

# BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

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## Second Witness Statement of Aaron Stokes

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 09<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

I Aaron Stokes, [ of [Address],] will say as follows:

### **Background**

1. I can confirm I worked at Brook House from 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016, including my 8 weeks training and my last working day was 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017. I can confirm that I did not leave to return to my previous professional, but to start a role in a career I was waiting for in Electrical/Mechanical Engineering.
2. I can confirm I resigned from my role on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017 and received an acceptance letter from G4S on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2017.
3. I am currently a self-employed Electrical engineer working in the Flight Simulation industry. I install, repair, and update flight simulators around the UK and the World. I started this job on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2017.

### **Training**

4.
  - a. I have considered document CJS004203, and can confirm this must have been my refresher course for C & R Training.
  - b. I cannot recall how long this lasted or what it covered but I do believe I finished the course.
  - c. I do not recall if I went back to work but as the document stated I was due back to work in visits.
  - d. I don't believe I did attend another course as I resigned shortly after this date.

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5. I have been asked to consider rows 7-11 of CJS000896, which you say record that I was the reporting officer for Incident Report 386/17, an assault on a staff member on 1 June 2017 between 11:00-12:00. I have now been presented with a revised document CJS000896 row 7.
- a. I do not fully recall the incident, however I can confirm that I reported that I was assaulted as per the document. I do not recall the detainee's name but I believe the incident was over a confiscation of a prohibited mobile phone. From what I can recall after I had confiscated the mobile phone I turned away from the detainee to head back to the office to place the mobile phone in a secure safe and fill out a report. Before I knew it the detainee grabbed me from behind in an attempt to wrestle the phone back.
  - b. I can confirm that I was the staff member that was assaulted and I do not recall the exact injuries I sustained but they may be listed in a report.
  - c. I do not recall if there were any others present.
  - d. I do not recall what actions were taken against the detainee, however according to the document above, the detainee was placed on rule 40.
  - e. I can confirm that I reported the incident to the manager on duty at the time, I do not recall their name, I believe I returned to my duties and left the outcome to management.
  - f. I do not know if anyone else reported the incident as I don't recall anyone else being there, however if they did then I assume that there would be a report on file.
  - g. I do not recall if I received any support from management.
  - h. I cannot comment on this as I have stated above that I do not recall receiving any support from management.
  - i. I believe that I did not report this incident to anyone else except management who I believe contacted the police. I recall having an interview with the police and the outcome was that it was not in the public interest to prosecute or take the matter further.
  - j. From what I can recall the impact on myself was that I felt unsafe and more anxious at work, especially around detainees as that I could be assaulted at any point on duty and felt unprotected by the system.

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6. a. I have been asked to consider SXP000102 p.1, which states that I was the victim of assault by a detained person on 2 June 2017 and no further action was taken by the police. I can confirm I was assaulted by a detainee and the incident was reported to the police. I believe these two incidences are related as from what I recall I was not assaulted two days in a row.
- b. I can only recall that I confiscated a smartphone that was prohibited. I do not recall the detainee's name or if any other individuals were around. I was about to place the phone in a secure place when I was attacked from behind for the phone and a scuffle took place. I didn't sustain any physical injuries but it did shake me up. I don't recall if any actions were taken but there should be an incident report. I can confirm that I reported it to my Line manager who was on shift but I don't recall his name. I don't recall any help offered, after the incident happened I just returned to work. As I reported this to my line manager I assume he was the one who called the police on my request as I needed to get back to work. After this assault it made me feel very on edge and uneasy.
7. a. I have been asked to consider document CJS005488\_2-3, which states that on 19 June 2017 another member of staff saw graffiti on the cloth of the pool table on the first floor of C wing which read "Aaron the officer is a snitch #facts". My understanding about the comment was that it was aimed at me doing my job and not allowing prohibited items.
- a. After reading the report I believe this could have been linked to me taking a mobile phone off a detainee. But I don't recall his name.
- b. I don't recall that I was made aware of the graffiti at the time.
- c. I don't recall any action being taken, but this was the first time I have seen this document, but I still do not remember speaking to the care team.

### **Staffing Levels and experience**

8. a. You have asked me to consider BBC footage from 5 May 2017 [KENCOV1013 V2017050500033, 02:55-08:56 and 09:18-11:40, transcript] which records me conducting a headcount without the list of detained persons and lifting the cell door flaps to check how many people are inside. Part way through the count, after detained persons were considered missing, it was realised that no count had taken place on the ground floor and so a count was commenced there. I would comment that I don't recall but yes as per transcript I accept this.
- b. Prior to this incident you would carry out headcounts by firstly asking detainees to go back to their room or into a room and they get locked in so a count can be done. We then count each individual on each level peering through the windows as we were taught not to unlock the doors until the count had been down.

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- c. I cannot recall any official training received as to how to conduct a headcount, we just learnt from senior members on how this was done.
  - d. I cannot recall exactly why I did not have a list of detainees when conducting the headcount, but I believe we did have a list but as we messed up we needed another list to start again.
  - e. I have been asked to explain why I did not, from the outset, go into the cells to check how many people were inside as previously recommended on the tannoy. I would comment that we were usually told not to go into the cells when making a headcount as we were doing the headcount on our own. If there was two, then we were allowed to open the doors and peer in to make the count.
  - f. In the footage, a staff member says that two detained persons would not leave one of the rooms so he locked them in the wrong room. I cannot recall who this was from the transcript.
  - g. My concern about this situation was that we were missing detainees and we were coming up short on the headcount and didn't know where they were.
  - h. I don't recall if this was reported to my line manager, if it was then there will be record of it. According to the transcript there was a Manager involved so I believe that he would of reported it.
  - i. In my opinion yes the staffing level did have an impact on how the headcount was conducted, there was not enough staff to conduct the duty properly. Only having 3 officers and there were three levels with possibility of approx. one hundred plus detainees per level was just not enough staff.
9. a. I have been asked to consider BBC footage from 5 May 2017 [KENCOV1013 V2017050500024, 14:28-15:10, transcript] which records me telling DCO Callum Tulley that reception sent two trainees, who were apparently meant to shadow experienced DCOs, to take detained persons back to C wing and they took them to the wrong place which affected the count. I do not remember but according to the transcript this is correct.
- b. According to the transcript yes this is what happened.
  - c. I don't recall doing anything about this as there was a Manager who was on duty and as far as I was aware was dealing with the situation.
  - d. I cannot comment or explain why trainee DCOs were escorting detained persons to C Wing as this had nothing to do with me.
  - e. I do not recall if a report was raised of the outcome but if I did then a report would have been made and would be on file
  - f. I cannot confirm whether anyone else reported this to management but there should be a report if they did.
  - g. I do not recall and cannot provide any examples of how often and for what purpose trainees were undertaking tasks or responsibilities that should have been undertaken by trained DCOs.

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10. I have been asked to consider BBC footage from 6 July 2017 [KENCOV1044 V2017070600026, 01:20-02:40, transcript] and CJS000774 where it is said that on 6 July 2017 I was left alone in the visits hall despite the fact I was supposed to be shadowing other DCOs and I had no previous experience of working in visits prior to that shift. However, in the report concerning the outcome of allegations highlighted in Panorama's "Undercover" [CJS000813], it is said in relation to 6 July 2017 that "2 x staff detailed in the visits hall and CCTV shows one or both of them in the hall throughout the afternoon. In addition Stokes was in the visits hall. He was a badged DCO who had been deployed to visits for respite from the units by the Deputy Director, rather than an unqualified trainee as suggested by 'shadowing'".
- I cannot recall if I was ever alone in the visits hall on the 6th July 2017, however according to the transcript provided, apart from Callum Tulley who I spoke to, the other DCO's had left the hall at some point.
  - I was a badged DCO however I had only been working for the company for a few months and mainly on the wings and had no full understanding of how the visits hall worked, so therefore I believed I should have been shadowing a more experienced DCO who had knowledge of working in the Visits hall regularly.
  - Even though I was a badged DCO, I had little to no knowledge or understanding of how the Visit halls worked and felt out of my depth.
  - I cannot recall if I reported this to my line manager but if I did then there should be a record of this.
  - I cannot recall why I was deployed to the visit hall, I just remember doing what I was asked to do and work where I was instructed to by management.
  - I do not recall having a lot of experience working in the visits hall.
  - I cannot recall any specific training for working in the visits hall.
11. a. I have been asked to consider BBC footage from 4 May 2017 [KENCOV1012 V2017050400028] and CJS000774 where DCO Callum Tulley asked me the best way to deal with "a person like [redacted]" (referring D1527, who was suicidal) and I responded with words to the effect of "turn away and hope he's swinging". I can confirm that I accept saying this as it clearly shows it in the footage, even though I do not recall saying this.
- I cannot explain why I said this as I really don't know myself as I don't recall saying it, I believe I must of really only been blowing off steam amongst colleagues, trying to laugh off having a bad day between fellow DCOs and didn't mean anything by it or cause any upset to anyone.
  - As per footage my colleagues' response to this was that we were all just laughing and joking about our day. No one seemed to be upset or raised any concerns about our banter. Not to my knowledge anyway.

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- d. I do not recall if I was present during an earlier conversation in which DCO Calvin Sanders described to multiple staff members how, when left alone in a room with him, he twisted D1527's hand when he was pushing his finger into his neck, but if I was I probably didn't think anything of it as I believe it was just spurring off between colleagues. I cannot comment if anyone else responded as I do not recall the conversation.
12. a. The BBC footage shows me having a conversation with DCO Calvin Sanders in which comments are made about holding the head of a detained person and having the urge to punch his face after which we both laugh. From what I recall I would comment that we were just chatting amongst fellow DCOs and decompressing from our day. I tried to make a joke of it to lighten the mood, obviously looking back now it was in poor taste, an inappropriate comment/action to do.
- b. At the time I was just laughing along with everyone to release my stress but now looking back this was not appropriate behaviour and it wasn't meant to upset anyone.
13. You refer to the BBC footage from 4 May 2017 [KENCOV1012 V2017050400026, transcript], in which you say Ryan says that the other emergency escort is for the elderly Portuguese detained person who threw the Chinese detained person down the stairs, who has bipolar disorder and was his roommate. It is said that I then call the detained person a "cunt".
- A. I don't recall the incident, so I cannot say who Ryan was.
- B. I don't recall the incident, after considering TRN0000076, I found that there was not reference of myself referring to the detained person as a 'Cunt'.
- C. I don't recall the incident so I cannot comment on how my colleagues responded.
14. a. I have been asked to consider BBC footage from 6 July 2017 [KENCOV1012 V2017070600007, 00:00-30:00, video] and CJS000774 where it is alleged that I said about D728, that the best way to deal with him was to "chin him" and I called him a "bellend". even though I don't recall saying it, I can confirm I said 'chin him' which it clearly states in the video, but I do not recall calling him a 'bellend'. If I did then I would believe I had just had enough of the day and was already under mental stress at the time.
- b. I didn't really mean anything by "the best way to deal with him" was to "chin him", I was just spurring off after having a stressful day.

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- c. Obviously no these were not appropriate remarks but at the time I must have been severely stressed and shouldn't have made the comments.
  - d. I don't believe or recall my colleagues responded at all, we were all under a lot stress.
15. I have been asked to review the transcript of the BBC footage from 6 July 2017 [KENCOV1044 V2017070600026, 00:55-01:17 and 02:50-04:15, transcript], CJS000774 and CPS000026 p.10 where it states that on 6 July 2017 D728 threatened to hang himself and I went to his room and said to him "I don't care just do it", "do it I'll cut you down crack on with it so what" and "you crack on mate".
- a. I don't recall saying this but according to the transcript it appears I did say this, however I don't remember saying this directly to the detainee or Callum Tulley.
  - b. I don't recall saying this , but if I did then I didn't mean anything by it and obviously would not have let him hang himself or hurt himself. I believe I was just under so much stress and just spurted off. Obviously these were not appropriate remarks.
  - c. I don't recall my colleagues saying anything to me or even if they heard the comments.

#### **Use of Force**

16. You refer to BBC footage from 4 May 2017 [KENCOV1012 V2017050400026, transcript], and say that Ryan says that a detainee who they "bent up" had been swallowing batteries and his phone and that the detainee had been alright once 'Michael' let go of his other arm. He says they gave him a guided hold. You state the footage records me saying that should "teach him a lesson". Another member of staff asks if there was a camera or manager there. After Considering KENCOV1012 V20170050400026 (TRN0000076) I can find no reference to myself and therefore cannot comment on or answer this question as I don't recall this incident.
17. I don't recall if there was a review of the 4th May 2017 incident, However if there was this should be on record.

#### **Incident on 30 June 2017 involving D87**

18. I have been asked to consider documents CJS005592, CJS001604 pages 1-4, HOM002351, CJS001424 pages 3-20, CJS001448, which concern two alleged

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assaults on D87 by staff on 30 June 2017. I can confirm that I was present for the first incident, an alleged assault by staff during D87's relocation from Eden Wing.

19. It is alleged that I and another officer ruffled him, tried to grab him to put him on the ground, then grabbed his hands in a lock position, held him until we all fell to the floor together, one officer then grabbed D87's head and pinned it to the floor and then he was stood up. I can confirm as per my report this is what happened and how I handled it, however I do not believe 'ruffled' is the appropriate word. I believe a more appropriate word would be 'struggled' as he was a very strong individual as you can see per video 'Disk 28 D87 (3).mp4'.
20. I was initially there as Leg Officer and my primary role was to hold his legs but as the situation changed so did my role, as per my report in the incident.
21. a. As per The Home Office PSU report (CJS001448\_17) stated that I reported a debrief of this incident. This is incorrect as I reported that there was a de-brief that took place. As far as I recall this was a de-brief amongst all staff that was involved in the incident.  
b. As far as I recall this covered all that occurred in the incident and reports would have been made.
22. I do not recall whether there was a review of the incident but if there was it should be documented.
23. I do recall going to apologise to D87 about the incident as I had a good rapport with him but I believe he misinterpreted why we were apologising. I had stated that I didn't want to have to restrain him but it was part of my duties to be part of the C&R team. I also did not state that I had told my DCM that we would talk to D87 and it was ignored but that I asked my DCM if we could talk to him but I was informed that 'it was past that due to security reasons'. I do not have anything else I wish to add as I believe my report stated everything I need to say.

**Incident on 30 June 2017 involving D377**

24. I do not recall this incident but after considering CJS001561\_5-17, I agree I was present during the search of D377's Room search as per my report.
25. I do not recall this incident exactly but can only go by report CJS001561\_13 which stated I searched his room by doing a search of his bed space, toilet and behind the TV.

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26. I Have considered CJS001561\_13 , I do not recall this incident and can only go with what the report stated, so I do not have anything else to add to the summary of my interview.
27. I do not recall this incident so cannot raise any issues and if I did have any then these would have been included in my report.
28. I do not recall this incident and can only go by the report provided so I can only believe I did not have any concerns and if any other members of staff did then they would have reported it.

#### **Incident on 7 July 2017 involving D68**

29. a. My account of the incident is accurate as per my report CJS005560.
- b. The only why I can explain this is that to get to the wrist flexion / lock you have to first put them in an arm hold and then into arm lock position and then into wrist lock. I believe I have just added more detail to my report.
- c. As per my report I used the figure of four arm hold and after reading DCM Dix report he also used the figure of four hold and I can only assume he ticked the incorrect box.
- d. I do not recall if I was on MMPR refresher course unless it was part of the C&R training which I did complete. But there should be a record of this on my personnel records.
- e. In Annex A I state that DCM Dix managed to calm the detainee down substantially and he then walked into his room in the Care and Separation Unit. I believe this is correct yes. As I do not recall the incident and can only go by the report provided. I do not know why he was put on rule 40 as this part of the DCM role not a DCO.
- f. I do not recall who completed the review of the incident(s) but there should be a record of it.
- g. I do not recall if there were any changes as I do not recall the review.

#### **Individual Detainees Welfare**

30. a. What I meant by spice is that I believed/ assumed this was the drug that was smoked within the unit as well as skunk but both had a distinctive smell.
- b. We could not do anything about this as it was just a smell, and we couldn't tell where it was coming from. And without evidence we cannot go around accusing people.
- c. I cannot recall if we reported it but if we did there would be a record of it.

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- d. I cannot confirm if anyone else reported it, if they did then there would be a record of it.
31. a. You have asked me to consider paragraph 26 of VER000188 which states:  
“Drugs coming in through visits hall. In the ‘boobs’ and ‘fanny’. Officers don't take it seriously... Interview DCO in visits hall who doesn't have a clue. DCO Aaron Stokes”. My understanding of how drugs came into Brook house was that I really didn't know and could only assume that drugs were getting in through ways that were out of our control.  
b. I came to this understanding as we weren't allowed to search intimate areas of any person in Brook House, so I believe this could have been one of the ways that drugs were getting into the building.  
c. I do not recall if I reported these concerns but if I did then there would be a record of it but I believe I probably didn't as it was only my assumption and no evidence to back it up.  
d. I cannot confirm if anyone else report such concerns but I believe there should be a report if they did.
32. a. when undertaking first night observations is that I would go and check on them every so often and check that they were ok and whether anything was bothering them or we saw something that was concerning.  
d. I cannot recall how often I did this it depended on my shifts.
33. a. I have been asked to consider CJS002889\_5, which suggests that I was present at a detained person's second case review on 12 April 2017. From what I can recall this was to see how the detainee was doing and engage how his welfare was.  
b. I attended as a witness to the review and had no input.  
c. I didn't have role I was just a member of staff that was available and became a witness to the review as per request from the manager.  
d. I did not contribute to the review.  
e. I cannot recall if I attended the first case review or any subsequent case reviews for this person but if I was then it would be recorded.  
f. Again I cannot recall if I attended any other case reviews but there would be records if I did.  
g. We only received training on how a ACDT worked and how to fill out observations but were not taught how to conduct a case review or how to open a ACDT, we were informed by our line manager on how to fill out the observation part of the report and the Line manager completed the rest.
34. I do not recall but as per report CJS006444\_3 I witnessed that the case review was done and I had no concerns. I cannot comment on anything else as I do not know,

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I was just asked to attend as a witness and I had no input into the review. I don't believe I received any training and I did not contribute to these reviews.

35. I have considered (KENCOV1012 V2017050400034, 01:26-02:30, Transcript) and cannot find any reference of myself and I do not recall the incident. The inquiry assumes that in transcript (TRN00000076) that I am Male officer 1, I do not recall this incident so I cannot comment on this matter and cannot find any reference of myself in the transcript provided.

36. I have been informed by the inquiry to ignore this question as it was asked in error.

#### **Action following Panorama**

37. I confirm I received a letter from the BBC which was sent to me in relation to the forthcoming broadcast and summarising the allegations against me. The letter was handed to one of my parents and I read it when I returned from work.

38. I was in a state of shock when I read the letter and could not believe or recall that I had said the allegations set out. I was dealing with my mental wellbeing at the time and I sent an email to the producer denying I said these things and that I didn't want to be part of the programme.

39. I actually resigned on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017 not 21 August 2017 and I resigned due to my opportunity arising in the career I wanted in Electrical/Mechanical Engineering. So the letter and programme did not have an impact on my resignation.

40. No I did not return to my previous profession which was a baggage handler before G4S. I left to pursue the career I was looking for in Electrical/Mechanical Engineering and my mental health was suffering and I could not take any more stress as this was not only affecting me but my personal life as well.

41. There was no disciplinary action taken following my resignation as I had already left the job before the programme was aired.

42. I am referred to document HOM000969, which is a letter dated 15 November 2017 noting that my certification as a DCO was suspended for a period of six months from my last working day, and at the expiry of this six months, my certification would be automatically revoked. I cannot confirm if I received this letter as I do not recall receiving this as it did not affect me. I believe my certification as a DCO would have been revoked as I had resigned from the job on

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14th August 2017 therefore it was not required anymore. All my G4S uniform and company property was returned upon leaving.

<b><u>Statement of Truth</u></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	Aaron Stokes
Signature	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"><b>Signature</b></div>
Date	16/02/2022

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