

## **BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY**

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### **First Witness Statement of David Waldock**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 24 February 2022

I, David Waldock (DOB DPA), will say as follows:

#### **Background**

1. I am a former employee of G4S and worked at Brook House as a Detention Custody Officer (DCO) from 8 February 2016 to 24 July 2019. During my time at Brook House I worked in the Visits department, D wing and E wing. Between 1 April and 31 August 2017 (the **Relevant Period**) I was based on D wing.
2. My reason for leaving Brook House in July 2019 was the failure of G4S to deal with a formal grievance I raised on 7 January 2019 in a satisfactory and timely manner. My experience of working at Brook House was that it was an environment in which bullying behaviour was encouraged and bullies thrived. I felt that there was a deliberate failure to address the issues I had raised, some of which concerned the safety of detainees at Brook House. I felt that I had no option but to leave and had effectively been pushed out of my job. I am now a full-time carer for my mother who has stage 7 Alzheimer's.

#### **E wing**

3. I was not based on E wing until after the end of the Relevant Period. However, my experience of E wing during the Relevant Period was that it was a loud and chaotic place, as depicted in the Panorama programme. When I was based on E

wing (after the Relevant Period) we introduced changes to make it a much more relaxed and calm environment, which focused on engaging with the detainees to try to solve their issues.

4. Rule 40 (removal from association) was the tool for managing anyone who disrupted the normal running of the centre. Detainees would be placed on a Rule 40 and removed from association on the residential wings and moved to the Care and Separation Unit (CSU). In my opinion Rule 40 was used far too casually. It was often used as a punishment for certain types of behaviours rather than to ensure the safety of detainees. For example, in the case of fighting, there was no distinction between a minor squabble and a very serious altercation; in both cases the detainee would be moved down to CSU on a Rule 40 and released the next day. That would be fine in the case of a minor squabble, but in more serious cases it meant releasing detainees back to the wings when they were still pumped up and in fighting mode. In order to improve the Rule 40 process there needed to be an opportunity for officers on E wing/CSU to input into the process and provide feedback on how the detainee had been behaving overnight, rather than releasing them the following day regardless (as often happened). Moving detainees off E wing/CSU too early, when they were not in the mindset to be returned to the hustle and bustle of the centre, could be damaging for their mental state.

## **Staff**

5. E wing was a very unique environment due to the detainees that were housed there. Detained persons on E wing presented with issues such as mental health problems, self-harm, intention to self-harm, physical injuries or medical conditions. When I was based on E wing, we made every effort to ensure that we created a calm and relaxed environment to assist the detainees with the issues they were facing. This was made more difficult when staff were moved onto E wing without any knowledge or experience of the different environment to the regular wings. I recall one example when we had a new officer straight off the initial

training course and she created a delay in shutting down E wing at a time when we had a very short period to get a room ready in the CSU in the immediate aftermath of an incident on the wings. At other times we had officers from other wings who were not used to the extra communication with the detainees that was needed on E wing. I raised my concerns with the Oscars (the managers designated in control of running the centre on a given day) and they did later impose a requirement for one year's service before staff could be transferred to E wing.

6. I have been asked for my comments on staffing levels during the Relevant Period. At that time I was based on D wing. There were never really as many staff as we would have liked but the argument that always came back from the Senior Management Team (**SMT**) was that there was more staff than the contract required. This may well have been the case but it was not enough in practice. Staff shortages got much worse after the Panorama programme came out, when numbers dropped dramatically.
7. The shift pattern was three 13.5 hour shifts per week. The problem was that officers would sometimes be on a rota to work four shifts in a row because the last shift technically fell into the next working week. By the fourth day it was absolute fatigue; officers were dead on their feet. There is no doubt that staff were not at their best when they were so tired. I believe there was also an issue with detainees wanting to be out of their rooms in the evening, for example, Muslim detainees had wanted to pray in the prayer room rather than always in their room. But I am not sure how practical it would be to have a rota of half shifts.
8. I have been referred to the transcript of an interview I gave to investigators from Verita on 11 April 2018 as part of an Independent Investigation into Brook House (the **Verita Transcript**) [VER000219]. At paragraphs 53-85 I comment on the lack of specific training provided to staff on E wing. I believe all staff should have had training on mental health, regardless of where they were based within the centre. If staff are not trained to spot these issues it is less likely that they will be picked up on the residential wings. I also agree that safeguarding, bullying and

violence and equality and diversity training would be useful and relevant to all DCOs. For E wing specifically, I would have liked to have training on how to assist detainees who were transferring from Heroin to Methadone, as this was something we had to deal with on E wing, and had no training on managing those symptoms.

### **Detained Persons**

9. I am asked to provide details of the typical number of detained persons on E wing during the Relevant Period, and the reasons for their transfer. Although I did not work on E wing during the Relevant Period, I can say from my later knowledge of E wing that the numbers of detainees there would vary quite a lot from day to day, so it is difficult to describe a 'typical' day. Some days you might have a lot of detainees suffering with their mental health; another day you might have a lot of physical medical conditions. During the Relevant Period, E wing was a fast-paced and chaotic environment, which I do not believe was a suitable environment for the detainees that were housed there. They needed a calming environment and an opportunity to talk, and at that time it was not what it should have been. Later a lot of work was done to create a more suitable environment.
10. It was not the practice for detainees on E wing or in the CSU to share rooms. In paragraph 22 of the Verita Transcript I comment that some detainees on E wing found it uncomfortable to share with detainees with mental health needs. By this I meant that some detained persons felt uncomfortable sharing the wing in general, rather than sharing rooms. There would be occasions when a detained person would present very severe behaviours, for example, shouting, screaming and running around the wing, and this would unnerve other detainees (particularly, for example, those who were coming off Heroin or dealing with another issue of their own). In these circumstances it was not uncommon for some detainees to say that they wanted to get off E wing to go back to the residential wings.

11. I have been referred to comments in paragraphs 32-52 of the Verita Transcript about a particular detainee who I felt should not have been housed at Brook House due to his vulnerability and physical condition. The detainee was called [D2422] (pronounced [D2422] or '[D2422]' in English). He was brought to E wing and we were told that he had no medical conditions but that his physical state was a '*street act*' (meaning that he was putting it on for the purposes of begging). It was obvious to me that he was not acting and that he had a serious condition. I had observed him through the night and seen his violent body movements whilst he was sleeping. I was very concerned about [D2422] and felt that what we were being told about him was not an accurate picture. With the help of a Romanian detainee for translation I was able to trace his sister via his mobile phone, and learned that he had been missing from his family in Romania for five years. We later learned that he owed money to drug dealers in Romania and had been given a '*drug bomb*' which was designed to give him permanent brain damage so that he could be trafficked to work as a beggar on the streets in the UK.

12. I provided the information I had learned to Steve Skitt following the morning briefing whilst [D2422] was in E wing. I do not know what action he took but I would be very concerned if he did not take it straight to the Home Office (HO). The actions I took in contacting [D2422] family were not within my duties as a DCO, but it was clear to me at the time that this very vulnerable man had been failed by the system and someone had to work out what had happened to him. It was such a rare situation that I do not think there needs to be a role introduced at Brook House to take the actions I took. [D2422] should not have been housed at Brook House in the first place. I had not received any safeguarding training. Although I believe I would have known who to contact at Brook House if safeguarding issues arose, it would of course have been helpful to have had training in this area.

13. I am asked to comment on whether it was usual for the HO to "*drag its feet*" in the way that I describe in paragraph 40 of the Verita Transcript in relation to its handling of [D2422] case. I can say that I never experienced a case as bad as this one. We had been told [D2422] would be at Brook House for two to three days, and in the

end he was there for six weeks. He would receive confusing correspondence from the HO which made him think he was going home, then it would not happen, and his hopes would be dashed. This happened two or three times. It was very disturbing for him. I cannot say I witnessed that happen in relation to other detainees; yes we would have failed flights, but not the level of confusion that Ion experienced. I am not aware of any other detainees being housed at Brook House with the same severity of challenges.

14. I do not have any recollection of the events described in Inquiry documents HOM000517, HOM000652 and CJS001049 involving D1527; however, they sound very typical of the type of incident we would have to respond to. I am not able to provide an account of the emergency case review process as this was not something within my role as a DCO. For the same reason I do not feel able to comment on whether the process was adequate during the Relevant Period.
15. The Inquiry has referred me to a number of case reviews that I attended [CJS007161, CJS003245, CJS003567 and CJS005514]. Although the documents record that I attended, in practice I would only be present because the case reviews took place in the office on E wing. DCOs did not participate in case reviews.

## **Culture**

16. The culture at Brook House was very hierarchical in the sense that you had Steve Skitt running the show. He had 30 years' in the prison service and Brook House was run very much as I imagine a prison is run. Although Ben Saunders was technically at the top, from my perspective it was Steve Skitt who shaped the culture of Brook House. Beneath him you had a circle of favoured officers who were protected in the instance of any complaints being made against them, either by colleagues or detainees. Against that you had officers (of which I was one) who had stood up and made complaints about how things were being run, and they were targeted and ultimately pushed out. In my view the officers who thrived at Brook House were bullies who enjoyed working in a culture which not only failed

to punish bullying behaviours but actively promoted and encouraged them, as the Panorama programme revealed.

### **Complaints/whistleblowing**

17. Paragraphs 172-268, 319-321, 385-396 and 453-462 of the Verita Transcript contain my accounts of the complaints made about me by Guyatri Mehraa (who worked in the Visits department) and Steve Skitt. I maintain that these were fabricated complaints made in response to the formal grievance I raised on 13 February 2017. My grievance was ultimately substantiated (see CJS0073634, p6-7)). A simple assessment of the complaints made against me reveals that they cannot be genuine as (i) it is not plausible that there would be two separate 'groups' of people hanging around the centre during a night shift, to whom I am alleged to have made various comments (ii) the complaint was received by Head Office on 28 September 2017, in advance of the time my alleged behaviour was supposed to have occurred and (iii) the scant detail provided to me of the allegations made against me. As far as I am aware there was never a resolution of this complaint against me. I do not believe this was ever investigated. It was clear at the time and remains clear to me that these complaints were deliberately fabricated either in an attempt to get rid of me, or as revenge for whistleblowing.
  
18. VER000061 is a letter I sent to the CEO of G4S on 15 April 2017 raising allegations of corruption and bullying at Brook House. I wrote this letter because I felt I had exhausted the proper channels and no action was taken to investigate my complaints. I had reported my concerns to the Stop It Line (later named the Speak Out line) and separately written a letter to Human Resources (**HR**) but I was not satisfied that action was being taken to investigate my complaint. Eventually I was asked to meet with G4S lawyer Nick Sheppard and make a series of statements about the matters I had raised in my complaints. I spent several hours making these statements and they contain details of problems that were later the subject of

the Panorama programme. G4S should have copies of my statements; I note that they have not been put into evidence in connection with the Inquiry.

19. I have reviewed a series of documents relating to complaints I raised with HR [CJS0073111, CJS0072826, CJS0073530, CJS0073020, CJS0073274]. I have also reviewed a copy of CJS0073634 which contains a chronology of the subsequent investigation and its outcome. I have not seen this document before. CJS0073634 contains a copy of a letter from Richard Allenby to me (undated), which I did not receive and have not seen before. The document also contains an email from Lee Hanford to Richard Allenby dated 1 October 2018 in which he states that he met with me to discuss the outcome of my grievance – this meeting did not happen to the best of my recollection. From my perspective, I did not receive any details of the investigation of my complaint.
20. CJS0073634 states at page 6 that I was removed from the Visits department and placed on ‘behaviour monitoring’ as a result of a complaint made against me by someone at the HO without any formal investigation having taken place. A quick review of the CCTV would have shown this complaint to be false (as it would have revealed that there was no-one present from the HO at the time of the alleged behaviour); however, the CCTV was not reviewed by G4S and subsequently overwrote itself after 35 days. It is clear that I was found to be ‘guilty’ without any investigation. In fact the complaint was entirely false, which would have been easily proven at the time. For the reasons set out above I do not think the complaints process was fit for purpose during the Relevant Period or afterwards.
21. I have been referred to comments in paragraphs 281-295 of the Verita Transcript about Tamzine McMillan, a former colleague who worked on E wing for a short time. These comments were made in response to specific questioning of me during that interview about what I considered to be the inappropriate manner of some members of staff towards detainees. Tamzine was a good example of this because she had a very aggressive and bullying manner towards detained persons. I am asked to provide further examples of Tamzine’s behaviour towards detainees. I



recall one example where a detainee had got hold of the wrong telephone and, instead of calmly asking him to return it, she grabbed it out of his hand and shouted at him in an aggressive manner. The incident was subsequently escalated into a full blown control and restraint when in my opinion it could have been dealt with calmly.

## **Management**

22. Paragraphs 268 and 328 of the Verita Transcript record my comments that Steve Skitt (i) was homophobic towards me and (ii) leant on a witness to change her story, was corrupt and had CCTV evidence removed so that it could not be found. The only clarification I would like to make is that I have subsequently learned that the CCTV evidence was not removed but had been automatically deleted due to the length of time it took for my complaint to be acknowledged and investigated. I have no further details to add to these comments other than to confirm I maintain these allegations.
23. During the interview with Verita I explained that before my official grievance I had made a complaint to Ben Saunders about Guyatri Mehraa's bullying behaviour towards colleagues and detainees, and was told to "*shut up and don't say anything*" [VER000219, paras 385-390]. I confirm that this is what happened. I am asked to comment on his management style. I believe he was a figurehead or puppet figure but Steve Skitt was the person who was running Brook House. As far as I am aware Ben Saunders did not take any action as a result of my warning that detained persons were being bullied.
24. I am asked to give my opinion of the level of involvement by the SMT on E wing. In my experience, the SMT would come down to E wing to talk to detainees on Rule 40 removal from association, which could happen daily. Outside of this duty it would be rare to see anyone from SMT. I believe the SMT should have been more involved in the operation of all of the wings, not just E wing.

25. I have been asked to provide any additional comments which I consider to be relevant to this Inquiry. As I state in paragraph 16, I believe that Brook House was a place in which certain staff were protected to the detriment of others, and bullying and aggressive behaviour was encouraged by management. It is my view that the problems that were revealed by the Panorama programme will not be addressed until the individual responsible for running the centre are no longer there.

<b><u>Statement of Truth</u></b>	
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	David waldock
Signature	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <small>DocuSigned by:</small>  <b>Signature</b>  <small>7004870492004FC...</small> </div>
Date	19/3/2022