

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

Witness Statement of **D1618**

I provide this statement in response to requests under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006.

I, **D1618** [**DPA**], currently residing at **DPA**
DPA

Introduction

1. My name is **D1618** I am not known by any other names. I make this statement as a witness in the Inquiry into Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC).
2. I am a national of Afghanistan **Sensitive/irrelevant** I was detained at Brook House IRC from 16 April 2017 until 16 November 2017, when I was released on bail. This was my first time being detained in an IRC. I have not been detained in an IRC since. I was granted refugee status on 06 July 2020 after my asylum appeal was allowed.
3. Whilst I was in Brook House, I was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is a result of traumatic events in my home country of Afghanistan as well as my experiences in detention. One of my symptoms of PTSD is problems with my memory. I cannot remember every detail. My memory is in bits and it is fractured. I particularly struggle with time and dates.
4. Following and during my detention at Brook House IRC, my mental health deteriorated significantly. I try to forget my time at Brook House IRC as much as possible but I still have repeated flashbacks of when I was detained; I still imagine myself in the cell. I still suffer from nightmares and bad headaches. It has been very

difficult and traumatic for me to prepare this statement but I want to assist the Inquiry with as much information as I can remember.

5. It has now been almost four years since I was detained at Brook House IRC. The following account contains everything I can remember at present. It may be that I will want to add to or amend my account at a later date, depending on memories of my detention at Brook House IRC coming back to me.

Arrival at Brook House

6. I arrived at Brook House IRC from the community as I was detained on reporting.
7. When I first arrived at the centre, I was asked a number of questions about my health and I said that I was fine. I said was not suffering from any pain and I was not taking any medication. This was because when I first arrived at the IRC, I did not have any noticeable mental ill-health problems. I began to suffer whilst I was at Brook House. This was the first time that I was told and believed that I may be returned to Afghanistan.

Physical environment

8. Brook House IRC was not a good place, it was very dirty and unsafe. I had never been to a place like it before in my life and I have not been anywhere since. It was a violent place where I frequently felt that I was in danger. I felt as if I was in prison but had not done anything to deserve being treated like a criminal. There was a heavy presence of security guards who did not let the detainees go anywhere with any freedom, a lack of windows and poor quality of the rooms. It also felt like a prison because of the way detainees were treated by the staff there.
9. After what I believe was one or two nights on the Induction Unit, I was primarily detained on D Wing. In total I was in a room with two other men for three months and

one other man for two months. I am also aware that I was on E Wing briefly but I do not remember this very well.

10. My first room on D Wing at Brook House IRC was horrible. The room was tiny and it was only really fit for one person but there were two or three of us in there at all times.
11. The room was in very bad condition and smelled really bad. My bed was directly opposite the toilet and there was a bunk bed on the other side of the room. There was a small sink close to the other beds. The sink was so small that we had to really crouch down to actually use it.
12. There was a toilet in the room which did not have any screens. We usually held a blanket around for each other to have some kind of privacy. The toilet, which was stained a yellow colour, made the room smell horrible and there was no window for ventilation. It felt as though there was not enough oxygen to breathe properly.
13. We were not provided with a toilet brush so it was difficult to keep the toilet clean after use. We were also not provided with toilet sprays or bleach to keep the toilets clean. I would regularly verbally ask at reception for cleaning products but they always said they did not have any. The staff would always say that they had asked someone to get cleaning products but that they had not got back to them. The staff did not offer us any alternative solutions and told us just to use water. But water was not effective in keeping the toilet clean.
14. I therefore just had to cope with the smell and the lack of cleanliness. I had no other alternative.
15. The toilet was also cracked and water was leaking from it. We put a blanket around the bottom of the toilet to try stop the leaking water from spreading in the room. When we mentioned these issues with the toilet to the staff, someone eventually came to fix it after about two weeks but even after the repair the toilet remained cracked and we continued having to use a blanket around the bottom of the toilet.

16. Inside the room we were only given one blanket each which we folded to make a pillow and one other blanket to use as covers. I had to use the bedsheet as a cover because we had to use the blanket for the toilet. We were not able to get another blanket as we were only allowed what we were given.
17. After three months, I was moved to another room, still on D Wing, which I shared with one other Afghan. This was slightly better as there was more room and fewer people but the toilet situation was still the same. The toilet was again stained a yellow colour. I felt really embarrassed to go to the toilet when someone else was in my room. My roommate felt the same. We both ended up trying to go to the toilet when the other was out of the room but that was impossible at night. We felt shy to say that we needed the toilet and to ask the other to leave the room. There was still no proper ventilation so it was obvious if we had been to the toilet.
18. Again we were not provided with a toilet brush nor cleaning products.
19. As I have said above, I also spent some time on E Wing but I do not remember it well. I believe it may have been when they tried to remove me.

Locking in

20. Every evening we were locked in our rooms from 9pm to 8am in the morning. They also randomly locked our rooms during the day and the staff would say this was due to meal times. For example, at lunchtime they would keep us inside as there was a long queue of people waiting. They would sometimes let us out one room at a time to reduce the length of the queue.
21. I suffered a lot during the lock in periods. This was when my mental health symptoms were particularly bad. Whenever I looked at the time and saw that it was coming up to 9pm, I knew that someone was going to lock me in and I became scared.

22. Every night I would struggle to sleep and I would often be awake until around 3am. When each lock-in started, I knew I had hours ahead of me where I had nothing to do other than think about what might happen to me and about my fears of being returned to Afghanistan.
23. I later suffered an arm injury after an attempted removal so I would be in pain at nights and I only had paracetamol to deal with the pain, which was insufficient.
24. Lock-ins were the hardest time of each day whilst I was detained due to the effect that they had on my psychological health.
25. There were many people at Brook House IRC who were criminals who had just been let out of prison. Some of them had committed serious and violent crimes. Many people acted like they were in gangs. Everyone was mixed together and we didn't even know who the dangerous criminals were. This made me very scared as I did not know who to be wary of.
26. There would often also be fights, arguments and conflicts between detainees and also between guards and detainees.
27. I can recall that my friend was in a fight on 25 October 2017 which made me feel even more scared and unsafe at Brook House. I was playing cards with an Afghan friend and we called over another friend to join us. As he was coming towards us, he was attacked by around a number of white detainees, who I believed were Albanian, who hit him over the head with a bin and they were punching him and beating him.
28. My friend called out for a few of us Afghans to come help but there were too many people attacking him. Around 5 or 6 minutes later they knocked him out and he fell to the floor unconscious. I could see blood on his arms and his face was bruised and bleeding.

29. There were two guards present in the area of the attack but they did not do anything. The guards only intervened when the fight was already over and my friend had been knocked out. More guards then came and he was taken to hospital by the staff.
30. I felt like the staff just cared about their safety over anyone else's safety. They should have been there to protect us but I felt like they did not care about us.
31. These types of incidents made me really scared to be in Brook House. My friend was only attacked because he had made a complaint about one of the men cutting in front of him in the queue for food.
32. I remember one time I saw a detainee attack another detainee who was serving food when he wanted two apples but was only given one. It was small things like this that could end up with someone being taken to hospital from Brook House IRC

Abuse and mistreatment of detainees at Brook House IRC

33. The staff treated us very badly. They ignored us when we would ask something and never listened to us. I felt that staff thought that all detainees were just liars. They did not take our concerns or our issues seriously because they just didn't believe us. For example they would deny our concerns about safety and cleanliness. When we would ask them something their body language made it clear that they weren't interested. I felt that there was no point complaining about anything as they would not be taken seriously. They made no attempt to make me feel comfortable and safe.
34. I felt like there was a lack of respect towards detainees and we were not considered to be people like the staff. They were rude to us. They would shout at us and respond abruptly if we spoke to them.
35. I saw staff mocking detainees who were due to be removed. These detainees were desperate to not be returned and the staff were just cruel when people were in a desperate situation. I felt it showed what the staff really felt about us.

36. I felt that the staff were scared of the detainees because they knew that some of the detainees were violent criminals. The staff were scared to intervene in case they were attacked. Because of these fears, it seemed to me that the staff could not to do their jobs properly.

Access to legal advice

37. When I first arrived in detention, I had a private solicitor who was suggested to me by my cousin.

38. However, later on, as I had concerns about my solicitor I was recommended to find a legal aid solicitor. I was told about Duncan Lewis and they began representing me in August 2017. They have represented me since.

Use of Force

39. On 29 July 2017, I was told I was going to be removed back to Afghanistan in the daytime. I believe that the staff placed me in E Wing the day before my intended removal. The guards who took me to the airport treated me like an animal. They put me in restraints. They had me in hand-cuffs as well as a waist restraint. They put a second pair of hand-cuffs on me on the plane. I was unable to move.

40. I kept telling them that I couldn't go back to Afghanistan because my life would be in danger. They just ignored me.

41. They forcefully pulled me towards the plane using the waist restraint. I kept telling them they were hurting me but they wouldn't stop. On the plane everyone was looking at me as if I was a criminal because of the restraints and it was very embarrassing. I felt ashamed.

42. The escorts pressed my head into the seat and told me not to move. I was shouting saying that I did not want to go. They put their hands on my forehead and pushed my head backwards. They said that as long as I kept shouting they would twist my hand

and push my head. They told me not to cry or shout as there was nothing more I could do, I was going back to Afghanistan.

43. I had to protest what was happening to me. I knew that I could not return to Afghanistan. I deny that I was being violent during the removal attempt; I was simply vocal and protesting. I was surrounded by big men with handcuffs, I could not do anything to them but they hurt me a lot. I was wriggling because I was in pain.
44. I was in a lot of pain because the restraints were cutting into my hands and I was bleeding. People on the plane were asking the escorts why they were doing this to me as it was obvious that I was in pain but the escorts just ignored me. Two pilots came and looked at me and when they saw the blood they stated that they did not want to fly with me on the plane. I was worried that the pilots thought that I was a criminal.
45. The escorts kept trying to silence me and told me not to shout. They didn't want the pilots to hear me.
46. I was taken off the plane and the escorts pulled me back into the van. I was crying because of the pain and I asked them to loosen the waist restraint which they did not do. The escorts shouted at me and told me that they would not loosen the belt because of my behaviour. I was taken back to Brook House in all of the restraints. I was feeling really bad and I was in a lot of pain, especially in my arms and legs. My right hand was particularly painful.
47. I was taken to hospital as result of my injuries. The Doctor was unable to x-ray my arm as my hand was too swollen. The Doctor thought my hand may be broken. Once the swelling had gone, the Doctor X-rayed my whole arm. He said that the results would be sent to me at Brook House however I never received them.
48. After this incident, I was in fear for my life every day. I kept thinking about the attempted deportation and I was worried every day that they would come and take me again. I could not sleep because of this.

49. When I arrived back in the centre, a member of staff asked me why I had come back and why I hadn't gone "home". I found really upsetting that he asked me this.
50. After the incident, a fellow detainee took photo of my injuries using a camera phone. It was fairly easy to get access to a camera phone within the facility. You could barter with someone and they would let you borrow the phone for a short period of time.
51. I wanted photos taken of my injuries because the Home Office, the escorts and G4S were trying to deny what had happened to me and trying to cover it up. I tried to complain and I just had a cover up.
52. I was very upset that I never found the outcome to my x-rays. I was worried that my hand was broken but I was just given painkillers. I should have been told what had happened to me.
53. None of the staff at Brook House or healthcare had taken photos of my injuries to try to establish a record of what happened to me.
54. I did what I had to do to try to document what had happened to me.
55. After the photos had been taken, they came and searched my room to find the phone but it wasn't there anymore.
56. It was only because I had lawyers who were able to work on a weekend that I was not unlawfully removed to Afghanistan after the first attempt.
57. The pain lasted for a few months afterwards. I feel that if I had been given proper medical treatment, it may not have lasted so long. I still have marks on my arm to this day.

58. Following the experience of an attempted removal, whenever I lay in my room at night, I was terrified whenever I heard a guard walk by as I thought that they would pick me up and deport me without notice.

Rule 35

59. I confirm that I did not ask for a Rule 35 Assessment whilst I was in IRC Brook House. Nobody told me what a Rule 35 was and I was not aware of how it would have helped me.

60. I think it would have been useful to talk to a doctor about how I was feeling in detention. I was struggling a lot with my mental health and I had nobody to turn to.

ACDT

61. I felt like ending my life whilst I was at IRC Brook House. I was trying to find a razor to try to hurt myself but I could not find one. I believe that the staff knew about this. I did tell them about how I was feeling and that I wanted to hurt myself.

62. I did not trust the staff at Brook House IRC. I felt like from the very beginning, as described above, I had sought help from staff but I was ignored. I felt that, even from the start, the welfare of detainees was not considered to be important.

63. My friends tried to help me. They said that I needed to have hope and that my father would help me.

Drugs

64. Lots of people took drugs in Brook House, particularly spice. Spice is horrible and it makes people go crazy. I tried to keep as far away as possible from those that take drugs. Lots of fights between gangs in Brook House were started due to drug supply.

65. Every day I would see people on the floor nearly dying after taking spice. Staff did not anything to help them and it was just allowed to continue.
66. I saw people who had used spice and they looked like zombies. They couldn't breathe properly. I looked at these men and I saw how badly they reacted to it. I wondered why they took such a bad drug that affected them in such a way.
67. I have no idea how the drugs came in to the facility but they must have come from the outside. The officers either did not do enough to stop the drugs getting in, they allowed it to happen or were bringing drugs in themselves.

Clinical care issues

68. I did not feel confident in the healthcare facilities at Brook House IRC from the outset of my detention.
69. I believe that I first wanted to speak to healthcare in my second week as I was feeling more emotional. I was just told that they were busy and they didn't seem interested in trying to help me.
70. The people in healthcare treated us very badly and with no respect.
71. When I was brought back to Brook House after the attempt to remove me, I went to healthcare to have my arms and wrists treated. The nurse said that I would be fine and the staff tried to blame me, saying that my injuries were my fault because I had resisted removal.
72. My arm would not bend and it hurt to twist it. My hand was completely swollen.
73. Even though I had been taken to hospital to have my arm checked, they did not provide me with any other update.

74. All that they did was give me paracetamol/ibuprofen which did not help my pain at all. I told healthcare that I could not sleep because of the pain and the stress that I was experiencing but they said that they could not do anything.
75. I felt so depressed about this. It felt unfair. I was in pain but nobody was interested in what had happened to me. I realised that healthcare did not care about me.
76. I stopped bothering with healthcare thereafter as I knew they would not help me. I knew that if I complained about my mental health, I would be just given painkillers like paracetamol.
77. I found it stressful to go. Everytime I went to healthcare, I felt that the same thing was happening and I saw no reason to put myself through it.

Complaints and oversight

78. I confirm that I made a complaint after the incident in which force was used against me during the removal process.
79. I do not remember the complaints process very well due to the passage of time. However, I remember that it was not dealt with properly. I did not receive any appropriate remedy or apology for what happened to me. It was not acknowledged that they had hurt me or done anything wrong.
80. I do not feel that my concerns were understood or resolved properly.
81. It made me more sad and mistrustful knowing that I had raised a complaint and been ignored.

Impact

82. I found it difficult to cope whilst I was at Brook House IRC and became so depressed. I remember that I would try to go and find places to be by myself and to relax. I would like to listen to music and close my eyes. I wanted to imagine myself somewhere else. My mental health deteriorated while I was there.
83. After I was released, I went to live again with my father. I kept waking him up in the night because I was shouting in my sleep through terrible nightmares.
84. This led to problems and arguments with my father. Eventually my father told me to leave the house and I had to live in an uncertain situation with friends. After I was granted leave to remain, I moved on to a YMCA.
85. As explained above, I have now been diagnosed with PTSD. This was after I met with an external doctor whilst I was detained. I was prescribed with psychiatric medication that I continue to take. I am currently taking: Sensitive/Irrelevant. I am receiving ongoing treatment.
86. Whilst my immigration status has been resolved, my poor mental health has continued. I believe that my experiences in Brook House IRC are a significant factor in my poor mental health.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

I am content for this witness statement to form part of the evidence before the Brook House Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Name

D1618

Signature	Signature
Date	3/11/21
