

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

First Witness Statement of Graham Purnell

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 16 February 2022

I, Graham Purnell (DOB: DPA), will say as follows:

Background

1. I have been asked to give a statement to the Inquiry as a result of my former employment as a Detainee Custody Manager (DCM) at Brook House. I make this statement in addition to the questionnaire I submitted to the Inquiry dated 22 July 2021 (the **Questionnaire**). I worked at Brook House from 2009 until 2016, when I was transferred to Tinsley House. During the period between 1 April 2017 and 31 August 2017 (the **Relevant Period**), I worked at Tinsley House.
2. At paragraph 16 of the Questionnaire I describe an occasion in which I reported a member of staff to management for use of excessive force, and he was later dismissed following an investigation. The Inquiry has asked me set out who this member of staff was; when it occurred; and who I reported it to. The member of staff's first name was Leon; unfortunately I cannot recall his last name, or when this occurred. I made the report to my senior manager Neil Davis.

Allegations made by D643

3. The Inquiry has asked me to respond to a number of allegations made by D643 in his statement to the Inquiry [DL0000228]. D643 alleges that following cancelled deportation flights officers (including myself) would become frustrated, aggressive or make comments towards detainees suggesting that they were trying

to avoid returning to their country of origin [para 35]. It would be a daily occurrence for detainees to have their flights cancelled for various reasons. I do not recognise the allegation that officers would become angry and frustrated about this. I refute the allegation that I made comments of this nature towards D643.

4. D463 alleges in his statement at paras 76-77:

"My recollection of this incident is that once I had come round from passing out on the floor I heard Graham Purnell, a G4S officer, say to me, 'why don't you go home you fucking nigger, why are you pretending that you are sick?'"

"I was very unwell at the time and was falling in and out of consciousness. I recall that four officers (including Graham Purnell) lifted me up and strapped me into a chair using plastic straps. Then all four of them lifted up the chair and escorted me from D wing to E wing."

5. I have no recollection whatsoever of the incident D643 is describing. I have never stereotyped a detainee or treated them differently because of their nationality. I would never use the term 'nigger.' I completely refute the allegations made against me by D643.

Allegations made by DCO Callum Tulley

6. The Inquiry has also asked me to respond to a number of allegations made by former DCO Callum Tulley in his statement to the Inquiry [INQ0000052]. DCO Tulley describes an incident (at paras 63-67) in which I allegedly instructed officers to restrain a detainee who was peacefully protesting the lack of progress in his immigration case because I did not want myself and other officers to be delayed going home at the end of a shift.
7. I have no recollection of the incident DCO Tulley is referring to. Whenever a restraint is carried out, a use of force report is completed by every member of staff

present. These reports are completed as soon as reasonably practicable after the incident whilst the incident is still fresh in the officer's memory, and sent to the Home Office within 24 hours for review. There should also be body worn camera footage of a restraint such as this. In order to respond properly to this allegation I would request to see the reports and footage connected with the alleged restraint.

8. I did not describe detainees in disparaging terms to DCO Tulley on numerous occasions and called them "*cunts*," as he also alleges.
9. DCO Tulley gave evidence about an incident in which I allegedly mocked a vulnerable detainee in March 2016 (see para 194 of INQ000052). DCO Tulley alleged that I offered a detainee toilet roll in a mocking tone as he was "*sat naked on the bed shivering and covered in faeces*." He also alleged either myself or DCM Roffey turned the electricity off leaving him sitting in darkness.
10. I strenuously deny these allegations. I do not recall the incident and I deny that I would ever have acted in that way. If a detainee was conducting what was known as a '*dirty protest*' he would be placed on a Rule 42 in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU), and there should be a document log which would detail contact with officers. I have not been provided with any evidence or details other than hearsay comments to respond to. There are other details of DCO Tulley's account which do not make sense, for example, it was not possible to turn off the electricity from the wing office as he describes; and the detainee would have been in the CSU if he was conducting a protest of this nature. If an incident of this nature had taken place as DCO Tulley described, I would have expected him to report it to management immediately so that action could have been taken.
11. The Inquiry has put to me that DCO Tulley alleges that I shouted "*bend them up*" and "*twist his wrist*" prior to a restraint and called a detainee a "*fucking idiot*" [CPS000024, p4-5]. I have been provided no further detail of when I am supposed to have made these comments. I refute them entirely and deny that I would ever have made remarks of this nature.

12. In his evidence to the Inquiry DCO Tulley alleged that a female member of staff made a complaint that I was stealing cash that was sent to detainees, and that she was punished and her concerns not taken seriously [INQ000108, p2]. This allegation is entirely false. I can recall an occasion when I noticed that there was cash missing from the wing office, and I reported this immediately to the Security team. My report should be available for review. I believe this must be the occasion DCO Tulley is referring to, albeit with mistaken facts. As I recall, the cash had been brought down from the post room and had gone missing. I believe the female DCO Tulley refers to had made a mistake and left it unattended, although my memory may not be clear about that. She was not removed from her duties or disciplined in any way as DCO Tulley alleges. She went off sick shortly afterwards which was unrelated. The Security team interviewed all staff on the wing that day in relation to the missing cash so the reports should be available to assist in clarifying the details.

13. The Inquiry has asked me to comment on DCO Tulley's remarks that I was close friends with Juls Williams and socialised with him outside of work [INQ000052, p18]. I would have the occasional drink with Juls, although I would not describe it as a close friendship. This did not in any way affect my ability to carry out my role. I do not accept that this would have prevented DCO Tulley from making a complaint about me to G4S. I have no doubt that if a complaint had been made about me to Juls Williams, he would have investigated it in an appropriate and professional manner.

Allegations made by Owen Syred

14. In his statement to the Inquiry Owen Syred alleges that he witnessed me bully another member of staff, DCO Vimal Limbachiya, by laying into him and accusing him of not doing his job properly during roll count [INN000007, p22]. This issue was raised as a formal grievance and investigated by Chris Milliken, Operations Manager. The investigation concluded that DCO Limbachiya should have remained present in his area of work until roll count had been called correct


before seeking to leave the site. In the grievance response to DCO Limbachiya Mr Milliken noted: *"I agree with DCM Purnell that your approach to your duties and the lack of assistance offered to your team was unacceptable"* [CJS0073294, p2]. The investigation also found that my approach to raising these performance issues was not acceptable, which I admit. I had words with the officer in front of colleagues which was not professional. To provide some context, DCO Limbachiya used to find it funny to deliberately delay the roll count or miscount, which meant that detainees would be delayed in going to lunch or unlocked. This was very frustrating and had a knock-on effect across the centre. I accept that my actions were not professional on this occasion. DCO Limbachiya's complaint was addressed and resolved through mediation.

15. The Inquiry has put to me that on an unknown occasion I boasted to an unidentified friend of Owen Syred that *"if any of the detainees got out of hand they were given a good kicking."* I do not know who I am alleged to have made this comment to, when or in what context, but I deny that I would ever have made a comment of this nature. This is complete hearsay. Owen Syred also claims that I said to him in 2014 that *"when you come back [to Brook House] you're going to love it because they have put more beds in the rooms and there will be loads more fights."* This is not only completely untrue but also factually inaccurate as the extra beds were not installed until 2016.

16. In his witness statement to the Inquiry Owen Syred claims that in 2010 I decided that a detainee would be forcibly removed even though Owen Syred felt that he may be able to persuade him to leave voluntarily, leading to him screaming for 45 minutes and suffering a broken arm. This is completely untrue. If a detainee had broken their arm there would be official reports and officers would have been interviewed about this. I have not been provided with any use of force reports to help me to identify the detainee I am alleged to have forcibly removed. If these allegations were true I would have expected Owen Syred to report my actions 12 years ago so that they could have been investigated.

Other allegations against me

17. I have reviewed documents CJS0073379, CJS0073156 and CJS0073137, which record that I was dismissed in April 2018 for gross misconduct following allegations of suggestive behaviour and comments towards female colleagues in 2017. I was not satisfied with the investigation process. There was no evidence to support some of the allegations and the others were taken completely out of context. The investigation took so long that I had already handed in my notice and found a new job by the time of the second disciplinary hearing, which is why I was not in attendance. The disciplinary hearing took place in my absence shortly before the expiry of my notice period and I was dismissed. I did not continue with the appeal as I had already started a new job.

<u>Statement of Truth</u>	
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	Graham Purnell
Signature	 Signature
Date	23/3/2022