

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF [D180]

I, [D180] of [DPA]
[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, over several phone calls. My solicitors helped me with the dates of events by referring to my records which they have obtained.
2. I am Jamaican and I am with the Church of England. I was born on [DPA] and am now 62 years old. I had been living in the UK for 22 years when I was detained at Brook House. When I lived in the UK I was sometimes known as [D180] [D180]. I can't remember if there are any other names I was known by.
3. I was held at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre ("Brook House") for two years from May 2015 to May 2017. I was detained under immigration powers on 8 May 2015, taken to Brook House and apart from one week when I was held at Colnbrook I remained at Brook House until I was returned to Jamaica as a voluntary return on 16 May 2017.
4. For more than half of the time I spent at Brook House I was disabled by poor vision. I was suffering from cataracts when I arrived at Brook House which made me almost blind. Just before I got detained I had been to Moorfields Eye Hospital in Shoreditch and they told me that I needed a cataract operation. I was due to have an appointment

at the hospital for a check up on my eyes and to give me for a date for surgery, but I was detained before I had that appointment.

5. Whilst detained I underwent two operations to remove the cataracts: the first in September 2015 and the second in August 2016. Until the first operation in September 2015 my limited sight made things very difficult for me at Brook House as I will explain later in this statement. I was nearly blind for these first four months until my initial operation and between my first and second operations I could only see out of one eye. I also suffered from intense pain to my hip and leg due to sciatica and shoulder pain. The pain got worse in detention and made the experience of detention even more difficult for me.
6. In about 2016 I was moved to Colnbrook IRC for an interview with the Jamaica High Commission for travel documents. I was meant to be returned to Brook House the following day but for some reason I was kept in Colnbrook for a whole week on the induction wing. I put in an application to be returned to Brook House because it was hard for me adjust to a new detention centre where I did not know anyone. After a week I was brought back to Brook House. Nobody explained to me why I was kept in Colnbrook for a whole week.

Induction Process

7. When I arrived at Brook House I was almost totally blind. I could only see a short distance in front of me and my vision was very cloudy.
8. I remember that arriving at Brook House was not a nice experience. I had to wait a very long time to be allocated to a wing. I think it was about 1.5 or 2 hours before I was given a room where I could rest.
9. I told the detention staff that I was virtually blind. I was wearing dark glasses and it would have been obvious to anyone that I was having problems getting around. Nevertheless, my solicitors tell me that a Detainee Induction Sheet [HOM017732] completed at 10.19am on the day I arrived was left blank in the section for 'Identified Special Needs' and for 'Welfare issues'.

10. My solicitors also tell me that my medical records show that I was seen by a Healthcare Assistant at 23.05 on the night I arrived at Brook House who noted:

23.05 New admission ... Detainee is partially sighted due to cataract surgery. Wears sunglasses as he states he can see better when the glare from the sun and lights is lessened. When asked how his sight impacts his day to day activities, detainee stated he often stumbles and falls when he is in unfamiliar places. SLP [Supported Living Plan] to be completed. Disability form read aloud to detainee and signed. No IP compact signed as detainee cannot see to read. Detainee complaining of pain in left hip.' [HOM028147_0003].

11. The next morning, I remember having an induction but it was very basic and routine and the officers did nothing to accommodate my disability. I was “shown” where the computers, library, medical centre, yard, and canteen were. I was also “shown” where the welfare office was, and I was given information about the Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group (GDWG) and other services. However, as I was almost blind the induction was not sufficient to orientate myself. I had to learn by myself to navigate around Brook House by counting my steps and using my very limited eyesight.

My everyday difficulties at Brook House before the cataract operations

12. It was very difficult and often frightening for me at Brook House being almost blind. I didn't know anyone there and I couldn't see other detainees properly. I didn't know my way around and couldn't see how to get around. The place was extremely noisy with loud banging of doors and shouting. I felt scared, intimidated and very vulnerable.
13. In the beginning at Brook House I was really struggling by myself to survive. At first I had a cell upstairs. Then I was given a cell on the ground floor because of my sight, but the canteen was upstairs on the second floor. The showers were upstairs too. I had to hold onto the railings in the corridor to make sure that I did not trip up or fall over. Where there were stairs I would hold the railings and make sure that I stepped very carefully. When I wanted to sit down or use the toilet, I had to feel my way with

my hands to find where to sit down. To get to the canteen or the shower I had to find another detainee to accompany me up the stairs.

14. Trying to get around Brook House without eyesight was really challenging. One time I walked into the wall and another time I hit my knee on a wall and it felt very sore for a few days. I went to the medical centre to ask for pain killers but my request was rejected. I am not sure why they rejected my request. I had to keep going back until eventually I got pain killers.
15. It was also very difficult when it came to mealtimes. Before lunchtime we were locked up at 11.45am. Then we would all be released, and we had to line up. We all followed the line to the servery and then we would hand over our plates for the meal we had chosen earlier that day. There would be an officer standing at the servery who would call out the number of the meal that you had chosen. Quite often by the time you get to the food the option that you chose had gone. They would give you the plate which you could take to eat at a table or in your room. I would try and find my way to the nearest table which was difficult with my poor eyesight. It was really difficult to deal with all of this – especially taking hot food on a plate and navigating to a table - but I had to manage because they did not make any adjustments for my disability.
16. Washing and having a shower were also hard because of my very poor eyesight. I had to go up a flight of stairs to get to the shower. I had to make sure that I held on properly to the railings. One time I had a fall, but fortunately I was not injured. The shower room had a little door but it was not very private as you could be seen over the top of the door. I would have to hold onto the wall to find my way into the shower and once inside the shower I would lean on the wall for support. This felt dangerous because the floor was wet. There was no changing room so you would take your towel in with you and change in the room. Normally there was a queue for the shower.
17. From my arrival at Brook House and until my first operation I wore dark glasses because the light hurt my eyes. I bought them before I was detained as they would make my vision a little bit better. Other detainees used to call me D180.

I didn't like to stand out and be different from everyone else but wearing the glasses really helped me to cope.

18. Until my first cataract surgery, I was not able to use the computers or the library without the help of another detainee.
19. Because of my blindness I had to ask for help with paperwork. Officers didn't offer to help me. I had to ask other detainees to read my correspondence and write letters for me or I had go to the Welfare Office and queue for ages to get help with reading and writing. Often the information was personal or confidential, but I could not keep the documents private. I just didn't have any choice.
20. After a while I made friends. They would walk beside me, make sure I was ok going up the steps. I really had to take my time to make sure I didn't miss any. Friends would help me at mealtimes. Generally, people knew my situation, they would say *'do you want to go to the shower? Let me help you up the stairs.'* There was a Nigerian man I became friends with who would help me use the computers
21. I wasn't given any help by detention staff to cope with my disability. Nobody asked me about my visual impairment and my needs. I wasn't given any visual aids or walking stick.
22. None of the officers ever offered to help me up the stairs. I did not ask them for help because I made friends and it was easier to ask a favour of a friend than to ask the officers for help. With the officers there was a risk they would say 'no' or 'later' or make a big deal out of it. It was safer to just ask a friend.
23. I don't remember any officers or healthcare staff asking me about how I was coping with my disability or being at all interested in my difficulties or offering to help in any way. No one suggested I should be seen by an optician. I had to go back to the healthcare centre to say that I really needed to go to the optician. It took me time to work out how to get an optician's appointment. No-one advised me how to get the appointment or what to do so I just had to figure it out by myself.

24. My solicitors tell me that my medical records show that I was seen in healthcare by a Senior Nurse on 11 May 2015 when it was noted '*requesting to see optician booked explained that it will not be till 3/6/15..*' [DPG000037].
25. On 18 May 2015, ten days after I arrived at Brook House, I was seen by Dr Hussein Oozeerally who noted '*c/o bilateral cataracts diagnosed at moorfields*' and that he advised '*cataracts operation would be subject to residency*'. [DPG000037]. He noted that I was experiencing '*left hip pain radiating to the knee*' and that he advised that I should have exercise. However, I could not exercise because I could not see well enough to use the gym and because of my vision it was difficult for me to get to, or to exercise in, the small, crowded courtyards. I don't remember the doctor asking me much if anything about my vision or how I was coping at Brook House.
26. I was seen by an optician about one month after arriving at Brook House. The optician confirmed both my eyes needed operating on. They sent a report to healthcare in Brook House. My solicitors tell me my medical records show the appointment was on 3 June 2015 and that a Healthcare Assistant noted:
- 'Attended Optician clinic here at Brook House. **Optician stated he is blind and needs his cataracts operated on.** Optician will send a report to Dr's at Brook House with his recommendations.'* [DPG000037][emphasis added]
27. I am told an entry on my medical records on 8 June 2015 states:
- 'Seen by optician last week and was recommended that he needs cataracts removed, **blind in both eyes.** Also exerieencing (sic) constant pain in left hip for over 3 months. Overview Notes..1. Refer to GP 2. Contact admin staff regarding referral for cataract surgery and producing his medical report.'* [DPG000037]. [emphasis added]
28. I am told my medical records include an undated report of an optometrist referring to the test carried out on 3 June 2015 which states '*Bilateral Mature Cataracts -- Severely sight impaired....You may feel prompt specialist opinion [illegible].*'

29. After the appointment it felt like everything in relation to my healthcare took a long time.
30. On 19 June 2015 my immigration solicitors, Duncan Lewis, wrote to Brook House explaining that I was falling and stumbling in the detention centre because of my lack of sight [HOM021622].
31. I was becoming depressed and my medical records show that on 21 June 2015 a nurse D. Dowd referred me for a mental health assessment. The reason for referral was *'low mood due to medical situation (decline in vision)'* [HOM028147].
32. I was assessed by a psychiatrist and referred for group therapy. I continued to feel extremely low so I went back to healthcare and explained that I was really depressed and frustrated and then I was prescribed anti-depressants called Mirtazapene but I cannot remember the dose.
33. I went to a drop-in session with GDWG. I am told by my solicitors that there is an entry on the GDWG records that one of their caseworkers saw me on 24 June 2015 and noted:

'Has sciatic nerves, cataracts — blind. Not really receiving enough support in BH. Has to count steps to get to shower, to work out where everything is. Doesn't have to queue to get food, but keeps walking into things. Feeling down, intimidated. Has made app with psychiatrist and been going to therapy. Been prescribed paracetamol, promethazine. Would like visitor, clothes, pc, chase up sol, speak to healthcare a/b optician appointments, welfare a/b walking stick'. [DPG000024]

34. GDWG records note they rang the Brook House Welfare Office that day and were told I was on a Supported Living Plan, was being monitored and had been moved from the First to Ground Floor. A Welfare Officer was to *'speak to diversity dep't and healthcare about walking stick'*.
35. However, I was never given a walking stick or any other disability aid. The only adjustments Brook House made for my disability was to move me to a ground floor

room but as I have explained that was of limited help as I still had to climb stairs to get to the servery and the showers. Officers came to check on me once in the morning and once at night to ask if I needed anything. This was somewhat helpful, but it seemed a bit of a token tick-box exercise. Between these two checks I had to rely on other detainees to help me get around the centre and to undertake daily tasks.

36. An entry on the GDWG records shows I phoned GDWG on 7 July 2015 saying I had been told by healthcare that I didn't need a walking stick because I would probably have cataract surgery soon. On 8 July 2015 GDWG received an email from healthcare at Brook House states:

'We are fully aware of [D180] and the concerns that you have raised. [D180] [D180] has been referred to the local hospital, as im [sic] sure you are aware we will receive an appointment within NHS waiting times, which can be anything up to 18 weeks. Here they will decide whether he requires a walking/support stick, they will also give him the appropriate training for him to be able to use this. We do not offer this training and would be inappropriate for Healthcare at Brook House to issue this. Therefore we will continue to chase and wait for an appointment.' [DPG000024]

37. My eyesight continued to get worse. There is a note on the GDWG records which shows that I called them on 11 August 2015. The note says *"has been put on anti-depressants, cataracts getting worse, now completely blind in one eye"* [DPG000024]. I remember feeling increasingly stressed and scared about it.
38. On 21 September 2015, after over 4 months of being in detention, I finally had surgery on my right eye at East Surrey hospital. I remember feeling really quite scared about the situation and this was made worse because the immigration officers handcuffed me to take me to the hospital and then, during the operation, they handcuffed me to the operating table and to an immigration officer. This was very strange and distressed me because I was not going to be able to move during the operation anyway. I was given a local anaesthetic and had the operation which went well. I was so happy at the time that my right eye was finally being resolved.

39. I was supposed to have a second operation on my left eye two or three weeks later but it was 11 months before I had the operation on my left eye. There were a lot of delays because of a lack of communication between healthcare and the hospital so the operation kept being postponed. This was extremely stressful, upsetting and scary for me because I did not know what was going on.
40. On 26 May 2016 I was not taken to my eye appointment because there was a chickenpox quarantine in Brook House. A nurse told me that I would be given a new appointment but because I missed the appointment the hospital took me off the waiting list. I spoke to a caseworker at GDWG that day and a note of our conversation records:
- “Hospital delayed his eye appointment for security reasons, thenhe [sic] couldn’t go because of chicken pox quarantine. Nurse said still had app. But hospital had taken him off list because missed app. [Redacted] follow up will make formal complaint”. [DPG000024].*
41. I went to healthcare numerous times asking what was going on but I could not get anybody to tell me what was causing the delay. I was trying to chase it up all the time. I probably went to healthcare at least once a week and I was constantly being messed around. I was waiting to be called for the second operation, but nothing happened. As I remember it my Volunteer Visitor from GDWG, Mary Lewis, contacted East Surrey Hospital directly and spoke to the secretary to the ophthalmologist at the centre. She explained that my operation had been really delayed, by months, and the secretary explained that I was no longer on the list. My understanding is that Mary then managed to get me referred back into the hospital. This is mentioned in the GDWG case file which include emails from GDWG to the hospital and healthcare on 31 May 2016 [DPG000024]. I understand that GDWG also made a formal complaint to healthcare at Brook House.
42. The GDWG records show that I was not placed back on the hospital list until around 7 July 2016. I finally had my second surgery on 10 August 2016. I was again handcuffed to an officer and to the table. I then had a follow up appointment on

31 August 2016 where it was decided that I needed glasses. I had a further appointment with an optician and eventually I was given glasses.

43. I was grateful because I could see again and I mentioned this to the immigration officers which is why there is a note saying that [IMB000005_0003]. This is misleading because it does not record how upset I was about how long it took for my second operation to take place. It seemed that it continually got delayed and it was so difficult to get the Healthcare Centre to take it seriously. It was only because Mary Lewis at GDWG stepped in that the second operation went ahead when it did. This meant that I experienced a prolonged period in detention with only one cataract operated on.
44. After my first operation, once I could see better, I was able to use the gym in the detention centre and I started to use the gym every morning. The bike and cross trainer helped to alleviate the pain to my hip and leg and to my shoulder.

Rule 35, unsafe to be detained

45. I never saw a doctor in relation to a Rule 35 report and as far as I am aware no Rule 35 report was prepared about me. I had heard of Rule 35 reports being prepared for other detainees but I didn't think this applied to me. I thought it was just for victims of torture or people who self-harmed. Although I became depressed at Brook House I never tried to harm myself.
46. My solicitors at DPG have explained that doctors at Brook House should prepare a Rule 35 when a person's health is likely to be damaged by detention.
47. The detention and healthcare staff knew as soon as I arrived at Brook House that I had problems with my eyesight and they could see the difficulties I had in coping with detention. They should have told the Home Office but I don't think they did. No detention officer, member of healthcare staff or Home Office case worker suggested I could ask for a Rule 35 report. The optician told healthcare that I was blind in both eyes and it is in my medical records, but the doctors did not do a Rule 35 report. My blindness and the pain to my hip, leg and shoulder made detention very hard for me

and I became depressed. I went often to healthcare about these health problems but as far I know a Rule 35 report was never done.

Physical environment

48. While at Brook House I was detained on A Wing and B Wing. I was never sent to E Wing during my time at Brook House. People who were sent to E Wing spoke about being restrained badly and handcuffed. It sounded very distressing.
49. I always had to share a cell. Although I only moved wings once and rooms twice, my cellmates seemed to change every other week. Repeated changes of cellmate were very distressing. Sometimes my cellmate couldn't speak English. I had cellmates who were from Iraq, Iran or Turkey, and I could not communicate with them. Before my cataract surgery I could not see my cellmates properly. It was disorientating and uncomfortable to have to share a cell and be locked in for long periods of time with someone that I could neither see nor talk with. I would have liked my own cell and this would have really helped with being in a detention centre with my disability. I would have felt a lot more comfortable and safer in my own cell instead of sharing with someone who I could not see. I was never offered a cell to myself, and I did not ask for one because I understood that single cells were only given to extremely violent people.
50. Some cellmates were difficult to share with. That's because people in detention were stressed out, and I mean really stressed out. They were going to be removed from the UK and separated from their loved ones and sometimes they were being sent back to war torn countries or to be tortured or killed. Most would be saying they didn't want to go to another country. Some would say they were certain they would be killed. I had depression and struggled a lot with my own thoughts, but it wasn't just my thoughts that would overwhelm me, it was also the environment and coping with my cellmates stressing out.
51. Some new person would be allocated my cell, and I would try to build a relationship with him, and then all of a sudden, he would be moved – possibly to be deported,

facing the fate that I feared most for myself – and then I would have a new cellmate and so it went on and on and on and on.

52. There was no heating in the cells and we were given only one blanket each which meant that I was often very cold. Sometimes I managed to get another blanket after someone left from an old bed but when there was a room search they would take the extra blanket away. There was a window with bars on the window. Between the two beds there was a table. There was also a TV in the room which had all the channels in English.
53. The toilet was also in the cell separated only by a little piece of plywood. This did not go all the way to the ceiling, it was about 5ft high which meant that if someone was standing on the other side they could see you. There was nothing you could do about the lack of privacy. In the day you could use one of the general toilets but at night or during a lockdown you had to use the toilet in the room. Sometimes someone would use the toilet and it would smell. It was not nice. It didn't seem hygienic.
54. The worst part for me was the experience of being locked in a cell, feeling isolated and scared, and feeling the loss of my liberty. Everyone was locked in their cell for 11 hours each night from around 9:00pm to 8:00am. We were also kept in our cells before lunch and dinner so that the officers could count everyone. If the count was right we would be let out but if the count was not right, there would be a very long delay.
55. If there was an incident we would be locked up for longer. Also if a fight broke out between detainees, or if someone was being moved out of Brook House or to E Wing the time spent in our cells could be extended until the problem was resolved. The longest delays happened when a detainee was being deported and he didn't want to go. Sometimes we were even locked up if someone was visiting from the outside. I think the officers didn't want us talking to the people on the outside. Sometimes when someone self-harmed, or there was some other incident, the staff would lock everyone in their cells. It may have been because there were insufficient staff to deal with the incident and continue supervising activities, though I think it was also

because they did not want us to get riled up over whatever was happening. They didn't want us to see anything. Depending on what the problem was we could be locked up for just another 15 minutes or it could be for another hour.

Activities

56. When my eyesight was poor there were very few activities I could do. There were newspapers which I would try to read but I could only glimpse and see certain words and could focus on only a word or two at a time. Reading would really strain my eyes so I did not do it often. Although access to computers was important in order to deal with matters relating to immigration and bail, before my first cataract operation because I was blind I could not use the computers without help from my Nigerian friend. The gym was important for pain management due to my sciatic nerve problem, but I could not make use of it at all before my first operation.
57. Staff shortages meant that normally the computers, gym and library had very limited access. For example, sometimes I would go to use the computer and it was locked or I would go to get fresh air but the exercise yard would be locked, or I would go to the library, and it would also be locked. Sometimes this was extremely distressing for me. I would be anxious to look up something about my immigration case on the computer, or to prepare an urgent letter, for example to the Home Office, but when I went to use a computer I would find that the room was locked because of a staff shortage.

Access to support and legal advice

58. I have mentioned that I had support from GDWG. One of their visitors came to see me most weeks. I was also referred to Duncan Lewis Solicitors who assisted me with my immigration matters.
59. I made several bail applications while I was in Brook House, sometimes with the assistance of my solicitors. I frequently had to withdraw my applications because of problems with my surety or because I wasn't taken to the bail hearing. It was also very difficult for me to make bail applications because my blindness meant that

I could not read documents. I tried to get help reading my documents from welfare officers at Brook House but I found this difficult. There were only two welfare officers, Octavian and Trisha, so there was always a queue to get help. Sometimes you would be in the queue, but then lunchtime and lock up came around so you had to leave the queue. Sometimes you would queue again in the afternoon, but you still couldn't get to them until the next morning. It took me a little more time to reach welfare than it took others due to my poor vision so I was often at the back of the queue.

60. On 13 January 2017 I signed up for voluntary return. I had been in Brook House for 20 months and was completely fed up. I had been in detention for so long and it was like a never-ending prison sentence. It was the unknown that got to me. I felt like I was never going to get out and nothing was in my control. I decided that it was best for me to go back to Jamaica and try to start a fresh life. On 8 April 2017 I confirmed I wanted to return voluntarily. I was returned voluntarily on 16 May 2017.

Treatment by detention staff

61. There was a big problem with the staff in Brook House and the way they treated the people in detention. I witnessed them mistreating detainees - being aggressive, hostile or racist towards individuals. I found this really distressing because everyone in detention is really vulnerable.
62. I would not say that all of the officers were racists, but some of them were. It wasn't only racism towards Black people as some of the officers also had serious prejudices towards other detainees. There were people of so many different nationalities in Brook House. There was a lot of discrimination towards people who were from Iraq, Iran and other places. The kind of abuse officers would give to individuals included slurs like, "Fuck off back to your country", "Why do you come to this country?" and "Why don't you go back to your own country? You're wasting taxpayers' money".
63. There was one officer, who I think was called Darren Tomsett, who I recognised from the Panorama documentary as being particularly racist and abusive towards

people. I could point this individual out on the programme if needed, he appears after 9 minutes and 11 seconds of the programme.

64. Darren Tomsett was extremely nasty to detainees. He was a very confrontational and appeared to really enjoy using force and restraining detainees. He was racist towards the detainees. For example he would tell people who were applying to stay in the UK that they should just leave and go back to "their country". He did not care about our wellbeing whatsoever and detainees disliked him. Darren was one of the wing officers who would let people out in the morning and lock people up at night. He also worked in the wing office where detainees could go to request toiletries like soap or a toothbrush, toothpaste or apply for clothing. You could buy these things at the shop but the detention centre also provided them for free. You would have to go to the wing office to ask for them. Everyone spoke about how sometimes they would ask Darren for toothpaste, and he would say that there was none but another officer would find it. I began buying toiletries with money which friends and family sent me, and later, after my operations, with money I made working the laundry room, just so that I did not have to go to the office to ask Darren for anything. Life was less distressing if I avoided him.
65. On at least two occasions my room was selected to be searched. Each time I was in my cell and the officers, about 3 or 4, came in and said "cell search" and I had to leave and stand outside by the door. I could hear them inside in my cell searching and talking to each other. I have no idea why my cell was searched as I was not using drugs and no banned items were found in my room. I think they were just random checks.
66. I felt very low after my room was searched. Officers would remove any excess bedding and throw it into the corridor where other detainees would take it. Officers would throw my clothing all over the bed and my other possessions would be scattered everywhere. Then they would leave the room without clearing up the mess. I felt like I was not being treated with any respect, like I was not human in some way. I also felt like I had no safe space of my own where I could relax or have any privacy.

Use of Force

67. I frequently saw officers using physical force against detainees. Often this was to try and restrain detainees because, for example, a fight had broken out in the detention centre or someone did not want to be removed. The officers would frequently use far too much force. Sometimes five or six officers would restrain a detainee and then send him to E Wing for a week or two and then bring him back. This felt wrong. In my opinion if detainees were aggressive this was often because they were extremely frustrated or had mental health difficulties and needed longer term support.
68. On one occasion a lot of force was used on a Jamaican man when officers attempted to remove him. The Jamaican man did not mention whether it was Brook House officers or escort officers who used force against him and restrained him, but he did tell me the pilot did not want him on the plane and that is why he was brought back to Brook House. On his return he was moved onto E Wing for two days and then moved back to the wing. When he was returned to the wing he showed me his wrists which he said had been damaged by handcuffs. They were really cut up and swollen. You could see the dried blood and the cuts on his wrists. It was quite shocking. I think that was in 2016.
69. I was also told about the excessive force used on individuals when they were kept in isolation including one incident when a detainee was punched by officers. I think the detainee was punched on E Wing, rather than before he was taken to E Wing. That is because this is the sort of conduct that would cause a riot if others had been around to see it.

Rule 40 (removal from association)

70. I was never placed on Rule 40. I did everything I could to stay out of trouble and keep my head down. It made my life easier.

ACDT, hourly observations, etc

71. I was never placed on ACDT, hourly observations or suicide watch. Normally people would be taken to E Wing if they were on suicide watch which did not make sense to me because E Wing was also where people who were being aggressive or about to be deported were taken. I don't know why all these people would be taken to E Wing. I think the detention centre should have a wing for more vulnerable people because people come in, people try to kill themselves, people get sick or are scared of removal. It is not right that these people are kept in the same place as those who are more aggressive.

Drugs

72. I didn't use or try drugs while I was in Brook House and because I was in a non-smoking cell none of my cellmates smoked spice in the cell. Spice was widely in use at Brook House. It would have been pointless to speak to officers about that. The officers already knew that it was being smoked by detainees, but they did not really care. In fact it helped the officers, in a way, because users would forget that they were being detained.
73. There were many fights between people from different countries due to the stress caused by detention and the prevalence of spice. Spice is very scary, it has a really strong effect on the people using it. The detention centre was loaded with spice. Those using spice would frequently collapse in the middle of Brook House. Officers and healthcare would attend and usually try to deal with it themselves. I got the impression that they were trying to avoid those outside Brook House from realising how severe the drug problem was so they would try to avoid calling ambulances. It really felt as though everything that was happening at Brook House was kept under wraps to try and protect the officers and staff there.
74. Although I was aware of which detainees were dealing spice I was not sure about who was supplying it. I heard from other detainees that staff were involved in supplying it and that two staff, a black male and white female, were involved. I also heard that the white female staff member underwent disciplinary procedures in

relation to this. I heard a lot of people say that the officers used to bring in the spice and that they would get paid for doing so.

75. The spice flooded Brook House. I frequently saw people collapse because they had taken too much spice. They would just pass out. For example, I remember one time when I was exercising in the yard and a detainee suddenly collapsed. When that happened, we would all be taken back to our cells for lock up. It seemed that they did not want detainees to see what was going on. Sometimes an ambulance was called and the detainee would be taken away and other times the detainee would be resuscitated in Brook House. Except for those taken to hospital, all the people that collapsed from spice were always taken to E Wing.

Protests and Food refusals

76. I didn't take part in any protests, but other people did. One detainee named [D3545] [D3545] went onto the mesh, the netting in the stairwell, and he was there all night. It was dark so you could not really see what was going on. He was a Jamaican man who I knew quite well who was in detention for about a year. The officers were not allowed to go onto the netting so there were about 5 or 6 officers standing in the corridor trying to talk him down. This started just before lockdown and he was there until about 1am. I could hear the officers talking and shouting and the other detainees in the cells were banging their doors. [D3545] was deported by force and has since been shot and killed in Jamaica. I know this because I saw his photo in the news in 2017 or 2018.
77. I never refused to eat and drink, but I knew people who went on food and fluid refusal. When someone went on hunger strike, they were taken to E Wing to have a doctor monitor them or to another detention centre. After that often I would not see the detainee again and would not know what happened to them. I remember one man, I think he was from Iraq, who refused to eat because he did not want to go back to his country. He was put in isolation. I found this upsetting - that someone could be put into isolation and then I would never see or hear from them again. It made me feel even more vulnerable and like everything was out of my control.

Clinical care issues

Hip, leg and shoulder problems

78. I have described the enormous difficulties I had getting treatment for cataracts. While I was in detention I was in significant pain to my left hip which spread down to my knee and I also had pain to my shoulder. The pain in my hip was a constant pain and the pain in my leg was a sharp, shooting pain. Walking was very painful.
79. A doctor at Brook House told me my leg pain was due to sciatica. I was given ibuprofen which didn't help much. I was advised to use the gym but I could only do that once I had surgery in my right eye so that I could use the equipment safely. I was in a lot of pain but every time I went to healthcare they just prescribed me ibuprofen. I didn't feel that I was being taken seriously by healthcare at all and this was extremely frustrating.
80. The pain in my shoulder was unbearable, especially at night. After some time I was referred to Crawley Hospital in relation to my shoulder pain. There is a letter on my GDWG file which shows that I had an appointment at the Shoulder & Elbow Clinic at Crawley hospital on 29 March 2016 which I missed, I cannot remember why this was, but that this was rescheduled for 27 May 2016 which I attended.
81. At the appointment I had an X-Ray of my shoulder and the doctor said that my shoulder was frozen and he gave me some exercises to do. I did these exercises but felt that they did not really work and it was not until I came back to Jamaica that the pain finally went away. I think the pain was linked to the stress of being detained.

Mental Health

82. As I have mentioned, during my detention at Brook House I developed depression, which I had not experienced before. I went to healthcare frequently explaining that I was feeling low and depressed. I was referred for group therapy and prescribed anti-depressants which continued to take until I came to Jamaica and then I stopped as they made me drowsy.

83. Despite this I had two Fitness to Fly assessments by the Home Office on 29 May 2016 [HOM022476] and 29 March 2017 [HOM017557] which said that I did not have any self-harm or mental health issues. However, on 17 October 2016 I was assessed as a Level 2 Adult at Risk (AAR) in a Detention Review document [HOM016747]. Confusingly, on 8 April 2017 I had another Fitness to Fly assessment [HOM016803] which also said that I did not have any self-harm or mental health issues but then my last Detention Review, [HOM017144] on 28 April 2017 referred to the AAR assessment.
84. The three Fitness to Fly assessments were not correct because I had depression and I was feeling very low and the officers knew about this from 25 June 2015. I didn't have any self-harm tendencies so that part is correct, but it was not correct to say that I didn't have any mental health issues at all. I had depression while in detention and this continued beyond my cataract surgery.
85. Because of my depression I went to a therapy group while I was at Brook House. The sessions were held once a week on Mondays. These were led by woman who did not work in the centre who came from outside. The numbers would vary but there was normally around 6 to 8 people. I think that if the sessions had been in other languages more people would have come but because they were only in English, the numbers were low. I went sometimes and I would try to be helpful to the other detainees when I went. It was helpful to talk to others. There was a note on my file about these sessions which said that:
- “**D180** always provides positive contributions to the group discussions. His long term stay at Brook House puts him in a good position to share with other group members, ways of surviving and managing stress”* [HOM021609_0001].
86. In general, there was not enough medical care in Brook House. The nurses and other healthcare staff were often rude or unhelpful. I often felt as though I was not taken seriously, and the delays to obtain treatment could be so long that I felt really scared, like I did not have any control. I didn't really trust the medical professionals at Brook House but I had nowhere else to go.

Welfare support

87. In general, the welfare support was not adequate at all. Not just for me but also for others in detention. I think a lot of the problems stemmed from there being insufficient welfare staff – there were normally only two members of staff on duty – who had to deal with the welfare needs of all the individuals detained at Brook House. This meant that I would frequently have to queue for hours or come back another day to see someone from welfare. The welfare support was essential because the welfare officers would deal with queries on everything – asylum applications, bail applications, flight information and the general problems and complications in detention. They provided crucial advice and it was really shocking that they only had two people working there and the long queues to see them were unacceptable.
88. There was an officer in the Welfare Department called Octavian and a female officer called Trisha who were both very helpful compared to the other officers. Octavian would read documents and letters out loud to me because I could not read. These two officers seemed to feel for detainees and could tell when people were stressed out.

Complaints and oversight

89. On 13 January 2017 I informed the Home Office that I wanted to return to Jamaica. I was detained for another four months before I was returned on 16 May 2017.
90. Originally, a flight was booked for me to fly in March 2017 but for some reason this flight was cancelled. The Home Office never explained to me why this flight was cancelled.
91. Another flight was arranged for 28 April 2017 but that too was cancelled without explanation. I was very frustrated which is why I wrote this complaint:

“I was supposed to go back to Jamaica today on VS65 and the wing officer told me my flight is cancelled. This is the second time around. I want to leave the country I would like to know what is going on.” [HOM021700_0002]

92. I don't recall receiving any response to that complaint. I later learnt that the flight was cancelled because my date of birth had been recorded incorrectly by the Home Office on the booking form. As it did not match the travel document the airline refused to take me. GDWG helped me by calling the Home Office who said that I would have to go to the High Commission to get another travel document issued.
93. There is an extract of a conversation that I had with Callum Tulley that day, 28 April 2017, in the transcript of his video diaries [TRN0000039]. Callum Tulley describes our conversation and says:

[D180 and I] were speaking just a few days ago about his ticket home, which was meant be for today, and he was excited. and i was actually quite excited for him because he's wanted to go back to Jamaica for a long time. and he's already had one flights cancelled [sic]. And then I saw him.. And I just said, "D180 what are you doing? What are you doing here? And he told me that his flight had been cancelled and he was gutted. Like he wants to go home, he wants to go back to Jamaica. He's happy to be deported and they've basically failed to remove him. And when I spoke to him later in the library at about 7 o'clock he told me that the flight failed because the Home Office put the wrong date of birth onto his ticket. So his date of birth on his ticket didn't match his passport. So basically his flight failed and he was brought back to Brook House. It's a joke really.

[D180] ... said he was gutted and then in the evening when we had a bit of an in depth conversation he was just.. year, I think he's just really disheartened. He's sort of given up. He was really cheerful last week . He wants to go and he just wants his freedom. he's served his sentence. He's spent two years in detention and is happy to be removed from an immigration removal centre and that's not been facilitated so he's just.. I think he's just gutted really. [p.10 – p.11]

94. I had not heard of the PSU (Professional Standards Unit) or the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board). I had heard of the PPO (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman). My understanding is that if you have an issue which is not being resolved you can

contact the PPO. I think I heard about this from another detainee. Generally, I would learn things like this from other people in the detention centre who would talk to each other because we all had similar issues – trying to put in applications, get out of detention or improve our circumstances in detention.

95. I understood that I could make a complaint but I knew that if I did the staff would all just stick up for each other or, at best, the staff involved would just be moved to another wing. I heard so many stories about other people in detention complaining but the complaint falling on deaf ears, so I just kept my head down and didn't complain. I just tried to get through my time in detention and make my own life easier day by day by staying out of the problems with the officers. Otherwise, the officers would gang up on the detainees. I saw this happening; I saw officers ganging up on people who had complained or ignoring them and not helping with the complaint. All the officers would stick together. I felt really intimidated by the officers so I did my best to distance myself and stay out of trouble by not making any complaints.
96. I also heard a lot of stories about people making complaints but receiving no response. Then when the person complaining asked why they had not received any response the officers would say something like the paperwork had been lost, or that it had been put in the wrong box. Many people believed that the officers would shred some complaints so that they would not be recorded.
97. In general, the complaints system was not good. Many people felt that they could not complain about racism by staff because they felt intimidated. Most people also felt that it was pointless because those providing any oversight would always defend the staff so generally complaining would just make life more difficult – the officers did not care, they just wanted the detainees to go away. It felt as though we were just a nuisance and really it was just their job – they were there to get paid, pay their bills and not to make anyone more comfortable or help the detainees if it was not necessary for their job.

Conclusion

98. I was at Brook House for two years. It was a terrifying place. Everyone in the centre was there to be removed so everyone was scared and vulnerable. It was very frightening, and I felt so vulnerable, especially when I was blind. Brook House was also always understaffed which created a lot of problems. I didn't get enough support at Brook House to help with my disability and it seems healthcare didn't tell the Home Office about my health problems when they should have.
99. There wasn't enough support for people with mental health problems, spice was everywhere, and a lot of the Brook House officers were really intimidating and racist. If immigration detention is going to continue far more should be done to look after the welfare of detainees. People shouldn't be detained for so long because that's when the depression kicks in.

Statement of truth:

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.

Signed:

Signature

(Buster Saunders)

Dated:

08/03/2022