

Brook House Inquiry

Witness Statement of John Joseph Connolly

I provide this statement in response to a request under rule 9 of the inquiry rules 2006 dated 24th July 2021

John Joseph Connolly ,will say as follows

Introduction

Background

1. John Connolly DPA

2. Professional qualifications (Prision service)

January 2009, bronze unit commander (Tornado).

June 2009, control & restraint instructors (C&R) which was later renamed Use of Force (UoF).

2011 physical control in care (PCC).

2015 gym instructors course.

3. I started working at Tinsley House IRC ,Gatwick airport ,in 2006,At the time GSLwere the company that had the contract for Tinsley house.The initial training course ,which was 9 weeks in duration ,was held in-house,once trained, new officers were assigned an experienced office who they shadowed for at least a month.

Tinsley house was a very small unit ,holding a maxim of 132 male detainees.each shift comprised of a shift manager,supervisor and 20 officers and a small families unit ,which had its own dedicated staff and was separate to the main centre .

All through I was only a DCO,when required I instructed the initial training courses for their initial Control and Restraint training(C&R) .I also refreshed operational staff.

I also took personnel protection sessions, for the non-operational staff (Admin ,Healthcare ,catering ,and Immigration staff.

Initial training course ,included a week of control and restraint ,on these course there were at least three instructors .in 2012 I relocated to Brook House and took up the post of Control and restraint coordinator all UoF force incidents that occurred at either Tinsley House or Brook House ,I investigated and reported my finding to the Director of Gatwick IRC,and if need to the prison service or the professional standards unit (PSU)'I was also instrumental in the introduction of the body worn camera for both operational officers and healthcare staff at both sites.

4. In 2017,I was dismissed from G4S,for gross misconduct.

John Joseph Connolly

5. I read a job description in one of the local newspapers ,it was the pay and the shift pattern which caught my attention.

6. The interview was held at a local hotel ,we were introduced to serving staff,and were asked to take three written test ,which were timed .After each test the paper were marked and those who failed the teas were asked to leave .those who were successful,were interview by two members of the staff.

7. On the whole, those people that were detained at Brook House were treated with a fair amount of respect and dignity.However the longer someone worked on a wing the more they became desensitised,to the people and their surrounding This desensition occurred because of low staffing numbers on the wing ,ratio :3 officers to approx 90 plus detainee,coupled with the fact that officers had to micro manage the wings and were sometimes left to make decisions that were way about their pay grade,officers were lucky to have a visit from management once in a 12 hour shift .

As more and more serving HMP prisoners arriver at Brook house for their immigration interview the dynamics changed .Serving prisoners found the officers a very soft touch,in that officers had very little discipline over the general population If a detainee refused to follow an instruction given by an officer ,a written warning was handed to the detainee,who proceed to throw it back at the officer ,with no back up from senior management ,detainees soon gained the upper hand .

The use of force was frowned upon by both senior management and the immigration ,this intimidation led to officers turning a” blind eye” to breaches of the rules.

Any office could open a ACDT on vulnerable detainees ,depending on the need of that person ,they would be monitored from every 15 minutes per hour to once every 24 hours ,this proved very difficult to maintain on a night shift ,what became the norm on night was the practice of having two officers overseeing two wings .if there were four of five detainees needing observations every fifteen minutes ,then other tasks fell by the wayside.

When the centre opened ,the first year was very challenging,to say the least but bit by bit rules were put in place and order restored .In 2011, the old director and the senior management team left ,the new director arrived from a young offenders institute,it took the new director 5 years before he attended a C&R course ,during those five years he was not qualified to comment on C&R incidents ,he also had very little respect from the shop floor.

8. December 2016 -March 2017 this period saw on average 20 - 27 first responses to incidents on wings.per day shift ,out of these, three quarters were medical emergencies ,spice was flowing freely around the centre,officers were overwhelmed and physically and mentally exhausted,so for that matter were the medical staff,so much that an officer was posted in the medical reception area,such was the level of violence.Officers,to a man and woman,often felt very abandoned by senior management who should have attended each incident but rarely did.

John Joseph Connolly

John Connolly**9. During the aboved period,relationships between staff and the detainees were** at breaking point.Officers were having to deal with more and more medical emergengies on their own ,as the medical team were eles were dealing with another emergency.drug taking was off the scale.Rumours started the circulate that someone working at Brook House was bring in Spice.I don't known if anyone one was caught.Also spice was being intercepted on a regular basis in the reception area and through the visits.

10. No matter what outside agencies thought.The wing officers did care about the welfare of those in their care ,and sometimes went that extra mile to accommodate the wishes of people in their care but the low ratio of staff to detainees made this very difficult at times ,12 hours is a long time to be kept being bombarded with requests and help.

- a. On a typical day shift,you would see the duty director at the morning briefing but other than that never.Oscar 1,would visit the wings first thing but again,the staff might not see them for the whole of their shift.
- b. **I'd say the vast majority of detainees had mental health issues to some degree, in that ,they were being detained and kept from their families and friends.offices did their best to look for signs and if concerned ,would raise concens.**
- c. If an officer had concerns about the mental or physical state of a person then that officer would be duty bound to open an ACDT and inform the Oscar 1

11. Very rarely did senior management team (SMT) venture onto the wings,The original deputy director Mr Ian Dnskin ,always made it a point to go onto a wing at lunch time and eat with the detainees ,who appreached this gesture .MrDanskin was also UoF trained and on more than one occasion was involved in a restraint incident.This cound not be say about the later director or some of the SMT.The wing staff did not have much faith in some of the SMT.

12. If an officer had concerns about a detained person,genarally a ACDT doc would have been raised and the relevant departments informed .

13. No Comment.

14. No Comment.

John Joseph Connolly

15.

- (a) E wing was originally named “the segregation wing” and it housed disruptive detainees, or those who had refused to leave the centre, either for a transfer to another detention centre or an overseas flight.
- (b) Fighting with other detainees.
Assaulting another detainee.
Assaults on officers.
Age dispute cases.
refusing to leave the centre.
- (c) Detainees were confined to the rooms, which were single occupancy, if a ACDT was raised they would be monitored. Food was served on the wing, if they were due a visit then there were escorted through the centre to the visits and back again. Healthcare visited the centre at various times. The duty directors made his rounds and spoke to each person on the wing.
- (d) Their liberty was very restricted, they had their own exercise yard, other detainees were not allowed onto the wing to visit, if they had a job in the centre, then this was taken away.
- (e) Before a detainee could be located onto the CSU The duty manager/deputy director had to be informed and a final decision was made by deputy director. Also the immigration department were informed, along with the Independent monitoring board (IMB) and religious faith leaders and Healthcare, there were probably more departments involved sadly I can't remember. Once on the CSU detainees were assessed and the level of observations were given, some detainees were placed on constant watch, due to the nature.

16.

- a. Policies and procedures were explained during the initial training course.
- b. During the morning briefings, if any changes were made, then officers were informed during the briefings. Oscaar 1 would also visit the wings if needed to up-date officers.
- c. The policies were very useful for the day-to-day running of the centre.
- d. To My Knowledge the policies and procedures were regularly up-dates

John Joseph Connolly

17. I started working at Tinsley House IRC, Gatwick airport, in September 2006, at the time GSL were the company that had the contract for Tinsley house. The initial training course

,which was 9 weeks in duration ,was held in-house. The training was very intense, as there were only nine students on the course. Various Outside agencies gave prestations ,these included ,Drug enforcement officers from Gatwick Airport,the immigration manager from Gatwick IRC. The Imram from the local mosque,the course did visit the mosque and we found it very informative. Self harm ,was a real eye opener for all of the course ,as most of us had heard about it but never had it fully explained. We also had a tour of Tinsley house. Someting that was stopped by the local immigration. Again this was a real eye opener. If this had continued,I think that future officer may have had second thoughts about this career path.

18. Training gives you an insight into the jobs and our training did give us the confidence to carry out our duties but having to shadow an experienced officer for a period of time was priceless.

19. Refresher training was held annually ,this was mandatory for every officer who had taken part on the initial C&R course ,it was the officer's responsibility to ensure they were current and in "Ticket". officer were issued with a prison service log book ,which was dated and signed by a local C&R instructor. Not ever officer used C&R during their time at either Brook House or Tinsley and when on their refresher ,they did not pass. We as instructors would recommend that the officer have no detainee contact ,until they received further training ,seinor management were sometimes reluctant to follow our advice but the safety of fellow officers and the detainee was always paramount.

20. 2015,I transferred back to Tinsley House as an activities officer. One very important duty of an activities office, was to induct new detainees in how to use the various pieces of gym equioment. I did show new detainees how too use the equipment. in particular the treadmill,(some detainees had never seen or used one). Once a a detainee was inducted, the officer would sign a form along with the detainee. I refused to sign these form and was "pulled up" by management as to my fallings. I explained that I was not qualified to train or induct detainees .6 months later, three offices, from Tinsley house ,myself include were send on a level 2 gym instructors course .so Tinsley House was covered by not Brook house activities staff.

21. Personal protection training was a one off package and there were no annual refreshers. This was a " one off package",an admin /healthcare or immigration officer might spend 10 years at Brook House and never have any more personal protection refresher training. The training was split into two halves .the morning concentrated on the law and the afternoon practical instruction in the dijo. there were a maximum of twelve students to two instructors per course.

John Joseph Connolly

22. Personal protection training was held on day three of the control and restraint training, I believe we had non-operational staff who joined us for initial personal protection training. The knife disarming, should it be removed, being taught to keep a safe distance and to put obstacles between you and your assailant, might have been a better option.

23. I am not sure of the month, it may have been January 2007, the course was one week in duration, there were 9 students on the course, plus two local instructors. The delivery of the training was very professional and in depth. On your first refresher we were lucky enough to have the same instructors.

a. January 2007, initial C&R course

b. Annual refresher December 2007.

24.

a. January 2009, Unit commanders course (Bronze), Held at HMP National Tactical Resource Group (N.T.R.G) Kiddleington. This was a nine day course four days class room and five days spent training a fourteen officer unit, dealing with riot control within prison establishments

b. June 2009 I attended a two week Instructors course held HMP National Tactical Resource Group (N.T.R.G) Kiddleington.

c. Every year after my instructors course, I was required to attend a four day instructors refresher at HMP National Tactical Resource Group (N.T.R.G) Kiddleington. This refresher was a pass or fail refresher.

d. In June, I attended a Physical Control in Care (PCC) restraining young persons (12 yrs - 17yrs), again this was held at HMP National Tactical Resource Group (N.T.R.G) Kiddleington. I again had to attend HMP National Tactical Resource Group (N.T.R.G) Kiddleington annually for a four day refresher.

25. Yes the job description was an accurate reflection of the role of a DCO at Brook House and Tinsley House

26. Smiles, hand gestures, house rules written in their own tongue and sometimes finding a person who could speak their language. That might have been an officer or immigration officer. If there were no interpreters we would use language line, an outside agency. If we used a detainee to translate, that detainee would be given a phone card to the value of £3.

John Joseph Connolly

27. At both centres detainees were encouraged to take part in a wide range of sports and the winning teams won monies, that were split and paid into their accounts, Detainees were all offered paid work around the centre, from gym orderly, taking meal orders, cleaners and working in the kitchens.

28. If an officer had any concerns for a detainee, then he or she would open an ACDT doc on that detainee. The officer would then keep the detainee close and inform an ACDT assessor who would then interview/chat to the detainee and go through the questions in the ACDT doc. Depending on the outcome of the interview the level of care / observation would be set and all relevant agencies would be informed of the outcome.

29. On arrival any detainee/serving prisoner would be searched and also their property before entering the establishment.

In the centres, officers could randomly search detainees who they suspected of using or carrying drugs, these searches would be conducted in a private closed off area, away from other detainees so as to give the detainee some dignity.

Visitors would also be searched upon entering the centre. In the visits hall officers would keep a discrete watch on the visits hall. If a drugs pass was suspected and any substance found the Gatwick police would be informed, the detainee would be removed and searched and placed in The CSU. The visitor would be dealt with by the Gatwick police.

The security would arrange for the Gatwick police to conduct random Drugs tests for all persons entering the establishment, usually at the day/night shift hand over, it was so the off going shift would also be tested. Any person found with drugs would be charged.

30. I was never part of the welfare team.

31. I was never part of the security team.

32. Never experienced nor was I aware of any racist attitudes or behaviour amongst staff or detainees.

33. I was never aware of any homophobic and/or misogynistic attitudes or behaviours amongst staff.

34. NO.

35. NO.

36. NO,

John Joseph Connolly

37. On the whole officers had a very good working relationship with the immigration staff .If for example a detainee needed informat concerning his flight or need to pass documents to the department,they (immigration) were always ready to help .

38. When I was working in the admin department, I did have day to day contact with the senior management,I would inform the management of any Use of force that had occurred,or any incidents that needed to be invistigated further.

39. On the whole the leadership was of a good standard but a more proactive approach would have been welcomed.Senior management could have shoen their faces more on the wing and inertacted with both the detainees and staff.

40. I was never a manager.

41. The DCM's have a very difficult job at Brook House,they were constantly under pressure from senior management and immigration staff.

42 . I think I had a very good working relationship with most of my work mates Male and Female.I could rely on nearly all the officers ,however some did shy away from confrontation with detainees and tune a blind eye,which did make life in the centre ,sometimes very challenging .

43.

- a. The healthcare staff had a very stressful job,more so at Brook houseThere was constant abuse from detainees.This abuse led to healthcare staff wearing body worn cameras and an officer on duty in the healthcare reception.
- b. The healthcare were empowered to override any officer in a use of force incident.On more than one occasion this did occure .
- c. During a planned relocation/removal of a detainee.a nurse would be present during the briefing before the planned relocation/removal.On camera the supervising officer would ask the healthcare nurse if they had any concerns about use of force being used on a detainee,they would aslo be carrying the defibrillator , oxygen bottle,emergency bag.Also on a medical emergencyv,the healthcare had to close the clinic and three members of staff would have to attend with the emergency equipment.
- d. The amount of abuse that was often leveled at the healthcare staff was horrendous.Detainees demanding to see healthcare out of "hours ",spitting and screaming in their faces.This occurred on a daily basis.

44. None.

45. None

John Joseph Connolly

46. When staff shortages when they did occur had a massive impact on the running of the centre. If there were insufficient activities staff, or insufficient wing staff to monitor detainees on the exercise yards, then these were shut, which caused frustration amongst the detainee population. Exercise was a huge outlet for the detainees to let off steam.

47. Staff shortages had a massive impact on staff, the same level of care and security still had to be maintained throughout the centre but with less staff, staff were often taken off 'less important duties' officers from Tinsley House were drafted in, which in turn left that centre short of manpower.

48. Agency staff were drafted in when permanent staff were either off sick, or on holidays. More often than not these agency staff could not leave the clinic and had to be escorted around the centre by an officer, so this practice, again had an impact on staffing levels.

49. The staffing levels at Brook House activities was very poor, particularly in the gym, more often than not, a gym orderly (detainee) would oversee the gym.

50. The majority of officers who worked at Tinsley House dreaded working at Brook House, they had all heard "stories" from other officers who had previously worked there. When they did work at Brook House, they felt that they had very little training and were more often than not left to their own devices.

51. Never worked in the reception department.

52. Detainees would be processed at reception, they would be escorted to their wing and the wing staff would then process them onto the wing.

53. The activities staff had a very difficult job, trying to motivate the detainees. They would chase the detainee trying to persuade them to take part in sports events. It was decided, having a money prize, would persuade detainees to take part. This proved very successful. When "paid" competitions weren't organised the atmosphere changed, in detainees became resentful towards activities staff. Paid activities did not occur every day. Wing officers who were stationed on the exercise yards did feel vulnerable, they were often seen as a target by the detainees to aim footballs towards them. Another problem was detainees deliberately kicking the football into the wire on the gates, thus stopping the game, which more often than not turned nasty.

54. The activities staff had tried everything under the sun.

55. None.

56. None

John Joseph Connolly

57. As a local UoF instructor ,more often than not I would be supervising any planned relocations or planned removals.I would be called upon to review any incident ,which involved any use of force ,be it spontaneous or planned.The reports would then be passed to the security department.When body worn cameras were introduced ,the footage was aslo downloaded and a disc keep with the report.this was very helpful in regards to spontaneous incidents.Planned UoF the briefing of all staff (including healthcare) was recorded and the “hot debrief” at the conclusion of the planned removal/intervention.

58. None.

59. Use of force was not used excessively at either Brook House or Tinsley House.It was always seen as a last resort.If each officer had been issued with personnel ratchet handcuffs, then restraints, would have been deal with quicker and would have been less stressful for both the detainee and the officers involved ,that my personal opinion.On spontaneous incidents officers would be seen struggling to control a detainee ,this would continue until a manager arrived with handcuffs,once applied the situation would start to descuate.

60. Taking to a detainee ,letting them vent their anger was the best way to try and avert the use of force.A perfect exemplify of this .Lock -down on the wing at 21:00hrs ,officers would start asking detainees to stat making their way back to their room,if a detainee refused or was unwilling to comply with this request,they were left where they were and then spoken too after all the other were safely in their room.By ignoring the detainee and waiting until they were on their own and without an audience,this would take the wind out of their sails.Sometimes ,talking alone would not persuade the detainee to go back to his wing .This sadly is where the use of force would be use to remove the detainee to the CSU.

61. We had welfare training once a year. ACDT refresher training .

62. Any detainee flagged up as vulnerable ,either physically ,mentally would be placed on a ACDT and all wing officer had access to that file and made themself familiar with that detainee circumstances and level of care /observations required.

63. A trained mental health nurse was always on site to assess detainees.These nurses were very caring.

64. Drugs were available at Brook house,detainees would freely smoke in their rooms and around the centre ,very difficult to enforce rules as officers could not be everywhere at once.

John Joseph Connolly

65. So back in 2016 (Not sure of the date) a new position was made ,substance abuse officer.They remit was to stem the flow of drugs into the centre and also provide information to the detainees.They also spoke to detainees if drugs were found in their possession .

66. The chaplaincy were supportive of the detainees then the officers,who could have benefited from a chat with them.

67 . The Chaplaincy were free to wander around both centres and interact with the detainees.No both sites Friday prayers were held in the visits rooms ,owning to the large number of detainee.To be fair,the detainee did respect all the chaplins,regardless of faith.If a chaplain or Imran had an concerns regarding a detainee ,they would raise these with the wing office thiswould be followed up by the officers.Chaplains/Imrans were kept in the loop at all times.

68. At each meal, a count of all detainees would be taken.Any detainee found not to have eated would be found and asked as to why they had not eated and that reason would be entered into a log,located in the wing office.

Some of the reasons:

- a. Had fallen asleep.
- b. Not hungry.
- c. Dietary requirements.(officer would speak to the catering manager to try and recifie the problem.)
- d. Fasting (religious belifes)
- e. Hunger protest.

The duty manager would inspect the log daily and offices were encouraged to get the person to eat

69. I NEVER WORKED ON RECEPTION .

70. I NEVER WORKED TSFNOS.

71. While working on the wings ,nobody identified a TSFNO to me.

72. No , I never had any concerns regards abuse ,either verbal or physical towards detainees from officers.

73. None

John Joseph Connolly

74. In the first instance ,a detainee would confide in an officer who they could trust and report their concerns.This conversation would be conducted out of sight for other detainees.If needed the detainee might be moved to another wing.Alos

75. None.

76. No.

77. There was a form, but i honestly can't remember the title.The detainee would place form in a yellow box on the wing and only the immigration had the key .The complaint would go the immigration and if needed, carry out an investigation.

78. I did work with tully,I was an activities officer at Tinsley and when Brook House was short of staff I would work at Brook House.

79. Yes I did appear on the BBC programme:

A. Time line 28:24 - 29:45.

B.

80. I wouldn't know the answer to this question,I was no longer employed By G4S.

81. I was not working for G4S ,when the programme was aired .

82. Again ,I was not working for G4S ,when the programme was aired .

83. Again ,I was not working for G4S ,when the programme was aired .

84. I worked with all of these officers,at one time or another and felt very comfortable working alongside these officers.

85. Managers spending more time on the wings ,not only engaging with the officers but also sitting down and talking to the detainees.Split shifts would,in my opinion lighten the load of the officers .Three eight eight hours shifts on days.night could remain the same.

86. None.

87. At present,none that I can think of.

88. None.

John Joseph Connolly

Statement of truth

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 **John Joseph Connolly**

Signature

Signature

Date 24th July 2021

