



Annual Report of the South and West Short-Term Holding Facilities

**For reporting year
1 February 2024 to 31 January 2025**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The South and West STHF Independent Monitoring Board is appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor and report on the welfare of people in a short-term holding facility (STHF) through observation of their treatment and of the premises in which they are held.

The Board conducts its work in line with the Short-Term Holding Facility (STHF) Rules, which place the day to day operations of STHFs on a statutory footing. Part 7 of the Rules sets out the responsibilities of the Independent Monitoring Board (referred to in the Rules as the Visiting Committee). The Board has unrestricted access to every detained person and all immigration detention facilities and to most records. IMB members have access, at all times, to all parts of the facility and can speak to detained people outside of the hearing of officers. They must consider any complaint or request which a detained person wishes to make to them and make enquiries into the case of any detained person whose mental or physical health is likely to be injuriously affected by any conditions of detention. The IMB must inform the STHF manager about any matter which they consider requires their attention, and report to the Secretary of State about any matter about which they consider the Home Office (HO) needs to be aware.

The Board's duties also include the production of an annual report covering the treatment of detained people, the state and administration of the facility, as well as providing any advice or suggestions it considers appropriate. This report has been produced to fulfil that obligation.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detained people and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMBs are part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

The South and West STHF Board is committed to treating everyone with whom it interacts with fairness and respect.

2. Description of the holding rooms

The detention facilities at each site vary. All the detention facilities in the south and west area are managed by Border Force (BF). Under the STHF rules, passengers should not be detained for longer than 24 hours other than in exceptional circumstances, when a longer period of detention is authorised by the Secretary of State (a responsibility delegated to a Home Office official).

Bristol Airport STHF

Bristol Airport has one terminal through which all passengers pass when entering the United Kingdom (UK). In 2024, over 10 million passengers came through the airport. A considerable amount of building work is currently underway to increase capacity to 12 million passengers per annum in the first phase of the airport's long-term development plan.

BF operates within the arrivals hall, managing the electronic entry gates, manual desks, controlled waiting area (CWA) and the STHF.

Should an arriving passenger be subject to further enquiries by BF at Bristol Airport they are initially taken to the CWA. This is a small open plan area comprising 12 seats situated in view of the immigration desks and other arriving passengers. When there is a passenger present it is monitored by a designated officer who completes necessary paperwork and attends to the welfare needs of passengers.

There is one short-term holding room that can accommodate six or seven passengers who have been detained by BF for the purposes of further enquiries, follow-up interviews and making decisions about whether they should be allowed entry to the UK.

The facility is also used for those denied entry awaiting return flights, and for those awaiting transport to alternative immigration/asylum/airport facilities.

When in use a minimum of two BF staff are designated to monitor those being held in the short-term holding facility. The room has its own toilet, shower, sink, hand dryer, baby changing facilities, water fountain, TV, fixed table and seating, mattresses and a prayer/quiet room.

The STHF provides privacy for passengers, allowing them to rest quietly and shower while awaiting immigration outcomes and future travel arrangements. The observation/office area contains a variety of items that detained people can use including:

- disposable bedding, blankets and pillowcases, and pillows
- a selection of toiletries and disposable wipes, nappies and towels
- religious books and a prayer mat
- bottled water, baby food, snacks and ambient/microwaveable food.

A double sink and a microwave were installed during 2024 in order to meet food hygiene standards.

Cardiff Airport STHF

The airport and detention facilities had been relatively quiet since two airlines stopped using Cardiff as a destination. In 2024 around 881,000 passengers came through the airport, a 5% increase on the previous year but nowhere near previous volumes.

The CWA comprises two separate banks of five seats to the side and in view of the immigration desks and the public. As CWAs are 'public' waiting areas, typically found in the arrivals hall at ports of entry, there are no dedicated facilities available. Anyone held there who needs toilet facilities would be accompanied to the public toilets and any food/drink needed would be brought to them. Temporary screening can be brought across to provide privacy for those held in the CWA, if necessary.

The STHF holding room is separate and has two toilet cubicles at the far end of the room, suitable for use by a disabled person, while one has a sanitary disposal bin. The main area comprises a table with four metal seats fixed to the floor. There are four thick mattresses and pillows. There is also a beanbag in the room.

There is a small food preparation room with microwave and stored packs of food. It has a five star rating from the local authority. A variety of food items are available and a food preparation log can be inspected.

A bookcase in the holding room contains a variety of reading material including some suitable for children. There is a television at high level, with a remote control. Helpful posters and information in several languages are displayed. The viewing area contains a variety of items that detained people can use, including:

- disposable bedsheets, pillowcases, and blankets
- clothing packs and disposable slippers
- a selection of toiletries, disposable aprons, nappies, and towels
- religious books and prayer mats.

Newhaven Ferry Port STHF

There are three distinct areas of the port - the Foot Passenger Terminal, vehicle booths and Freight Interception Point (FIP). There is a CWA in both the passenger terminal and FIP, with the FIP a short walk from the passenger terminal. To the side of the immigration desk in the passenger terminal is a bank of four seats that make up the CWA. Immediately adjacent to the CWA is a baggage search room.

The STHF suite is adjacent to the immigration hall. It is a purpose-built facility, provided by the Port Authority in early 2022, and comprises a holding room with monitoring area, storeroom, interview room and kitchenette.

The holding room itself is spacious, with the main area being L-shaped. One leg of the room has a round table with four chairs secured around it, the other leg has four beanbags for detained individuals to relax on. The rest of the space is taken up by a separate toilet cubicle (with toilet, sink, soap dispenser, hand dryer, metal mirror and sanitary products/disposal unit), plus a large separate walk-in shower room.

Adjacent to the holding room is a storage area and separate kitchenette containing a sink, microwave, and a kettle. Beyond this area is the interview room, comprising a desk with seats on each side, with a separating transparent screen.

In the FIP, there is no STHF holding room, but a larger CWA containing two immigration desks and 18 seats, where drivers wait while their vehicles are being inspected. There is also a toilet and kitchenette in this area, along with a fingerprint room. (Detained people in the passenger terminal are escorted over to the FIP if they need to have their fingerprints taken.)

There is a separate storage room containing a selection of supplies, including:

- toys for children;
- religious items (books and prayer mats);
- toiletries, nappies, disposable clothing;
- disposable bedding and towels; and
- first aid kit/spill kits/biohazard packs.

Poole Ferry Port STHF

The Port of Poole and Poole harbour is a cross-channel ferry port in Dorset and is Europe's largest natural harbour. The cross-channel ferry service is limited in number during the winter months but increases considerably from April to October. Alongside passenger ferries, a year-round international shipping trade operates for imports and exports of cargo.

There is a CWA at the location where foot passengers are processed and a separate room where families and individuals can wait in privacy, if required. These are spacious and well appointed, with a variety of posters around the wall and information available for those using the room. It has a table with a bank of three seats against the wall and a further seat on the opposite side of the table (all fixed to the floor), a heater and portable screens to provide privacy during searches.

The STHF Holding Room is situated in the main terminal building. There are also two toilet cubicles at the far end of the room, both with metal toilets, sinks fitted with a liquid soap dispenser and electric hand driers.

The main area comprises a table with four metal seats fixed to the floor plus another three seats against the wall. These are flat seats without armrests and could be used to lie across to rest if necessary. Two mattresses are on the floor and disposable bedding is issued to any detainees as required. The room does not have a TV or any other form of entertainment although a few magazines are on the table.

There is a storage cupboard containing a selection of supplies, including:

- a selection of food and drinks;
- toys for children; and
- religious books and a prayer mat.

Portsmouth Ferry Port STHF

There are three distinct areas of port: the Passenger Terminal, Car Hall and Freight Interception Point (FIP), each with its own CWA. A BF van is parked at the FIP, ready to transport anyone being detained across to the STHF, which is located in the Passenger Terminal.

The Passenger Terminal is quite similar to an airport, with a line of immigration desks forming the border between 'land-side' and 'sea-side'. To the side, just in front of and in sight of the immigration desk there is a bank of nine seats that make up the CWA.

There are two holding rooms located within the STHF, which are overseen by a monitoring area. Each holding room contains a separate toilet facility comprising a toilet and multi operation wash basin (soap, water, hand dryer). The holding room area has a table and chairs, which are fixed to the floor, and a mattress. The walls have posters relating to the detention process and detained person's rights.

The staff monitoring area is fitted with CCTV screens and food cupboards containing ready meals, biscuits, crisps and baby food. Hot drinks are available and there is a cold water dispenser.

There are storage cupboards in the viewing area, containing a selection of supplies, including:

- food and drinks (all of which can be served without being heated);
- toys for children;
- religious items (books and prayer mats);
- toiletries and nappies;
- clothing (ponchos tracksuit slippers hats gloves, etc);
- disposable bedding and towels; and
- first-aid kit/spill kit/biohazard bags.

There are 10 soft mattresses and a number of pillows, along with disposable covers, which can be used by people who have been detained. The holding rooms are cleaned regularly by port cleaners, and further cleaning can be requested if needed.

3. Key points

3.1 Background to the report

The South and West STHF Board was newly formed in January 2023. Members made a total of 121 monitoring visits during the reporting year. At Portsmouth, the IMB notifies BF of their plans to visit so that BF are able to ensure that immigration detention records are available to be scrutinised. At Poole a small number of planned visits were cancelled by BF. In addition, during the year the IMB access to the offices at Poole was withdrawn. This has sometimes prevented the IMB from seeing key documents about detentions. We were most concerned about this as it compromised our ability to monitor that site effectively.

After each visit, the IMB prepares a report and, if there are concerns, asks BF to answer these and provide an explanation. We received no answers to our questions from July to December 2024. This was a matter of significant concern, as it prevented the IMB from monitoring effectively. It is still the case that we do not get prompt answers, although BF has retrospectively addressed most concerns.

It was difficult to organise visits to coincide with people being in detention. We asked BF to let us know when someone was detained so we could visit. This happened on a few occasions and so, in contrast to last year, when no detained people were seen face to face, IMB members interviewed a small number of detained people.

BF provided a monthly data sheet listing all people detained for two hours or more. These people are issued with an IS91R, explaining the reasons behind the authorisation of detention. The Board found some inconsistencies in the information provided, so the data should be regarded as indicative rather than completely accurate. These data are reported in the evidence sections below. Bristol was the busiest site, with 356 detentions for longer than two hours, and Poole the quietest, with only two detained individuals. Portsmouth had 63 detentions, Newhaven eight and Cardiff 12. At all sites, these numbers were lower than last year, when a total of 582 people were detained for longer than two hours.

Across the region, 49 children were detained and one person over 70 years old.

Three per cent of detentions were less than two hours (these were people who were temporarily released and then came back for a return flight); 29% for two to three hours; 29% for four to five hours; 31% from six to 12 hours; and nine per cent 12 hours and over. No-one was held for more than 24 hours.

3.2 Main findings

Safety

There were few issues relating to the safety of detained people. Where an issue arose BF staff were quick to seek advice or take action to address the issues.

In relation to children held in detention we had a specific focus on these cases between April and December. We found that, where we could see evidence, BF staff were prioritising the welfare of detained children. However, it was often difficult to assess this from records which did not fully reflect the work done by staff to ensure the safety of detained children.

In addition to being notified about planned and spontaneous Use of Force, we asked BF to provide information about the Use of Force against detained people as part of

the monthly data sheet. This was not provided and therefore prevented us from monitoring this important area effectively. We were not notified about the one incident of Use of Force with a non-compliant detained person.

Fair and humane treatment

The facilities where detained people are held were sufficient except:

- At Poole, where the absence of heating was a long-term issue that needed addressing.
- At Portsmouth, where issues with failures to provide hot water and soap were a frequent occurrence and compromised the health and safety of detained people.
- At Bristol, where the inadequate arrangement for storing bedding was an issue.
- During the year, the inability to provide hot food and drinks at all sites, and for protracted periods at some sites, was a concern for the IMB. All locations were able to serve snacks and cold drinks throughout, but the IMB are of the opinion that hot food and hot drinks should be available at all STHFs, especially as some detained people may have had a long and arduous journey and may be detained for a lengthy period.

The expansion in passenger numbers at Bristol will impact on the capacity of the detention facilities. We were not reassured this would be addressed.

The Disability Access Reviews, which took place during 2023/24, identified deficiencies at all sites. However, of those, the report indicated where facilities were not required to meet current regulations. The IMB will draw attention to conditions that are considered detrimental to those detained, whether or not the organisation is required to meet current regulations.

Health and wellbeing

The arrangements for assessment and treatment of health conditions at all sites is inadequate. The main issue has been that detained people who are holding any form of medication have this taken away from them and often, although BF are prompt to seek advice, they are not allowed to take the medication. This potentially can have an impact on someone's health.

Preparation for removal, transfer or release

Our main concern this year was that BF have consistently failed to give the IMB access to detention records, primarily at Poole and Cardiff, which made it impossible to monitor effectively. We raised these concerns repeatedly.

There were some improvements in the quality of recording detention information, albeit there was still room for improvement.

We noted that detained people were waiting for transport provided by Mitie Care & Custody (the company contracted to provide transport to other immigration detention facilities) or Clearsprings (the Government provider responsible for organising transfers between detention facilities and asylum accommodation) often led to extended detention times.

3.3 Recommendations

TO THE MINISTER

- Ensure that the capacity of detention facilities keeps pace with the expansion in passenger numbers at Bristol Airport.

TO THE UK BORDER FORCE

- Ensure that the IMB has full access to detentions records so we can monitor effectively.
- Rota reports are they responded to promptly and concerns raised by the IMB are addressed.
- Ensure that the recording of children's detention fully reflects the individual child's treatment.
- Provide use of force statistics as part of the monthly data return to the Board.
- Confirm that, at Portsmouth, hot food/drinks can now be served?

3.4 Progress since the last report

Staffing levels

We were concerned that staffing levels, particularly at Bristol Airport, were sometimes insufficient to allow detained people to be transferred to the more comfortable STHF from the CWA. We have noted an improvement although staffing levels at weekends seem less flexible.

Children in detention

We were concerned that children had to sometimes wait for a considerable time in detention waiting for Social Services to attend. This year we found that the range of time waiting, between Social Services being called and arriving, ranged between less than two hours and over six hours. There was still room for improvement.

Provision of hot food in STHFs

We were concerned that the withdrawal of hot food and hot drinks (in order to meet longstanding local authority requirements) was detrimental for those held for longer periods. Whilst this was remedied at most sites, at Portsmouth, the IMB found that no hot food was being served at the end of the reporting year. All locations were able to provide snacks and cold drinks throughout, as required under the STHF rules.

Quality of record keeping

We were concerned that detention records were often incomplete or inaccurate. There has been some improvement in the accuracy of record keeping, but there were still occasions when key information was missing.

Informing the IMB of detentions

We were concerned that last year we had been unable to interview people detained face to face and had to monitor solely through checking the records. This year we were contacted by BF on several occasions and did interview several people face to face.

IMB access at Portsmouth

We were concerned because the IMB members monitoring at Portsmouth had not been provided with the passes to access the areas to be monitored unaccompanied.

We raised this in every Board meeting from September 2023. It was only at the end of January 2025 that the passes allowing unaccompanied access were provided. Until the issue was resolved, Border Force facilitated access by accompanying IMB to allow access to be gained to the STHF.

Coordinating monitoring across immigration detention

The Head of the National Preventative Mechanism reported on progress:

‘The UK National Preventive Mechanism welcomed the recommendation from the South West STHF Board. The Head of UK NPM met with the Chair of the Board, the National Chair of the IMB and the CEO of the IMB to discuss how we could best address. The UK NPM Steering Group also considered future work. The NPM encourages cooperation between its members as part of our 4 strategic priorities and guiding principles. All 21 bodies of the NPM are committed to working collaboratively to share expertise, good practice and intelligence, with the core objective to prevent ill-treatment in places of deprivation of liberty under the UN Optional Protocol on the Convention against Torture. This work is led and supported by a small central team. The UK NPM has further considered how we can support and encourage greater cooperation, to improve conditions and treatment for those deprived of their liberty. With this in mind, the NPM will carry out a pilot programme of work in 25/26 to look at scope for joined up monitoring. We will pilot a project to use case studies from across NPM findings to follow individuals through detention which will aim to highlight any gaps in existing practices.’

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception

The arrangements and facilities used during the initial stages of a person's detention were generally fit for purpose at all sites.

At Bristol, following our repeated expression of concern at the amount of time some people were spending in the CWA rather than being transferred to the more comfortable STHF, we noted that many more people were being placed in the STHF.

4.2 Suicide, self-harm, deaths in custody

There were no instances of suicide or self-harm during the reporting period. We raised an issue that the risk assessment section of standard documentation combines risk to an individual with risk from an individual to others. We viewed this as potentially confusing and fed this back to BF.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction

There were no instances of violence during the year.

4.4 Vulnerable adults, safeguarding

There were no detained people held during the year recorded as having a disability. There were a small number of people who had health issues, either as a result of their journey or due to existing illnesses or conditions requiring medication or health intervention. In these cases, BF staff were quick to refer people to hospital or seek advice from health professionals. In the health section below, we comment on the adequacy of healthcare arrangements at the STHFs.

There were eleven cases referred to the National Referral Mechanism - dealing with people thought to be affected by modern slavery. We did not identify any cases where this referral should have been made and was not.

4.5 Children and families

In April 2024, the South and West STHF Board agreed to undertake focused monitoring of children in detention, centering on Bristol, Portsmouth and Newhaven. From April to December 2024 members agreed to look at as many of these cases as possible. We also interviewed detention staff about how children safeguards were managed.

There were 32 children detained during this period (although one was later assessed to be an adult). All were at either Bristol Airport or Portsmouth Seaport. At Bristol, there were 19 children and at Portsmouth there were 13 children (including one who was later assessed to be an adult). There were notable differences between the two locations. At Portsmouth, all of the children detained were unaccompanied, whereas at Bristol most were in family groups. At Portsmouth, 11 of the children detained were from Sudan, whereas at Bristol there was a greater spread of nationalities, covering 11 countries. The number of children per month being detained ranged from zero to seven. One person detained at Portsmouth was later assessed as adult.

At Bristol, nine of the children detained were aged under 10 years, whereas at Portsmouth, all were 10 years old and over. All the children at Bristol required an interpreter and at Portsmouth all except two children required one.

At Bristol, none of the children were referred to Social Services, whereas at Portsmouth all except two children were referred. The time between the call to Social Services and their arrival ranged between just over one hour to nearly six-and-a-half hours.

At Portsmouth, all except two children were referred to, and the case managed by, a Safeguarding and Modern Slavery (SAMS) officer. At Bristol, the cases were only referred in the months of July to September 2024, and none of the cases was managed by a SAMS officer, who takes responsibility for ensuring the health and wellbeing of children or vulnerable people.

At Bristol, one child was detained for less than two hours; five children spent a total of between two and three hours in detention; five spent between four and less than six hours; two spent between six and less than eight hours; and the remaining six children were detained between eight and less than 12 hours. The longest detention time was for two Iranian children, who were held in detention with family for 8 hours and 45 minutes.

At Portsmouth, none were detained for less than four hours; seven children were held for between four and less than six hours; five children were held for between six and less than 12 hours; and one was detained for over 12 hours, which was the longest detention, at 12 hours and 42 minutes. This was the person who was later assessed as an adult.

South and West IMB looked at a small number of detention records and observed and interviewed one family in detention. Observations from this monitoring included:

- There were examples where the case recording for the adults took precedence over that of the child and it was difficult to identify log entries that focused solely on the children.
- It was difficult to assess from the records what the quality of engagement was between BF staff and the children. In the case that was observed both children were very young and so it was appropriate for communication to be through the parents.
- In cases where it was possible to determine, through scrutiny of the detention records, it was clear that the BF staff had prioritised the welfare of the children.
- In one case, there were three young children, and the mother was taken to hospital, leaving the children in detention with the father. This must have been distressing for them. In this case, the risk sections of the file were incomplete.
- In one case, the detention record appeared to show that a 15-year-old was searched and fingerprinted by a solo officer. This was later reported to probably be an inaccurate impression and that other records not seen by the IMB would confirm that two officers would have been present. In addition in this case, an unrelated adult who was travelling with the child but who had not been detained, was used to translate. We checked with BF, which confirmed that this is sometimes the practice in order to progress processing of the case.
- In one case, where the family was interviewed by the IMB, they said they had been treated well by BF and had received all the support and advice they needed. The only issue raised was that after a long journey and with a

fractious baby, the holding room was noisy and kept the child awake. It is true that with frequent changes of personnel, the opening and closing of heavy doors would have been a disturbance.

- One 16-year-old passenger could not read or write and there was little available as an alternative to books or subtitled television.

The BF staff did seem to prioritise the welfare of children, although it was sometimes difficult to see this by just looking at the records.

4.6 Use of force

It was difficult to monitor the Use of Force (UoF), as its use was not routinely recorded in the documents monitored by the IMB. We asked for any UoF to be reported through the monthly data sets provided to us by BF. We were told in May 2024 that this was awaiting a decision centrally. By the end of the reporting year, we were still not receiving this information.

We were aware of two examples where force was used against detained people. One at Bristol, where three people were caught as stowaways on a ship at Portbury Dock and placed in handcuffs to be transported to Bristol Airport for processing. The other example was at Portsmouth, where a 16-year-old was placed in handcuffs.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The accommodation provided for people detained is generally suitable for short periods. However, some accommodation has limitations, for instance, at Bristol there is no natural light, and the seating arrangements make it difficult to sit in a relaxed way; at Poole there was no heating during the winter months making it difficult to heat the room quickly should there be a person detained. As a result, there was a person detained at Poole who had to be kept in the family room during the night, as the holding room was deemed too cold to be used.

The capacity of the holding rooms is generally sufficient. However, there have been times at Bristol when too many people were detained in a room that was too small. This has meant that some people had to spend a lot longer in the less comfortable CWA. For example, one passenger in Bristol was kept in the CWA for over eight hours.

At Portsmouth, the toilet was inoperable for periods. There was also no water supply to the washbasin or soap available. This meant that detained persons had to be escorted by staff in order to use toilet facilities outside the holding room.

The STHFs were generally clean and tidy, except on a few occasions where the port cleaners had not cleaned the facilities between detentions. At Bristol there were concerns about the storage of clean bedding and the prompt disposal of used bedding. Completion of the cleaning and Legionnaire's logs (the responsibility of the Port Authority) was occasionally missed.

Items that may be needed by those detained, such as, toiletries, towels, bedding, nicotine replacements, nappies and sanitary products, were all in good supply. At Poole it was reported that some bedding was out of stock although this was restocked before our next visit.

At Bristol, we raised a concern that there was a notice board in the monitoring area with the personal details of people detained, which could easily be seen as detained people and visitors passed through the area. Having raised this potential breach of confidentiality, it was quickly removed.

During the year, an issue for the IMB was the provision of hot food. It was determined in July 2023 that the facilities for providing hot food did not meet the required local authority food hygiene standards so, for a number of months, only ambient food was available. STHF kitchen facilities were refitted to the correct standard. This process seemed to take a long time, as BF/HO negotiated the changes with the Port Authorities. At some sites the provision of a range ambient alternatives was sufficient as a temporary measure, but the range of options varied by site. At Portsmouth, the only food available for months for those detained was crisps and biscuits. Given the many hours that people were often detained, the IMB viewed this to be inadequate.

The range of food and drinks available was generally acceptable and, with very few exceptions, was well within the use-by dates. There was one example at Newhaven where we found out of date baby food.

5.2 Relationships between staff and detained people

From the evidence we have gathered during our visits and the written evidence we have reviewed, BF staff treated passengers with respect and courtesy, giving priority to meeting their needs. At Newhaven, Poole and Portsmouth, no detained people were seen by the IMB. At Bristol and Cardiff there were a number of occasions when the IMB was able to observe and interview people who were detained. In fact, they all gave a much better impression of their engagement with BF staff than could be gleaned from the documentation. There were no serious concerns raised.

The only concern we have raised is whether BF staff check well enough that detained people have understood what they are being told. There were examples of people interviewed by the IMB who did not seem to have a detailed grasp of what had happened as part of the detention process and what would happen in the future.

5.3 Equality and diversity

Most detained people required the use of an interpreter. The Big Word is the service used to source interpreters. For simple matters, like whether someone wanted food/drink, BF staff used a translation application on their phones. In most cases, this worked well, but there were occasions when the time in detention was extended, or key documents could not be served because an interpreter was not available. This was usually because it was a less common language.

During 2024, BF conducted a Disability Access Review of the STHF in order to improve access and the quality of facilities. There were deficiencies identified at each site.

5.4 Faith and religious affairs

Religious texts and prayer mats were available and kept correctly at all sites. At Bristol there is a small separate room within the holding room for prayer.

A small number of clearly marked Halal and Kosher meals were available.

5.5 Complaints

We were not made aware of any complaints being made by detained people during the year.

5.6 Property

Arrangements for keeping a detained person's property varied across the sites and included individual lockers or storage cages. All baggage was securely stored and monitored. There were examples of the property record not being signed by the detained person to show they had received their property. This would be an issue if there were a complaint about missing items.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

None of the sites has dedicated healthcare facilities. Given the unpredictable throughput of detentions, this is not surprising. Healthcare assessments conducted by Border Force staff include a simple set of questions asked during the induction process which require passengers to self-assess any medical conditions and medication needs. If staff have concerns about a detained person, they sought advice by calling the 111, the NHS non-emergency medical helpline. If a passenger required access to their own medication, staff deferred to 111 to obtain advice on whether the medication could be self-administered. Staff were also able to refer to Gatwick custody medical team, if necessary. Some Border Force officers are trained first-aiders. In the event of an emergency, BF staff would dial 999 for the emergency services, or 111, depending on the seriousness of the condition.

6.2 Physical healthcare

We have been concerned that for a small number of passengers with chronic medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, or diabetes, that the current arrangements, where possession of medication is not allowed, could have their health placed at risk. There were examples of medication being withheld, for example, one case at Bristol where a person was taking post operation antibiotics. There were no examples during the year in the STHF, of a deterioration in a detained persons health whilst they were in detention as a result of their medication being withheld. We are unable to confirm if health deteriorated after the short time spent in the STHF. BF seek and follow professional health advice as necessary but in our opinion the current arrangements may present risks to health.

6.3 Mental healthcare

The risk assessment included identification of any detained person's mental health needs. There were no examples of mental health needs being identified, apart from detained people declaring that they usually take medication for conditions such as depression and/or anxiety. No issues arose in the STHF as a result of these.

6.4 Soft skills

Detained people had access to a small number of activities at all sites. These included books, magazines and a TV.

7. Preparation for removal, transfer or release

7.1 Case management

Given that IMB members were rarely able to interview detained people face to face, it was important that we were able to monitor the detention files covering all issues relating to the STHF. This was not always the case. At Portsmouth, Poole, Newhaven, and Cardiff there were examples of IMB members not being given full access to all the STHF documentation relating to individuals or that key documents were missing.

At Portsmouth, the processing of detained persons was generally good. However, there were deficiencies in the standard of record keeping. For example, section six of the record of detention (which states the outcome of detention) was often not completed. We observed numerous occasions where the time interval between the issue of the IS81 and IS91 exceeded the prescribed two-hour time limit. Induction logs were frequently missing key information including, on several occasions, the details of the officer leading the process, details of the detained person's welfare and legal requirements. Some IS91 Forms did not include a photograph of the detained person, although sometimes this was added later. Whilst assurance checks of case files are carried out, these are not always effective in obtaining the missing information.

IMB noted that, at Bristol, where we had last year criticised the quality of recording, there had been an improvement. This was helped by the rigorous BF internal audit and feedback in place.

We raised some concerns about the information given to people detained about their access to legal advice. The holding rooms have a copy of the information for people detained including access to legal advice and a copy in the persons first language was usually given to them. There were some examples where the record showed that this was not given to the person.

7.2 Family contact

We noted that detained people were allowed access to mobile phones or a landline to contact family/friends to let them know what was happening. Although not allowed full access to the internet, they were allowed to insert their SIM card into a basic mobile phone provided by BF in order to contact family/friends.

7.3 Removal

We were not able to observe any removals during the year. The documentation we were allowed access to only included basic detail about the time and date of the removals. At Portsmouth, we reported that there was a general reluctance to allow the IMB to see records of removal, including the detail of how the removal was carried out.

7.4 Transfer or release

We noted that in cases where the detained person was to be transported by taxi or other transport arranged by Mitie Care & Custody or Clearsprings, there were often considerable delays. In March and April, there were examples of detentions lasting over 17 and 23 hours, respectively, as people waited for transport. In August and September, however, the detention times and waiting times for Clearsprings or Mitie Care & Custody were less than seven hours.

8. The work of the IMB

During the year we were reduced to eight active members, resulting in both Cardiff and Newhaven having only one IMB monitor.

The Board worked hard this year to reflect on the findings of the Brook House Inquiry and dedicated sections of a number of Board meeting, facilitated by individual Board Members, considered the findings in detail.

We would like to be able to see more detained people face to face but this has proved difficult to achieve.

We have been grateful for the positive way most Border Force and Home Office staff have engaged with the IMB. There have been some difficult moments when we have had to push quite hard to encourage improvements to be made. Conversely there have been some occasions when our concerns have been addressed promptly and effectively.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	10
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to establishment(s)	121
Total number of visits to Bristol Airport STHF	51
Total number of visits to Portsmouth Ferry Port STHF	28
Total number of visits to Poole Ferry Port STHF	19
Total number of visits to Cardiff Airport STHF	12
Total number of visits to Newhaven Ferry Port STHF	11

Annex A

Glossary

BF	Border Force
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
Clearsprings	A private company providing accommodation and services for asylum seekers, commissioned by the Home Office.
CWA	Controlled Waiting Area
FIP	Freight Interception Point
IMB	Independent Monitoring Board
IS81	This form gives immigration officers the authority to detain people while they undertake further enquiries.
IS91 and IS91R	The IS91 form allows someone to be kept in immigration detention under the powers of the Immigration Act 1971. It must be served on the detaining agency. The IS91R form is served on every detained person, including children, at the time of their initial detention.
MITIE Care & Custody	A private company providing secure transport for detained people.
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
NRM	National Referral Mechanism: related to people who may be victims of modern slavery.
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
SAMS	Safeguarding and Modern Slavery
STHF	Short-Term Holding Facility



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