

## **BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY**

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### **Second Witness Statement of Owen Syred**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 21 November 2021.

My address is known to the Inquiry, and I will say as follows:

#### **Self Harm**

1. I have reviewed page 1 of document CPS00059, which is the statement of Callum Tulley that records incidents involving D149. I was not present at that incident, and I was not made aware of it.
2. From my experience of working at Brook House incidents that involved cutting and bleeding, and the use of ligatures, were treated more seriously and would be routinely reported. First response would often be called to incidents involving cutting and ligatures. Once this happened, and a record was made in the control room, it would not be possible to ignore the incident.
3. I suspect that self-harm, such as refusing to eat, pulling hair out, self-strangulating with hands, and incidents such as a detained person banging their head against a wall or door would not always be reported because of a desire to avoid additional administration. I suspect that the need to complete paperwork was one of the reasons an incident of self-harm might not be reported. It could take an hour to complete the paperwork and over this period a member of staff would not be in attendance on the Wing which would further exacerbate the issues of staff shortages. In addition, certain staff may have formed the view that the self-harm was an attempt to frustrate

the removal process or to secure release from detention and might not make a report for this reason.

4. In the training that I delivered I would emphasise that all self-harm incidents were required to be reported no matter their nature, and regardless of views about the reasons and motivation of the detained person. However, this was not always followed. On one occasion, in 2019, I can recall reviewing the circumstances of a detained person who had been transferred from Harmondsworth IRC who had threatened self-harm on three occasions, each of which ought to have resulted in the opening of an ACDT log; however, no ACDT log was opened until the detained person made the threat on a fourth occasion.

#### **Welfare Staff**

5. I have reviewed document CJS001425, which is a complaint, in part, regarding the lack of welfare staff. Page 14 of that document contains an email from DCM James Begg to me and others regarding the outcome of a welfare meeting and the mention of recruitment of Welfare Orderlies.
6. Originally, from 2009 to around 2012 there was only one Welfare Officer in Brook House. When I returned for my second spell at Brook House this had increased to two Welfare Officers. When I was appointed to the role of Welfare Officer in 2016, I became the third Welfare Officer (the two existing Officers at this time were Terisha Creppin and Octavian Stratt). Shortly after my appointment, a fourth Welfare Officer, Sunil Sharma, was appointed. At this time, Brook House had a population of approximately 400 and between the four of us we would conduct approximately 1800 appointments a month. Tinsley House had a much lower number of detained persons (approximately 130) and they had six Welfare Officers. I believe Harmondsworth IRC had less appointments per month than Brook House (approximately 1400) and yet they had 12 Welfare Officers. In my opinion, the Welfare Team at Brook House was significantly understaffed. The I.T. was of a

very poor standard and inadequate (see the complaint about the fax machines by detained person D381 in CJS001425). In addition, Welfare Officers were often taken off Welfare duties to assist elsewhere on the Wings, for example within Escorts, and Activities. Around 2017 my colleague Terisha Creppin made a formal request, possibly to James Begg, which was supported by me and the other Welfare Officers, that we should not be taken off Welfare duties in this way. This request was also communicated to HM Inspectorate of Prisons, and they included a recommendation with a report for better support for Welfare Officers.

7. The Welfare Officers worked over different shifts, so it was difficult to arrange a time and date when we were all present. Meetings were held approximately once every month. In attendance at the meetings would be three or four Welfare Officers, and either James Begg or Conway Edwards, as the relevant line managers and DCMs. James managed me and Octavian, and Conway managed Terisha and Sunil. James was also Safer Custody Manager and, in this capacity, he had oversight of Welfare.
8. Issues discussed at these meetings would be staffing levels, resources, and issues with retrieving property. Tracing property was a particular problem because it could be difficult to contact the relevant organisations (e.g. prisons and police stations), it was a significant issue for detained persons, and it could also delay the removal of a detained person. It took a while for the team to gel, probably due to the fact that Terisha and Octavia had worked together as a team for some time before Sunil and I joined. However, we eventually became an effective team. The Home Office Manager, Debbie Weston, organised quarterly meetings between different IRC Welfare Teams. I can recall attending these meetings at Harmondsworth, Morton Hall, and, I think, The Verne. Welfare representatives from Brook House, Tinsley House, Colnbrook, The Verne, Morton Hall, Yarl's Wood, and Dungavel House would attend these meetings. We would discuss the subjects of the voluntary returns pilot, and any changes to Home Office procedures. We also shared statistics and

good practice, and it was helpful to build relationships with colleagues who were performing the same role.

9. Welfare Orderlies were introduced in 2017 and they were recruited through the Paid Work Co-ordinator. The role of Paid Work Co-ordinator was carried out by Joe Marshall. He would provide a list of detained persons who had requested paid work, and a discussion would take place with James Begg and the Welfare Officers about who would be most suitable. The role involved managing the ticketing system and queue for Welfare appointments. We looked for candidates who were reliable, and not easily intimidated by other detained persons. I would sometimes ask Welfare Orderlies to help with basic administration. Welfare Orderlies could also assist other detained persons with basic queries such as how to fax a document and where to obtain relevant forms. I believe James Begg came up with the idea for Welfare Orderlies, and it made a big difference to the capacity of Welfare Officers to help detained persons and it de-escalated tensions around waiting for Welfare appointments.

#### **D87**

10. I have reviewed page 5 of CJS001453, which records: D87 "told to DCO Babs to Fuck off for his HO interview Carols advised O. Syred to see him". This incident concerns a Home Office request for a meeting with D87. When the Home Office made requests for meetings with detained persons, a DCO (who was given the radio call sign of November 1) would be assigned to personally inform the detained person of the meeting. The detained person would already have received prior written notice of the meeting, but the purpose of the face-to-face contact was to act as a reminder and to encourage the detained person to attend.
11. On this occasion I believe that D87 told my DCO colleague, Babatunde Fagbo, who had been assigned as the November 1, that he did not wish to attend the meeting. The person referred to as Carol within document CJS001453 was Carol Martin, a

Home Office Engagement Officer. At this time, which was March 2017, I was seconded to the Home Office Voluntary Removal Pilot, and I was working quite closely with Carol. I can remember that D87 was in room C12 which had its own shower, and was a room that was normally used for people with disabilities. I can recall speaking with D87 in his room and I explained that the Home Office wanted to speak with him, that it was in his interests to see them. I explained that it was probably for the purposes of a monthly update on his immigration status (although I did not know the precise reason for the meeting). D87 was an intimidating individual; however, I had built up a rapport with him whilst at Brook House and he listened to what I had to say. I was able to escort him to the meeting.

12. I have reviewed page 1 of document IMB000014 in relation to the voluntary departure of D87. I recall speaking with detained person D87 about the option of a voluntary return and the benefits (which included a facilitated return payment of £750) as opposed to a forced return, which can involve the use of handcuffs and a restraint belt. I do not believe that I was working on the voluntary returns pilot, although I continued to advise people of the option of voluntary return in my role as a Welfare Officer. I do not recall any other involvement with the return of D87 and I cannot recall whether D87 returned voluntarily or not.

### **Drug Use**

13. I have reviewed document CPS000025, which records an incident on 18 May 2017 of D3732 forcing another detainee to smoke Spice. I have no recollection of this incident.
14. I have reviewed document CJS000491, which are the G4S records for June 2017. Reference is made to an incident in which D1275 may have been used as a guinea pig to test drugs. I believe I can recall this incident. The detainee was young and of short stature. A DCO colleague who was of Iranian decent, Mo (for Mohammed), had spoken with D1275 to try and find out what was going on, noting that the

detained person spoke very little English. Mo asked my advice and I advised that he should raise a security information report and speak to Officer colleagues on the Wing so that they were aware of the potential vulnerability of the detained person, flag it up in the Wing diary, inform the DCM on the Wing, and offer the detained person the opportunity to speak with Welfare. I think this individual was moved to Tinsley House shortly afterwards because D1275 was considered to be vulnerable.

15. The issue of detained persons being pressured to smoke spice to test its strength (in which context the phrase “guinea pig” is sometimes used) was a big problem in the Centre. This practice was often in relation to Spice since its strength could be so variable. The dealers would seek out vulnerable and/or new detainees to try the drugs first to test their strength. Every time a new batch of drugs entered the premises people who you did not expect to be taking drugs needed medical attention and I suspect that in many cases this was because they were being used as guinea pigs.

#### **ACDT Assessments**

16. I have reviewed document VER000267 and my own comments in paragraphs 3, 15, 55 and 71 of my first witness statement, all of which relate to ACDT assessments. Some ACDT assessments were of a high standard, and some were poor. I refer at paragraph 170 of my first witness statement, to an occasion when Nathan Ward asked me to carry out a further assessment because he was concerned about the adequacy of the first assessment. The Officer who completed the initial assessment was Charlie Smith and the report read as if he had never spoken to the detainee - the responses were just one-liners. The detained person had expressed suicidal thoughts to other detained persons, and they had reported this to members of staff. The conclusion of the first ACDT assessment was that there was no issue.
17. I can recall that when carrying out my assessment it was necessary to encourage the detained person to talk about his feelings because he was not very forthcoming.

However, in the course of our discussion he opened up. The detained person [redacted] and this was culturally unacceptable in his country. He indicated that he could not face the thought of going back. After carrying out the assessment I was so concerned about the detained person's welfare that I told the Wing staff to stay with him while I spoke with Nathan. I told Nathan that I was not happy going home until the detained person was placed on constant observation. Nathan instructed constant observations and I can recall that Adam Clayton, a DCM and the Oscar 1 that day, expressed irritation at this decision because it meant that a member of staff would be taken off other duties to carry out the observations. I believe that the detained person was released from detention shortly afterwards.

18. To become an ACDT assessor, an Officer had to complete a three-day course. I became a Safer Custody Trainer in late 2016 and was accredited to deliver this course. At paragraph 55 of my first witness statement, I refer to a Safer Custody Trainer who advised staff on the course that an ACDT assessment should take no longer than 30 minutes whereas I had been trained that the assessments should take as long as necessary and to record all relevant information.
19. ACDT assessors could sometimes be pressured by Wing Officers not to recommend observations or to recommend that an ACDT log be closed, to reduce the levels of work on the Wings. However, decisions on carrying out observations, their regularity, and closing an ACDT log, were not for the assessor; they were for a DCM or someone more senior. The process was not widely understood.
20. I carried out approximately four three-day training sessions and would always advise the candidates to be as thorough as possible and that the assessment takes as long as it takes. I explained to the candidates that the ACDT document was the most important document that they would deal with in the Centre and that if the process was carried out properly, it worked well.

21. The process improved over time as more emphasis was placed on it. Both Tony Bond and James Begg (as Safer Custody Managers) made Improvements to the ACDT process. After Panorama I felt I was able to have more input as an ACDT assessor and I was increasingly asked to carry out assessments. Staff volunteered for the role, and some were very good, but the standard was mixed.

#### **Incident of Movement of D87**

22. I have reviewed document IMB000051. On page 1 of that document, it states “various R40 and a few UOF (all minor)” on Monday week commencing 24 April 2017. I can recall no involvement with any of the incidents set out on that page. However, I believe the reference to a detained person who refused to move out of the “disabled room” was D87 (see paragraph 11 which refers to the fact that D87 was occupying a room for people with disabilities). The reference to the detained person being “taken down” is likely be a reference to a transfer to E Wing.

#### **Incident in Spring 2017**

23. I have reviewed document CJS005598. The use of force incident recorded in that document is not the incident to which I refer in paragraph 162 of my first witness statement. To date I have been unable to identify with any certainty an incident report or a use of force report in connection with the incident I explained in paragraph 162 of my first witness statement. However, given the nature of the incident both types of report ought to exist.
24. As to the date of the incident, I have recorded in my first witness statement that the incident took place in the Spring of 2017. I am able to specify this period because I was not working in uniform when the incident occurred due to the fact I was seconded to the Home Office Voluntary Removal Pilot. This secondment was from the end of 2016 to around May 2017, and I know that the incident occurred towards the end of my secondment because shortly after the incident I can recall discussing



the fact that I had been assaulted by a detained person with Home Office colleagues in the G4S central admin office. The Home Office staff had only moved to this location towards the end of the pilot. At the beginning of the pilot they had been based in an office within the Centre for Home Office staff.

25. The timing of the incident would have been during the day because while I was seconded to the pilot, I worked Monday to Friday 08:00-17:00.
26. The incident occurred in the Wing Office. I am 90% sure it was on C Wing, though it may have been B-Wing. The reason I know it was either C or B-Wing was because of the configuration of the Wing Offices on those Wings. Specifically, the door to the Wing Offices opened inwards and to the right, whereas the doors to the Wing Offices on A and D-Wing opened inwards to the left. The incident definitely did not take place on E-Wing.
27. I was present on the Wing for the purposes of informing detained persons about the progress of their voluntary returns. I attended the Wing Office to speak to staff to find out the whereabouts of the relevant detained persons. I remember that there were quite a lot of staff in the room; I recall six in total, including three new staff who were shadowing. A young detained person who I believe was of Middle East origin was speaking rudely with a raised voice to a female colleague. I asked what the problem was. The detained person replied, *“what the fuck has it got to do with you”*. I responded, *“the officers are only trying to help you and you need to treat them with a bit of respect”*. At this point, the detained person lunged towards me with a punch, which grazed my face because I had stepped back.
28. I took hold of the detained person’s arm, and the other officers assisted. I stepped away from the detained person while three colleagues restrained him - one on each arm, with one officer holding his head. I can remember that the detainee was bent over at 90 degrees.

29. A first response was called by another Officer, and the control room sent a first response team to the incident. On any given day as an Officer you would be allocated the role of first response (usually 6 or 7 staff), or second response (again 6 or 7 staff). Once the control room announces a first response, those allocated to first response immediately attended the location of the incident.
30. Derek Murphy was the first officer to arrive. The door to the office was already open and the detained person was still at 90 degrees and he was being held in straight arm locks and he had not yet been moved into a final restraint position which would have allowed him to stand up. The Officer holding the detained person's head was stood to the side of the detainee. The detained person was facing the door. Immediately upon entering the room, Derek crouched low and punched the detainee with rapid uppercuts to the detainee's face on at least three occasions.
31. I pushed Derek away and the detainee was taken to E-Wing, I believe on a Rule 40. I believe one of the officers who restrained the detainee was Graham Matchett, but I cannot be certain. Later that same day I spoke to Derek and asked him, "*what was all that about?*", and Derek said, "*sorry, I lost it*". I said, "*if I ever see or hear of you doing that again I will report you, you do know that*", to which he replied "*yeah, yeah, sorry*". In addition to the welfare of the detained person, I was concerned by the presence of new staff who were shadowing colleagues.
32. I am certain that if I have had reported Derek I would have experienced significant harassment, as I had three years earlier, because a lot of staff in the Centre looked up to Derek. I would have been seen as a grass and I did not feel supported enough to go to management about the issue.

### **Reporting of Colleagues**

33. I have reviewed document VER000252, which is a transcript of my interview with Kate Lampard and Ed Marsden. In that interview, I described how I reported a

colleague for making a racist comment. After reporting the incident, I noticed a poster on the wing that contained photographs of the staff (so that detained persons can identify staff members) had been defaced and the words, “grass” had been written over my image. I also received post-it notes on my locker which includes words such as “nigger lover” and “grass”.

34. I showed Ben Saunders the poster and the post-it notes. Ben was approachable and had an open-door policy. Ben told me that he would support me and take action against any staff member responsible for this behaviour. I also told him that friends of Sam Gurney who worked in the control room were following me around the Wings on CCTV. On one occasion a colleague, Carl Hallam, admitted that he was monitoring me on the Wings using CCTV, in response to which I informed him that he needed permission from the Home Office to do that. I informed Ben and he said that he would look into it. One day when I was clocking off for the day in the presence of Ben, I became so frustrated with the situation that I said to Ben, *“you need to start thinking about the quality of people you are hiring, some of them are just silly little boys”*.
35. I am not aware of any specific action that was taken with regard to the post-it notes and poster, me being monitored by colleagues while on the Wings, or the false allegations made against me. For example, there was a false allegation that I had received a shave in the barbers while on duty, which I mention at paragraph 127 of my first witness statement.
36. No investigation was launched, and I am not aware of any additional action taken to encourage and enable the reporting of inappropriate behaviour in response to the way I was treated.
37. I previously mentioned that I had to take time off work with stress because of the bullying and harassment I suffered from my own colleagues. I was off work with stress for a period of weeks in 2015. My performance report for 2015, dated 20

October 2015, includes a reference by Juls Williams to this period. However, he inaccurately attributes it to the fact that I was under investigation, which was not the case. I was off work with stress because of the bullying and harassment I had received from colleagues in connection with my report of racist behaviour by a colleague.

38. When I came back to work, I was not placed on a phased return, and I felt uncomfortable for some considerable time afterwards. Many staff did not want to work with me and/or were cautious around me. HR and Senior Management did not provide any specific actions of support, and I cannot recall any specific initiatives to ensure that others who reported incidents of a similar nature would not face the same kind of bullying and harassment that I had.
39. I received support from my manager James Begg and from Conway Edwards (the Race and Diversity Coordinator). They informed me that I should go to them if anything else happened.
40. The whistleblowing and reporting process at Brook House was not effective. I was bullied and harassed, and I had to take time off work with stress. I am not aware of any specific actions or initiatives in response to my treatment to seek to change the culture and to protect officers who were prepared to call out inappropriate behaviour.

#### **Incident in Meal Line**

41. I have reviewed document CJS000651 at row 145, which relates to an incident. I can remember that I was monitoring the meal queue at the time. It was my practice to stop people pushing in the queue because this caused disruption. A general rule was that if there was food left over once everyone had been served then detained persons were welcome to second helpings. I told the detained person to wait until everyone had been served their first meal before he queued for a second meal. The

detained person complained that someone had hit him on the head with a plate and he asked me what I was going to do about it. I told him I had not witnessed the incident and that if he wished he could make a formal complaint and I obtained the complaint form for him and offered him assistance with completing it.

### **Incident with D523**

42. I have reviewed document CJS0000651 at row 30, and CJS001524, both of which relate to an incident involving D523. My recollection of this incident is that a detained person made a request of DCO Hayley Attwater in the C-Wing Office. Hayley asked the detained person to wait with his request because she was dealing with another issue. The detained person was having a bad day and made a complaint. I spoke with him later; once he had a chance to calm down, and he indicated that he wanted to withdraw the complaint. To D523's and Hayley's credit, they both spoke to each other afterwards and apologised for any misunderstanding.

### **Complaint of D3477**

43. I have reviewed document CJS001558 at row 48, which relates to a complaint concerning D3477. D3477 was a young man, in his early 20s, who was resident at Brook House for approximately 3-4 months. He was thought to be a Russian national and I can recall greeting him in Russian on occasion. There was an older man (probably in his 70s) who was resident in the UK and claimed that D3477 was his partner and carer. However, there was a suspicion that D3477 may have been trafficked and I believe the issue was escalated to senior levels within the Home Office
44. It transpired that D3477 was from Latvia not Russia and I facilitated his return to Latvia. In conversation, D3477 confided that he was not in a relationship with the older man and that he wanted to return home. D3477 was very distrustful in the beginning but we built a relationship over a period of approximately one month.

Once I determined that D3477 was from Latvia and not Russia, I was able to assist with gaining EEA travel documents.

45. I can remember obtaining some clothes for D3477 from Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and I had a pair of gym shoes in my locker which I gave to him because his own shoes had holes in them.
46. I can recall that D3477 had some superficial cuts and I believe there was a possibility that D3477 was being coerced to self-harm by the older man as a means of securing his release from detention. I spoke with him about issues of self-harm, and I may have carried out his ACDT assessment. I was instructed by Ben Saunders to observe D3477 and the older man on their visits to assess the nature of the relationship. It was difficult to form an assessment, but the conversation looked very one sided with the older man doing all the speaking. There were no signs of affection by D3477 towards the older man. I believe it was suspected that D3477's circumstances were part of a wider investigation into people trafficking.
47. At the point D3477 returned home, I can recall that we hugged, and that D3477's whole demeanour had improved from when he first attended Brook House.

## **IMB**

48. I have reviewed paragraph 34 of my first witness statement. While I worked on C-Wing in about 2010 I had an issue with an IMB representative, who complained that the food was not fit for human consumption. She incited detained persons who began to throw food and the situation became volatile. I removed the IMB representative from the Wing and reported her behaviour to the IMB. She had a very hostile attitude towards Officers.
49. Apart from this isolated incident, I found IMB to be very helpful and collaborative. I welcomed their attendance when speaking with detained persons, if the detained

person consented, and we had a good working relationship. They were very interested in the voluntary removal scheme and asked me to give a talk to their Board on the subject, which I did.

50. I would inform the IMB if a detained person needed help with an issue such as the return of property. The IMB would inform me of people who they thought were in need of assistance.
51. The IMB are volunteers, and they have a difficult job. They wanted to make sure that the Centre was run properly. However, staff would not act normally in their presence so it would be difficult for them to identify inappropriate behaviour.

### **GDWD**

52. I have reviewed document GDW000003, which is an email from Steve Skitt to me and others about activity packs. I worked with GDWD a lot as a Welfare Officer. Some GDWD staff were very good, and we worked together to help detained persons to obtain clothing, travel money, credit for phones, and to recover property. GDWD held weekly surgeries at the Centre and if a detained person wanted to speak to someone outside of the Centre, I would put them in touch with GDWD. I thought they were a little undervalued and for Christmas of 2018 I arranged for a card to be signed by staff and detained persons to thank them for their work.

### **Red Cross**

53. I have reviewed document VER000258 at paragraphs 47-51. The Red Cross would help with issues such as tracing a relative. I did not have a lot to do with them, but we had a positive relationship.

<b>Statement of Truth</b>	
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
Name	Owen Syred
Signature	<b>Signature</b>
Date	01-12-2021

Witness Name: Owen Syred  
 Statement No: 2  
 Exhibits: None