

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

Witness Statement of **D393**

I, **D393** **DPA** of **DPA** will say as follows:

Introduction

1. I am providing this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006. The facts stated within this statement are within my own knowledge and belief save where otherwise stated. This witness statement has been prepared with my solicitors Deighton Pierce Glynn via video call.
2. I am a national of Sierra Leone. I was detained at Brook House on two occasions, once in 2015 and once in 2017. It was all a very long time ago and I am having trouble remembering the exact dates. It is also very difficult for me to remember what happened in which period, and sometimes it is difficult to remember whether the events I recall happened at Brook House or at another detention centre.
3. I believe I was detained at Brook House during the Relevant Period, between approximately 16 August 2017 and 24 August 2017, when I was forcibly removed to Sierra Leone. I was also detained at Brook House on an earlier occasion in 2015 and I was then moved to The Verne sometime in late 2015 and into 2016, but I do not recall the exact dates.
4. I believe the chronology and details of my detention will be in my Home Office file and my medical files, but I do not have these and neither do my solicitors at Deighton Pierce Glynn.

Witness Name: **D393**
Statement No: First
Exhibits: None

5. I was born a premature baby which has caused me health problems throughout my life; I have always needed more healthcare than others. I suffer from physical and mental health issues as well as learning disability. I was diagnosed with ADHD as a child, and I also suffer from depressive disorders with psychotic features, anxiety, and auditory hallucinations. I also have epilepsy, a condition that causes me frequent seizures. These were all ongoing conditions during my detention at Brook House both in 2015 and 2017.
6. I remember I had one epileptic seizure while at Brook House. I basically went into a fit and started having auditory hallucinations, hearing voices. I was in my cell on my own when I had the fit and I passed out for a little while. When I came to, I went into recovery position until I started feeling better. I tried to see Healthcare on the same day to let them know but I couldn't get an appointment on the same day. I think I only got an appointment the next day. I told them about my epileptic seizure and they wrote it in their notes. I believe it wasn't until a few weeks later when I was taken to a hospital where I saw a doctor.

Physical environment

7. I don't remember much about the induction process when I was at Brook House. I believe I stayed on all of the wings at one point or another during my two periods of detention at Brook House. I mostly remember being held on E Wing, but I am not sure whether that was in 2015 or 2017 or both. I am told that the few records shown to my solicitors by the Inquiry indicate that during my detention at Brook House in 2017, I was held on B Wing.
8. I remember sharing cells with other detained people but also being placed in cells by myself. It was very claustrophobic, particularly when sharing, as the cells are small. I remember the toilet did not have a door which meant that I could see and smell everything when my roommates were using it and the same for when I used it. It was degrading. There was no freedom or dignity at all in

Witness Name:	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">D393</div>
Statement No:	First
Exhibits:	None

Brook House. From memory, the cells I stayed in did not have windows which opened.

9. I am told that there is a Brook House Shift Handover note dated 18 August 2017 [CJS001303] that records I should have a single room to myself. I think this was because I was considered to be at high risk if placed in a shared cell. I do not remember undergoing this specific assessment nor do I know why this decision was taken. I cannot remember if I knew at the time why the decision was taken.
10. I am also told that the same Shift Handover note dated 18 August 2017 [CJS001303] records that I was on a Supported Living Plan due to my epilepsy. I do not recall what this Supported Living Plan did for me. I think I might have been made because of my learning disability. However, I can't remember being given any support for my learning disability or my epilepsy while at Brook House.

Healthcare

11. I have explained above that I have ADHD. Having ADHD makes me restless and unable to sustain attention or concentration on tasks. I also suffer from impulsive behaviour that can often be misunderstood as rudeness, and this makes me very easily agitated. My understanding is that ADHD is not something that can be cured, but it can be managed with appropriate support, advice, and medication. I did not receive any of this while I was at Brook House. I don't think the staff had awareness of how this condition shows itself and the difficulties it causes.
12. The healthcare at Brook House was inadequate. My conditions were known to the staff and yet getting proper healthcare was very difficult. I believe the medication I was receiving while I was at Brook House were tablets for the epilepsy and some anti-psychotic drugs. I don't remember the name of my

Witness Name:

Statement No:

Exhibits:

D393

First

None

medication, but I believe one of them might have been olanzapine, which I am still taking. I don't remember the name of the other medication I was on. I am unsure if I was receiving any medication for ADHD. Other than the anti-psychotic medication and the epilepsy medication which the staff at Brook House must have read about in my medical records, I did not receive treatment from the mental health team. They did not try to understand my mental health issues and help me. They only gave me tablets, and even those were not always given.

13. While I was out in the community, I was in charge of taking my own medication. Despite explaining on numerous occasions to staff at Brook House that I needed my tablets with me, to treat my various conditions, they refused me in-possession medication. I had previously been allowed in-possession medication while at the Verne so I do not understand why staff at Brook House refused to do the same.
14. Not being allowed to have my medication in possession was demeaning and meant that I was refused my medication on occasions. I remember being slightly late to pick-up my medication a few times. On one occasion I was late because I had been on the phone to my solicitor, and because I was late healthcare refused to give me my medication. I felt like they were trying to punish me instead of helping me get treatment. I also recall an occasion being given the wrong medication. I went to collect my tablets, but soon after I took them I begun having dizzy spells and felt very sick. I went back to healthcare who explained that I was having an allergic reaction and that was due to having been given the wrong medication. They did not apologise. They just switched it for the right medication.
15. During nighttime lockdowns, when I felt unwell, I would knock on my door and ask for a doctor, but I would usually be met by aggression from officers who either told me to stop banging on the door and get back to whatever I was doing,

Witness Name: D393
Statement No: First
Exhibits: None

or that they were under-staffed and there wasn't anyone onsite to help me. There was a bell in my cell, which was supposedly there to alert the officers if we needed anything during lockdown. However, in my case, they always ignored my calls, which meant that I had to resort to knocking the door to get their attention. On some occasions after I had knocked on the door for a while the officers would eventually come, but they were very annoyed that I had been insisting on getting their attention. On other occasions they would just ignore me and never come so I would have to wait until the end of lockin to get medical help.

16. The lockdowns were 10-11 hours long and this was particularly difficult for me due to my ADHD. Having ADHD means that I generally experience restlessness, I am unable to relax, I feel very fidgety, and I become irritable very easily. All these feelings became worse during lockdowns. I remember I had very intense, intrusive thoughts and was hearing voices during lockdowns.

17. My mental health declined during my detention at Brook House in 2017. It got so bad that I self-harmed by cutting my arm with a razor blade. I self-harmed when I was by myself in my room, and no one saw me at the time. The officers saw the blood on my sheets at a later stage but did not make any enquiries or check if I needed healthcare. My solicitors have asked if I recall being monitored under ACDT. I remember being placed on ACDT at some point in immigration detention and I believe that was because of my epilepsy. Being on ACDT meant that someone had to come check on me every 10-15 minutes or so. I found that intrusive at times, as I could be using the toilet and an officer would just walk in.

Treatment

Use of force/Abuse

18. I did not feel safe at Brook House, mostly due to the levels of violence there.

Witness Name:	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 2px;">D393</div>
Statement No:	First
Exhibits:	None

19. While I was in immigration detention there was an incident during which I was assaulted by a group of other detained individuals in my cell. I think that was during my detention at Brook House. They attacked me in my cell because they knew there was no CCTV there. I am still unsure why they attacked me, as I had never really spoken to them before the event. I lost a lot of blood because of the injuries from that attack. I can't be sure whether the other detained people were using weapons to attack me, but it felt like I was receiving heavy blows with an object or maybe fists. They might have used rocks or batteries placed in socks - these things were used as weapons by detained people at Brook House. I defended myself as best I could, before hearing the alarm over a speaker being sounded. I believe the alarm was sounded by the officers. Prior to the alarm sounding, officers came to my cell and saw what was happening, but they went away and closed the door behind them, leaving me to receive further violence from the other detainees. After some time, I believe a number of officers came in and restrained me, by twisting my arm behind my back. They also punched me several times in the back during this restraint process. I don't remember if it was during this incident or another, but I remember officers smashing my head against the wall. Unfortunately, I do not recall names of officers, but I could probably recognise them in pictures.

20. Following this incident, I was punished in various ways. Despite being the one who had been attacked and sustained injuries, I was taken to segregation. I was also placed on closed visits and was told that the reason was because of the incident in which I was attacked. Closed visits means that you only get to see the people visiting you through a transparent wall. It feels like you are in a glass box. This was very difficult for me when my family was visiting because I could not give them a hug and it heightened my anxiety and feelings of isolation. Being punished for something that was not my fault made me very frustrated and I felt helpless.

Witness Name: D393
Statement No: First
Exhibits: None

21. The officers were also physically abusive towards me and towards other detainees on other occasions. Once, the officers hurt my shoulder so badly while they were restraining me that it felt as though they had broken it. I still suffer pain to my shoulder from this incident. I do not recall what healthcare treatment I was provided after that.
22. On another occasion, while being placed in handcuffs to be taken to hospital for treatment related to kidney problems I was having, the handcuffs were put on too tightly, causing me pain. I asked for the handcuffs to be loosened several times but I was refused every time. They said I would have to wait until we got back to the centre as they did not have the keys to loosen the handcuffs, even though it was the same officers who had put the handcuffs on me.
23. I also experienced excessive force being used by Brook House staff when they arrived at my cell in the middle of the night to remove me from the UK without warning. They used shields to restrain me, which I thought was excessive force since I was not resisting. This experience was petrifying. They did not cause me any new injuries, but I remember that they re-opened some old arm injuries they had caused me during the incident described above, when they twisted my arm and restrained me after I had been attacked by the other detained people in my cell.
24. I have also been threatened with violence by a detention officer. I was trying to get together paperwork for my solicitor, rushing between the office where the fax machine was and the library with the computers, when an officer told me that he would "pound me in". I don't know why he spoke to me like this but I did not respond as I knew he was trying to provoke me and I wanted to avoid the conflict.
25. On other occasions, I have witnessed officers being physically abusive towards other detainees, by punching them and twisting their arms. I believe staff took

Witness Name: D393
Statement No: First
Exhibits: None

individuals to segregation, where they used excessive force where others could not witness it.

Verbal and Racist abuse

26. I also experienced a lot of verbal and racist abuse from Brook House officers during the time I was detained there. One incident of racist abuse I can remember clearly is that officers at Brook House would regularly call me the name of a famous Black African footballer, who has a similar name to me. I do not bear any resemblance to this footballer other than that we are both Black Africans. I believe I was being identified in that way on account of my race and I found it insulting and dehumanising.

27. I also very regularly received snide comments from staff, who would point at me and laugh. I can't remember the specifics now because it's been so long and my memory is not so good but I remember the comments made me feel humiliated and scared for my safety.

28. I also witnessed staff regularly bullying other detainees, and in particular those who did not speak English well. Staff would mock those people to their face when they asked questions, laughing at them, and refusing to help them. Again, I don't remember the specifics but I remember that I could understand they were mocking the detainees' inability to speak English.

Searches

29. During my time at Brook House, I was often subjected to strip-searches. I was frequently woken up in the middle of the night to be strip searched, sometimes up to 5 times a week. The searches happened so regularly that I believed and still believe they were part of a routine targeted at me. They sometimes turned violent. On one of these occasions, officers twisted my arm while strip-searching me.

30. I was not usually given a reason for these searches. Once I was told the staff thought I had a smart phone, which I did not. No smart phone was ever found during their searches. Other times I was told that it was just a random search. I was never given a valid justification. They never said they were looking for drugs and they never found any drugs while conducting their search.
31. The strip-searches were not only disruptive but also very humiliating and degrading. The staff would ask me to take my trousers and pants off and make me squat and bend over. I do not remember there being a towel placed in front of me during this process to protect my dignity. I was mortified.

Drugs

32. Spice was openly used at Brook House while I was detained there and staff did not care. It is my personal belief that the staff were even bringing spice into the centre. I believe this because I once heard other detainees talking about how staff were supplying Spice to them. I do not recall if any officers were named or any other information about supply of drugs at Brook House.
33. I am told there is a Security Information Report dated 18 August 2017 (CJS005086) in which DCO Rachel Milburn reported that she had noticed a smell of cannabis outside of my room on the wing landing. I did not take any drugs during my detention at Brook House, but I am aware that my neighbour or neighbours did. I know that the smell could not have been from my room, which I had to myself, as I did not smoke cannabis and it would therefore have to have come from the neighbouring rooms.
34. I mostly kept to myself while at Brook House and tried to survive and focus on my work. I worked in various posts while at Brook House, in the Kitchen, the Servery and as a Cleaner. From memory, that was during both periods of detention at Brook House.

Witness Name:	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 2px;">D393</div>
Statement No:	First
Exhibits:	None

Welfare and other services

35. The welfare service at Brook House during my detention there was inadequate. I thought welfare would be a service providing support and assessing the detainees' welfare needs. The reality was that welfare was overcrowded. Every time I went to welfare, they would turn me away and tell me to come back another time.
36. Given my declining mental health, I found the inability to access welfare when I needed it very stressful and it made my situation at Brook House worse. I believe the majority of welfare support I received while detained at Brook House came from an external organisation called Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group.
37. The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group provided me with emotional support by arranging to visit me. They paid for credit top up on my phone card so I could make calls to my solicitors and my family. They would come to see me while I was held at Brook House and assess whether I had any needs. If I had needs they could not help with, they would refer me on to someone else who could. I found their support very useful, especially given I was not receiving any other welfare support.
38. The internet access at Brook House was also insufficient. It was only accessible when using the library computers. Most of the computers in the library however never worked, so the few remaining working computers were always occupied and I was very often unable to access the internet to communicate with my solicitors.
39. Whilst we were given a mobile phone, the mobile reception at Brook House was appalling, which meant that I could not always call my solicitors or my family. This was very frustrating. A phone call is one of your only contacts with the outside world, and being unable to do that made me feel isolated. There was an

Witness Name: D393
Statement No: First
Exhibits: None

office landline phone that we could use, but again, this phone was not available 24/7 and during the limited time it was available, the queue to use it was huge and I often didn't get to it.

40. While I thought we would have access to legal advice, in reality the situation was very different. I remember sometimes being unable to get documents to my solicitors when they asked me to. This was usually because the computers or the fax machine were not working properly. I do not recall if this had any prejudicial effect on my case but the stress of the possibility of that happening was very real.

Complaints

41. I remember being very scared to make any complaints whilst detained at Brook House. When you are detained there you do not know what you are facing. If you made any complaints at all, you needed to be very careful of what kind of complaints these were. I was very careful not to make any type of complaints against the people making decisions about my immigration status. This is because we all feared repercussions, mainly from the Home Office staff who were deciding our immigration cases. We were also cautious of Brook House officers finding out we had complained about them and retaliating. I don't remember if I actually ever knew for sure that someone had suffered retaliation because they had made a complaint, but I was using my common sense. They control the whole system so you really don't want to mess with them.
42. The only complaint I felt comfortable making to the IMB was about my possessions which had gone missing, in particular all my clothes and my £450 Armani watch which had been a gift from my wife. I felt that the IMB did not take my complaint seriously, saying there was nothing they could do about it.

Witness Name:
Statement No:
Exhibits:

D393
First
None

43. I remember I went on a hunger strike while detained at Brook House. I have very little memory of what that was about, but I remember that no one cared. The officers and healthcare simply ignored it and left me to starve for a while. I have no memory how long it went for but I eventually went back to eating.

44. Being detained at Brook House was a scary period in my life. The treatment I received was very bad and I would not wish it on anyone else.

<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	D393
Signature	<div>Signature</div> <div>D393 [Feb 25, 2022 12:43 GMT]</div>
Date	25/02/2022

Witness Name: **D393**
 Statement No: First
 Exhibits: None