

Introduction

Brook House is an immigration removal centre (IRC) situated near Gatwick Airport. Brook House and a neighbouring IRC, Tinsley House, are both operated by G4S and are collectively known as Gatwick IRC. At the time of this inspection, Tinsley House was closed for refurbishment and some of the detainees, and most of the staff, had been temporarily moved to Brook House. The last inspection was in May 2013. The centre holds adult male detainees, and at the time of this inspection there were just under 400 being held there.

As with all immigration removal centres, the major challenge for the staff was to manage the frustration felt by many of the detainees at the length of their detention and the uncertainty surrounding their future. We found that the average length of detention at Brook House had increased substantially from 28 days to 48 days. Surprisingly, there did not appear to have been any analysis or investigation as to why this had happened. In the absence of such analysis, it was hard to see how detention periods could be systematically reduced and the inevitably negative outcomes for detainees mitigated. As we point out in the section of this report dealing with casework, in addition to the overall concern about the length of detention, there were also some serious delays apparent in some individual cases.

Aside from the delays in casework, our major concern was about the physical environment in which detainees were held. The residential units very closely resembled the conditions found in prisons, and these were exacerbated by poor ventilation and unsatisfactory sanitary facilities.

This report makes a number of detailed recommendations about the treatment of detainees and the conditions in which they are held. I would add a cautionary note on an issue that is not the subject of a specific recommendation but has the potential to adversely affect the conditions in which some detainees are held: the proposal to bring into use the third bed which has been installed in 60 of the two-person cells. Many staff and detainees were of the view that this would lead to a decline in living standards. This is a view shared by inspectors.

Overall, this was an encouraging inspection. The centre had improved upon the standards we found at the last inspection, and on this occasion was assessed as 'reasonably good' in all four of our healthy establishment tests. This also marks excellent progress from the standards we were seeing at Brook House when it first opened. There is no doubt in my mind that the standards now being observed at the centre are the result of a great deal of hard work by the management and staff. They should be congratulated on their efforts and I hope are encouraged by this report to maintain and build upon the clear improvements they have made.

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