

Report on a full announced inspection of

Brook House Immigration Removal Centre

15 – 19 March 2010

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

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1st Floor, Ashley House
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Introduction

Brook House immigration removal centre at Gatwick airport opened in March 2009. It is run by G4S and holds around 400 male detainees. New custodial establishments frequently experience early difficulties as staff and detainees get used to their new surroundings and each other. However, by the time of this first full announced inspection, a year after the centre opened, managers could be expected to have resolved teething problems. Instead, we were disturbed to find one of the least safe immigration detention facilities we have inspected, with deeply frustrated detainees and demoralised staff, some of whom lacked the necessary confidence to manage those in their care. At the time of the inspection, Brook House was an unsafe place.

Our surveys, interviews and observations all evidenced a degree of despair amongst detainees about safety at Brook House which we have rarely encountered. Bullying and violence were serious problems and – unusually for the immigration detention estate – drugs were a serious problem. Many detainees were ex-prisoners and a number compared their experience in Brook House negatively to that in prison.

There had been significant staff turnover, particularly following an outbreak of serious disorder the previous summer. While many staff tried hard to maintain order and control, many felt embattled and some lacked the confidence to manage bad behaviour. A number of staff reported feeling unsupported by managers, and detainees claimed that some staff were bullied by more difficult detainees. As a result, it appeared that management of detainees was more confrontational than we would expect. Use of force was high, separation was often used as a punishment, contrary to the Detention Centre Rules, and freedom of movement had been restricted in an attempt to combat violence.

Many safety procedures were not yet sufficiently robust. Reception was stark, room sharing risk assessments were inconsistent, first night procedures were inadequate, there was no formal induction, violence reduction arrangements were nascent, response to security intelligence was slow, dynamic security was weak and there was no drugs strategy. However, those at risk of self-harm were well cared for and there was access to UKBA staff in relation to immigration concerns.

Brook House had been built to typical category B prison standards and was noisy and austere. Superficially, relationships between most staff and detainees were reasonable, but interaction was limited and staff needed more support and training in working with detainees. There was no personal officer scheme, little confidence in the complaints system, a lack of forums in which detainees with limited English could raise concerns and obtain information, and too little use of translation services. Diversity structures were underdeveloped, but there was generally good faith provision. Healthcare was reasonable, although mental health services required development.

There had been limited investment in activity places as Brook House had been designed on the assumption that detainees would stay for only a short time before removal or release. In reality, many stayed for lengthy periods. There were insufficient activity and education places, and the breadth and depth of provision was particularly poor for those staying more than a few weeks. There was some paid work but there were long waiting lists. The library was adequate and the fitness suites were good, but there was no sports hall.

Welfare arrangements were in their infancy. There was good access to the internet, post and faxes but there were problems with the phones issued by the establishment. Visits

arrangements were generally good. There was no multi-disciplinary risk management of those about to be removed to minimise difficulties and distress. We found two oppressive holding rooms for detainees about to be removed and who were deemed recalcitrant: these lacked any formal governance and needed to be decommissioned immediately.

The challenges of opening a new immigration removal centre should not be under-estimated, particularly with inexperienced staff and challenging detainees, many of them ex-prisoners. The challenge at Brook House was significantly compounded by poor design which built in boredom by providing too little purposeful activity on the erroneous assumption that detainees would be staying only a few days. But none of this can excuse the fundamentally unsafe state of Brook House, which must be urgently addressed by G4S and UKBA. In particular, staff need more support and visible leadership, order and control must be restored to ensure safety, relationships and dynamic security must be improved, and steps must be taken to provide more activities and better welfare support.

Anne Owers
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

June 2010

Fact page

Task of the establishment

Immigration removal centre for male detainees

Location

Gatwick Airport, West Sussex

Contractor

G4S

Number held

401 (12 March 2010)

Certified normal accommodation (CNA)

426

Operational capacity

426

Escort provider

G4S

Last inspection

Not applicable

Brief history

Brook House opened in March 2009 and is a purpose-built immigration removal centre with a prison design. The centre was designed to hold detainees for no more than 72 hours. The centre exclusively accommodates male detainees.

Description of residential units

The centre has four wings. Three wings have three landings and the fourth two landings. The ground floor of the fourth wing is used for removal from association and temporary confinement accommodation. There are four small outdoor areas for fresh air and exercise. There is no sports hall, but there are three fitness rooms.