see annexe).

### **Larne House STHF**

This facility opened in July 2011 and is located within the Larne Police Station compound. It is a residential facility, the only one in Northern Ireland (NI), where immigration detainees may be held. Persons may be detained for up to seven days where removal directions (RDs) have been served. Where these have not been served, the maximum period of detention is five days. Thereafter the detainees must be released (unconditionally or temporarily), or removed from Northern Ireland, or transferred to an IRC on the UK mainland as there is no appropriate resource available in the Province. Prior to the service being opened, detainees were kept in Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) custody suites where monitoring was carried out by independent custody visitors. The Minister for Immigration appointed the Glasgow and Edinburgh IMB to undertake monitoring at Larne House towards the end of 2012.

Board members normally visit once fortnightly. A recommendation in the Shaw Review<sup>1</sup> was that more frequent visits should be made by the Board and that a number of these visits should be carried out during the evening and at night. The frequency of visits is largely governed by a budget set by the IMB Secretariat.

With the Covid-19 outbreak face-to-face visits have not taken place since April 2020. This has been for a combination of reasons including health considerations and the difficulties getting flights to NI. Instead the Board has carried out rota duties via telephone for both Larne and Drumkeen. For a period in late 2019 and early 2020, rota visits or calls were made on a monthly basis because operational Board member numbers fell to five. Fortnightly telephone calls resumed when the appointments of new members were finally confirmed. It is also the case that the numbers of detainees at this facility have been considerably lower since the government Covid-19 measures were first introduced in March 2020 (the total number of detainees for Larne for the period February 2019 to January 2020 was

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<sup>1</sup> *Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons: A report to the HO by Stephen Shaw*. January 2016. HMSO

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/490782/52532\\_Shaw\\_Review\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/490782/52532_Shaw_Review_Accessible.pdf)

1724, while the number for the period February 2020 to January 2021 was 315). We anticipate being able to resume face-to-face visits in 2021.

The Larne House facility continues to be managed by C&C staff. The normal staffing model is four DCOMs (managers) and 22 DCOs (custody officers), who operate on a four-shift rotating model. Currently, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, an alternative staffing model is in place to both take into account the reduced number of detainees and to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

Because we have not been able to undertake face-to-face visits since April 2020 we are relying on our observations made up to that point, except where we have been informed otherwise by C&C staff.

We are informed that a well-designed Covid-19 procedures protocol is in place at Larne. This includes such matters as:

- Identifying detainees entering Larne from 'high risk' countries and using a separate entrance for these detainees.
- Taking their temperature on arrival.
- Using a separate Covid corridor for detainees in self-isolation.
- Delivering meals to the room.
- The issuing of a set of fresh masks to all detainees every day.
- Opening a voluntary adult care plan for any detainee arriving from a high-risk country.
- Testing for Covid, if necessary, is not undertaken on site but detainees are taken to a Belfast Hospital.
- Any detainee in self-isolation has access to the exercise/open area, but not at the same time as any other non-isolating detainees.

There is no HO Immigration Enforcement presence at Larne House. If there is a detainee who cannot be managed after being accepted at Larne House there are contingency arrangements in place to ensure individuals can be moved to a more suitable location. In the first instance, this would be to a mainland IRC. Police stations can sometimes be used.

Families with young children are not detained at Larne House. They are given temporary admission (bail) to Northern Ireland with direction to report to Drumkeen House reporting centre as and when required.

Larne House can accommodate up to 19 detainees in 10 bedrooms, only some of which are for single use. During the Covid period we are informed a policy of single occupancy has been in place. Male and female bedrooms are located in separate parts of the building. The planned alterations to the layout of the facility to provide a separate designated area for female detainees who wish not to associate with male detainees has been impacted by the Covid pandemic, but we understand fresh construction quotes are currently being sought and hopefully work will commence shortly. It remains the case that the bedrooms are very basic, containing only a bed and wardrobe. There are no wall decorations or reading lamps. The wooden edges of the beds are raised above the height of each mattress making them quite uncomfortable to sit on. The lack of suitable seating in bedrooms has been an issue raised by the Board in previous reports. Normal seating was viewed as unsuitable by



DCOs and the HO staff since the bedrooms are small and any seating would need to be secured to the floor for safety reasons. The Board has not pursued the matter as new seating arrangements in the recreation room went some way to easing the problem. It remains the case, however, that private time for detainees remains limited.

The centre is compact, clean, and fairly well decorated. It is cleaned daily by contractors and given a deep clean every few months. Although there is no natural light, the eco-lighting system is effective and efficient. There are no light switches and when areas are not in use the lighting reduces to a low intensity level.

The small recreation room offers a TV with Freesat providing in excess of 100 channels, a selection of DVDs, books, newspapers and magazines, all in various languages. English language newspapers are normally provided on a daily basis, and those in other languages tend to be changed infrequently. We have questioned, in previous reports, the usefulness of having these. There are two computers with headphones, with, however, only limited access to the internet. Since improved facilities and seating arrangements have been established, association amongst detainees is said to have generally improved. However, we have commented previously that the size of the room places limitations on these opportunities, particularly when the complex is busy.

Other areas at the complex include:

- Reception, offices and staff room (adjacent to, but outside the residential part of the facility)
- Interview rooms
- A 'management' room/office
- A custody office for use by a C&C manager, containing a small "shop" selling basic items such as soap, cigarettes, etc.
- Showers and toilets
- A multi-faith prayer room with religious materials available for a variety of faiths
- A dining room/kitchen area with tables and fixed seating
- A hot and cold drinks machine. An order has been placed for a new machine that will offer a wider range of both hot and cold drinks.
- All day supply of cereals, milk and fruit, with the provision of hot meals prepared by DCOs from frozen/chilled packs using the microwave and other ovens
- Washing and drying equipment
- A medical room
- There is also a small outside area where detainees may smoke and have access to fresh air. We have been informed that improvements are to be made to this area in early 2021 to include new decorations and new exercise facilities.

When a detainee is admitted to Larne House, he or she is assessed for detention suitability. The duty nurse undertakes a review of any medications brought in with the individual and makes a general assessment of the detainee's health situation. A

fully qualified nurse is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the year (although we are informed that currently if no detainees are present in the facility the nurse will be on standby).

Detainees have freedom of movement and association across all areas except for the custody office. Those who have been admitted without adequate clothing are given a pack containing basic underwear and tracksuit-type outer garments.

Detainees may use their own mobile phones providing no camera is fitted and internet access is not available. If required, detainees can be issued with a basic mobile phone to be returned when they leave.

This is the only residential facility monitored by this IMB. People held at the non-residential holding areas at airports and the reporting centre will typically be detained for just a few hours whilst those detained at Larne House can be held for up to a week if removal directions are set. There is, therefore, greater opportunity for interaction between the DCOs and detainees at Larne House.

We have been informed that one member of staff has completed the course for mental health first aid training, and four more are waiting to complete the training.

The issues that have concerned us most this past year relate to Covid prevention and mitigation issues, particularly around movement of detainees across the estate. We have been assured that appropriate measures have proactively been put in place to ensure movements take place with minimal risk to either the detainee or to others and that Larne is fully compliant with the 'Guidance for IRCs, RSTHFs and Escorting during the pandemic' issued by the HO.

The number of detainees held at Larne House during the period covered by this report is shown in the statistics (see annex).

## **SECTION B**

### **4. SAFETY**

The Board understands that a formal induction process is undertaken when detainees arrive at the HR. An IS91 form authorises the detention of an individual in immigration detention. A new IS91 must be completed every time a detainee enters immigration detention by the detaining team. Copies of all IS 91 forms are made available to the Board and are checked to ensure that all sections, particularly those recording information on risks, are completed satisfactorily. The Board also monitors whether action plans are prepared for young and vulnerable detainees.

However, 2020 has been an unusual year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Detainees have not had their temperature checked on arrival in the holding facilities, despite DCOs having access to handheld, non-contact thermometers and a high body temperature being one of the indicators of the presence of the Covid-19 virus. It is

also not clear what the procedure would be should a detainee display a high temperature. Equally there are no temperature checks or Covid-19 tests being carried out on detainees leaving the facilities. This situation presents risk to HR staff and the general public within communities. It is, however, recognised that the reduced number of flights, and consequently passenger movements, does reduce the risk somewhat, but, nevertheless, the risk is still present and unacceptable. This should be addressed as a matter of extreme urgency.

The Board will be increasing its future monitoring focus, looking at how safety considerations are addressed within the built environment and how the safety of detainees is assured or impacted upon by the physical characteristics of the holding facilities. Equally, any assessment of the built environment will include appraisals of the suitability of the facilities in terms of equalities legislation (particularly those areas previously covered by the **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)** legislation).

## **5. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS**

The Board is generally satisfied that detainees are treated within the HRs and STHF in an equal, caring and fair manner. We do however have some major concerns regarding the current suitability of HRs to accommodate detainees with disabilities. We have not been given access to the HO complaints system so we are unable to give our opinion about whether detainee complaints are robustly and fairly answered within a reasonable timeframe.

With regard to faith and religious requirements, we are satisfied that a comprehensive and diverse variety of religious literature including Bibles and the Quran, are available to detainees from a wide number of faiths. Prayer mats, and at least one Qibla, are available at all locations. However, we found that DCOs were not always aware of the significance of special days/festivals for detainees arriving in the HR. A calendar of notable religious festivals would remedy this but this is something that only some DCOs had access to. Also, some HRs had a jug for water in the toilets for use by detainees who are Muslim for ablutions but this was not the general case.

There is adequate provision of foods (Halal, Kosher etc.) in all HRs to meet the dietary and religious needs of detainees. Halal certificates are displayed to indicate suitability.

There is no access to the toilet cubicle within the HR at GLA for wheelchair users. Detainees who require the toilet and are in a wheelchair are escorted by a DCO to disabled toilet facilities elsewhere in the airport building. This impacts on the dignity of the individual and limits the availability of a DCO should he/she be required in the HR. Also, there are no hand grips beside the toilet in the EDI and GLA HRs to enable safe use of the toilet. This presents an unacceptable risk of falls for the disabled and the elderly.

There are no signs in Braille in any of the HRs or in the STHF for those with sight difficulties. Equally, for those with hearing loss, there are no text relay services or

translation devices (such as Babel) to translate information into different languages for the hard of hearing.

We are, however pleased to be advised that disability awareness training has been undertaken by UKBF Officers and C&C DCOs.

In summary, we believe that a full disability access review should be undertaken, annually, at each HR and the STHF, to ascertain compliance with current disability regulations.

## **6. REMOVAL FROM ASSOCIATION/TEMPORARY CONFINEMENT**

Specific care is taken regarding the vulnerability of detainees and appropriate notices are raised at Larne House STHF when it is considered that a detainee's health is likely to be injuriously affected by continued detention.

There were seven Rule 32 reports opened during the period covered by this report. Two reports were for one individual and the others were for individual detainees.

The Board is not aware of any other Rule 35/37 notices, (removal from association/temporary confinement) issued under the detention centre rules during the reporting period.

## **7. RESIDENTIAL SERVICES/HOLDING ROOM CONDITIONS**

We continue to have concerns about the inadequate provision of natural light, fresh air, and smoking and exercise areas within the two airport holding facilities. We believe, as we stated earlier, that the Covid-19 pandemic has further increased those concerns, particularly with regard to the infection risks for staff and detainees through the airborne transmission of the virus.

We note that there is generally adequate access for detainees to phones and mobile phones within the HRs.

Board members pay particular attention to the standard of food served to detainees during all monitoring visits. While meals tend to be very basic, they have been found to be culturally appropriate and nutritionally balanced. All ready meals, sandwiches/baguettes and other packaged foods have been found to be in-date.

Detainees are able to communicate with outside, appropriate bodies, because there is generally adequate access for them [detainees] to phones and mobile phones within the HRs and the STHF.

We have, in the past, found staff-detainee communications to be generally clear, accurate, timely and respectful, and DCOs have been found to be sensitive to individual detainees' vulnerabilities. However, because of Covid restrictions – which have limited our ability to visit the STHF – we have not been able to witness these to the same extent as previous years. Good use is made of telephone interpreting services and there are a number of information cards in a variety of appropriate

languages available in each HR. While there has been little opportunity to ascertain the early use of the new Vasco devices, we are, nonetheless, firmly of the opinion that the provision of these portable electronic language interpreters will greatly enhance communications between detainees and DCOs and Board members alike.

Separately, the IMBGEL has taken measures to communicate its purpose and availability to detainees through the placement of posters and information leaflets in each HR and the STHF. The literature is in a variety of appropriate languages and we are confident that detainees will make use of this. The posters also give an Email address, which is monitored regularly, and can be used as a means for detainees to contact the Board individually.

## **8. HEALTHCARE**

All detainees are assessed as part of the induction to the Larne House STHF. There is a dedicated medical room which is fully equipped to give immediate assistance to detainees should they require it. It is not possible to carry out such assessments at the HRs because detainees are only held for a short period and there are no medical staff there.

Generally the STHF and HRs have adequate supplies of all necessary PPE materials and equipment as required during the current Covid-19 pandemic. We are, however, concerned that it is not always possible to maintain the current recommended two-metre social distancing within the STHF and HR estate. There is inadequate space in HRs at the airports to hold more than about four people in each room and this will be exacerbated when airline flights return to their earlier frequency with increased passenger volume. This may also become an issue at Larne House if detention numbers increase.

Electronic non-contact thermometers, which can take a detainee's temperature, are present in all the holding rooms; however DCOs have been instructed not to use them. At Larne House STHF the nurse routinely takes the temperature of all detainees on arrival. It is generally accepted that a high body temperature is one of the early signs of the presence of Covid-19, so such a non-invasive test is essential for the early identification of possibly infected people, thus keeping other detainees, staff and personnel safe. Currently, Covid-19 infection rates throughout the world are very high and although this simple test does not give a definitive indication of definite infection it is certainly a most useful diagnostic aid. We were informed that the use of the thermometers had been postponed because the DCOs had not been given adequate training in their use; this is disingenuous as these thermometers are simple to use, and they are used, to great effect, elsewhere in the community.

## **9. EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

While education provision is not provided at any of the establishments due to the short/transient stay of detainees, magazines, newspapers, television and limited access to computer games are provided to relieve boredom. Larne House has a small outside area where detainees may smoke and have access to fresh air and can participate in some exercise.

## **10. PREPARATION FOR RELEASE/REMOVAL**

Before the pandemic, when they were able to carry out substantially more monitoring visits, Board members have consistently witnessed DCOs assisting detainees with accessing legal advisers, family and supporters especially during induction and stressful times such as when removal directions are served. The DCOs have also been seen to assist detainees to understand ticket arrangements or access money changing facilities especially when detainees require English denomination currencies when leaving detention in Scotland for onward travel through England.

## **11. GOOD PRACTICE**

We have had very limited opportunities to witness practices which we recognise as worthy of highlighting this year. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted heavily on our opportunities to visit the immigration estate.

However, while our face-to-face meetings have been curtailed, we have made extensive use of virtual means (Zoom) to maintain our monthly Board meetings and to maintain “member to member” communications, albeit in a limited fashion.

We are very grateful to UKBF, HO, C&C and Immigration Enforcement for their dedication to maintaining communications throughout this difficult period by their regular attendance and participation at our Board meetings. They have also responded expeditiously to our requests for information and clarity. This cooperation has equipped us to understand the (sometimes complex) workings of immigration enforcement and detention and to make informed recommendations. We have been able to raise issues and, importantly, progress solutions, by this approach.

We do however remain vigilant in upholding the safe, caring and respectful treatment of all detainees while they are in custody within the immigration estate.

## **SECTION C**

### **THE WORK OF THE EDINBURGH, GLASGOW AND LARNE HOUSE IMB**

#### **Role**

The Board normally undertakes its role of monitoring the welfare of detainees held in immigration holding rooms and the STHF at Larne by carrying out regular, unannounced, monitoring visits to each of the establishments. On-site visits have not always been possible during this period because of the restrictions presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, so we have maintained monitoring by using a blended approach: on-site and telephone interviews of C&C staff, especially during the period

March 2020 to January 2021. The numbers of visits, carried out during the earlier part of the year, were reduced because our five new members had not completed their applications for airside passes. All have now received their passes, undertaken their initial training including accompanied visits to each establishment, and all have played a significant part in restoring our previous rota frequency.

The majority of our monthly Board meetings have also had to be conducted partly virtually and partly by telephone conference calls. While we are grateful to be able to maintain communications, we are nonetheless acutely aware that neither the virtual nor telephone medium is a satisfactory replacement for face-to-face discussions and we are therefore hopeful we can reinstate our meetings at the earliest possible opportunity.

#### Board Development

All five new members have been supported by the three office bearers: Chair, Vice Chair and Board Development Officer (BDO). All have successfully undertaken the five online modules offered by the IMB as induction for new members. In addition, a Zoom meeting was organised by the Chair to equip the members with the opportunity to ask questions and for experienced members to share their experiences. Members have also undertaken online training in such areas as: mental health awareness, monitoring separation and adults at risk and raising concerns and preventing abuse.

#### Communications

Aware of the need for us to inform detainees about our independent monitoring role, we have undertaken a review of the information available to detainees, particularly with regard to their access to the Board. We consulted with other IMB Boards and the IMB Communications Unit, and we have now produced two introductory wall posters, which list our contact web address. In addition, we have placed, in all of our holding rooms and Larne STHF, a short information script, in fifteen languages, which Board members can use to introduce themselves to detainees. This work is ongoing and we will continue to review its effectiveness.

The introduction of electronic VASCO translators, now available to our Board members, is a welcome addition to the detention estate. In addition, there are signs in all HRs indicating the availability of a translation hotline provided by "The Big Word".

#### Equality and Diversity

We are generally satisfied that detainees are treated in a fair and equitable manner. We further acknowledge the various measures taken by C&C and the HO to ensure the cultural, spiritual and faith needs of detainees are met while they are in detention. As stated earlier, we carried out a limited disability compliance review of the holding rooms at Glasgow airport and were disappointed to find a number of omissions. It is our intention to undertake similar reviews at all of the other establishments.

#### Statistics

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted greatly on the normal work of the Glasgow, Edinburgh and Larne IMB. Traffic passing through our two airports has substantially reduced (EDI -62% and GLA-72%), the numbers reporting directly at Festival Court

(-76%) and Drumkeen (-52%) have also reduced and the numbers held at Larne STHF are 82% down on the previous year's figures. The overall reduction in detainees held across all establishments was 76%. Both reporting centres were closed for a large part of the year. Immigration Enforcement focused their reduced activity levels on priority cases and used local Police Stations for detentions.

We continue to monitor the length of time that detainees are held in each establishment.

About 7% of detainees were held for more than eight hours at the GLA holding rooms, this compares with 8% last year. The corresponding figures at EDI were 6% against 7%, at Festival Court 3% against 0% and 0% for both years at Drumkeen reporting centre. The percentage of detainees held at Larne STHF stayed constant, at 2%, for this and last year's reporting cycle.

Detention in an HR or STHF can be a traumatic experience for unsuspecting travellers, no matter how DCOs try to reduce this. We are aware that it does sometimes take time to investigate and clarify the backgrounds and travel history of some travellers. Equally, there are occasions when, for weather reasons, detainees cannot be transferred to the mainland from Larne STHF, nevertheless, we feel that all efforts should be made to minimise unnecessary delays, so we will continue to vigilantly monitor detention stay.

While the introduction of the new members increased our capacity to carry out more monitoring visits, the pandemic necessitated significant change to the form and number of monitoring visits. As stated earlier we operated a blended approach to our visits, where our members, conscious of personal circumstances and health risks, made personal decisions about whether to conduct site or telephone visits. Most visits were carried out as telephone interviews. We did, however, undertake a total of 129 monitoring visits, which was 8.4% up on the previous year's total.

Our Board members' average attendance at monthly meetings was 74%, a considerable improvement on the previous year's 49%.

**Hugh McGloin**

**Chair, on behalf of the Board**



## Annexe

<b>BOARD STATISTICS</b>	<b>Current Reporting Year</b>	<b>Previous Reporting Year</b>
<b>Recommended complement of Board members</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Members' attendance at Board meetings</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Total number of monitoring visits to: Glasgow Airport</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>35</b>

<b>Edinburgh Airport</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Festival Court Reporting Centre</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Drumkeen Reporting Centre</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Larne House STHF</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Detainees held in HRs/STHF:</b>		
<b>Glasgow Airport HR (% for more than 8 hours)</b>	<b>150(7%)</b>	<b>531(8%)</b>
<b>Edinburgh Airport HR (% for more than 8 hours)</b>	<b>222(6%)</b>	<b>582(7%)</b>
<b>Festival Court Reporting Centre HR (% for more than 8 hours)</b>	<b>39(3%)</b>	<b>161(0%)</b>
<b>Drumkeen Reporting Centre HR (% for more than 8 hours)</b>	<b>12(0%)</b>	<b>28(0%)</b>
<b>Larne House STHF (% in holding room for more than 5 days)</b>	<b>315(2%)</b>	<b>1724(2%)</b>