

DB paper – February 2020

Reviewing IRC Methodology

Introduction and background

Immigration removal centre inspections have employed a revised methodology since September 2017. This methodology was developed to increase the chances of inspections identifying the abuses recorded at Brook House by a hidden camera between April-July 2017, and the pernicious sub-culture that allowed this behaviour to emerge and go unchallenged.

We had inspected Brook House in October 2016, identifying no serious concerns at that time. A Panorama programme showing the footage was aired in the autumn of 2017. The programme exposed behaviours that may have existed at the time of our inspection and were not picked up by us, the Home Office monitors, the IMB, or any of the visiting NGOs or other visitors to the centre. After the programme, several staff at Brook House were dismissed and subject to criminal investigations. There has been a debate about Brook House in parliament, an independent inquiry led by Kate Lampard, and a public inquiry led by the PPO is now underway.

This paper describes the methodology developed after the Brook House revelations, and reviews the practical experience of implementation to date. It then explores questions that have been raised about the approach, and ends with some proposals.

As part of the review, colleagues who have conducted interviews in the last year were asked for their views on three key questions: What works well? What areas need improvement? Is it worth continuing with the approach? Appendix one provides a summary of their comments. Appendix two provides some examples of current reporting.

Evolution of the methodology

After the Brook House revelations, the key question for us was, should we have been reasonably expected to discover the abusive behaviours identified in the programme? We revisited our findings and approach during the 2016 Brook House inspection and identified little more that we could have done within the existing methodology. The evidence we gathered pointed the towards the findings.

However, we also considered whether we could have obtained a fuller picture through using other methods. The main gap seemed to be that we had not given Brook House staff enough opportunities to whistle blow about behaviours that some of them must have been aware of; and we had not devoted resource to private interviews with detainees that could also have encouraged disclosure and/or or leads for follow up.

Shortly after the Panorama programme went to air, we were due to inspect Harmondsworth IRC, which had a far worse reputation than Brook House. It seemed imperative that we take all reasonable steps to minimise the risk of missing important evidence at this inspection, and we therefore developed a revised methodology that sought to learn from the Brook House experience. That methodology includes the following elements:

- Every detainee is offered a confidential interview.
- We interview 10-20% of staff in operational roles, including DCOs, healthcare and the Home Office.

- All staff receive a SurveyMonkey questionnaire.
- Community and legal advice groups are asked to put us in touch with recently released detainees.
- We ask the same agencies for any relevant intelligence about the centre we are about to inspect.

The interview proformas and survey were developed by I team and R and D. They were reviewed for us by detention researchers at Oxford and by one of the Brook House whistle blowers, and amended in line with their recommendations. The methodology was signed off by management board in 2017 and first used at the Harmondsworth inspection the same year. It built upon an existing 'enhanced' methodology that had been employed at Yarl's Wood in 2015 and 2017 following allegations of sexual abuse and public and political concern about the treatment of detained women.

Staff conducting interviews are given guidance notes (see appendix one), and supported by the team coordinator. They write a summary of no more than one page, including key themes from the interviews they have conducted, and complete an Excel spreadsheet with more details. At every inspection a sizeable proportion of these interviews are undertaken using telephone interpretation or the interpreters we often have on-site at IRCs. The team leader and coordinator pull the information together into one document. This is published as an appendix in every IRC report and the evidence is used in the body of the report, especially in the safeguarding and staff relationships sections.

The main purpose of the approach is to give detainees and staff every opportunity to provide information that could help to identify abuses and to provide evidence on the culture of the establishment. It is intended to allow us to extract some broader conclusions, e.g. about staff capability and poor leadership.

Outcomes of the enhanced approach

Appendix one gives the views of interviewers. Overall, they are positive about what the methodology achieves but identify logistical problems that we should address.

Detainees and staff are given multiple opportunities to identify abuses; we discover important new information about the life of centres; and reports are more richly evidenced. We are able to build a strong picture of relationships and detainee safety concerns in particular, are bolder on issues such as the impact on detainees of low staffing levels and deficiencies in staff training, and have identified cases that helped to evidence broader concerns (see examples in appendix two).

Staff are usually very willing to talk to us and provide evidence that is often used extensively in our reports. For example, at Harmondsworth, a third said they did not have sufficient training for their roles and some staff conducting interviews for trafficking victims admitted they did not understand what they were supposed to do; there was widespread lack of understanding of safeguarding. These issues are especially sensitive in IRCs and the findings helped us to make strongly evidenced judgements.

Where detainees give us information about alleged mistreatment, we follow up individually, e.g. checking CCTV and documentation. We usually identify a handful of cases, most relating to healthcare or immigration casework. For example, in one centre a detainee told us he had been tortured and could not understand why the Home Office had not replied to his Rule 35 report (a doctor's report documenting evidence of torture, suicidal ideation or other mental or physical health problems. Such reports often lead to a detainee being released). We discovered that healthcare had lost the report, which had indeed shown evidence of torture and the HO had no knowledge of it.

External comments on the methodology and challenges to HMIP following Brook House

- We asked the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) to provide an expert peer review of our methodology and overall approach at Harmondsworth. The review was very positive about the level of rigour and evidence gathering.
- We were challenged about Brook House at the Home Affairs Select Committee hearing and our response largely focused on our willingness to review, identify potential gaps and close them using the enhanced methodology. A similar argument was made at the JCHR hearing.
- The Lampard independent review was critical of the Brook House IMB for its defensive approach. After we explained our revised methodology, the review team decided to say little about HMIP as an organisation except:
'... more focused questioning of staff and frontline managers might have more clearly identified some of these issues [i.e. abuses and staff culture]. We welcome the fact that HMIP are now surveying and interviewing staff as part of their inspection process.'
- We met with the main Brook House whistle-blower, who supported and contributed to the new methodology and defended HMIP's rigour at the HASC.
- As part of this review, Home Office and IRC senior managers were asked for views and all were supportive, usually citing the greater degree of assurance the interviews/survey provided.
- We were contacted by an ex-Home Office Director of Detention, now running a consultancy, praising the value and clarity of the information provided in the appendices.
- The feedback from community groups about employing this methodology at each inspection has been positive, especially as many detainees are in contact with them and have fed back the level of HMIP scrutiny.

An effective use of resources?

The first new-style enhanced inspection at Harmondsworth required considerable resource (240 interviews conducted); detainees were probably encouraged by lawyers and NGOs to speak to us after the Brook House story broke. No inspection since then has required anything approaching the same levels. The closest have been Brook House 2019 (110 interviews) and Colnbrook (84 interviews). In Brook House, the total inspector deployment was 11 days. In Colnbrook it was 8 days. However, most inspections have required much less resource. Three inspections (Campsfield, Dungavel, Tinsley) required an average of 4.3 inspector days.

Deployments are usually of permanent inspectors with gaps in their schedules. Most interviews are done by I team and other inspectors are used only if available; they are not taken from other inspections. Associates are sometimes used if they are also attending the main inspection week or if we have no alternatives, but this is not common. There is a wider range of staff outside of inspectors who are capable and keen to participate in the work as a development opportunity. Some members of the Secretariat have expressed an interest and, provided there is adequate preparation, safeguarding and on-site support from inspectors, this is a viable option.

We are given direct Home Office funding which more than adequately covers the work we do, as confirmed by the review undertaken with the former HoS in 2018. The HO provides the same funding now as it did when we had nearly double the number of IRCs to inspect. In recent years, the number of IRCs has reduced from 13 to 7, and we also inspect immigration detention less frequently than in the past. The HO supports the 'deep-dive' inspecting represented by the enhanced methodology and understands the value that HMIP can bring for the resource expended.

Why in IRCs if not in prisons?

We have always been aware of the high risk of abuses going undetected in IRCs, which is recognised by the more frequent inspection schedule. The entire population of IRCs can change within a few months. Victims may leave before they get to the stage where they feel confident to complain, and complaints may fall for lack of evidence because the detainee has left. Detainees are also much more reluctant to complain than prisoners for fear of it affecting their immigration cases; they also experience greater communication problems. The number of complaints is usually very low across the IRC estate.

There is a charged political context around immigration. Civil society and grass roots campaigning groups are both numerous and highly vocal. This makes it more likely that there will be exposés - Brook House was the third time that a smuggled camera had been used in an IRC. This in turn increases reputational risk to HMIP, and that risk is likely to remain considerable in the near future.

While some of these points could apply to prisons, we could not realistically implement such an approach in the much larger prison estate. That is not a reason for not employing it in IRCs. However, one element that could be implemented in prisons relatively easily is the confidential staff survey. It is easy and cheap to administer and provides helpful information that can advance understanding of staff culture. Once the survey is agreed, all staff are sent a SurveyMonkey link, which automatically produces percentages and comments under each question.

Targeted on risk?

The 'enhanced approach' was originally due to be implemented only in the highest risk IRCs. In the event, most of those considered to be low risk have been closed. The number of detainees has reduced by over a third in the last three years. The only remaining IRC that can be considered a low risk is now Dungavel, but it is also one of the most politically sensitive because of its location. The Home Office are opposed to using a lighter touch methodology at Dungavel because it has the same risk factors as other IRCs.

Questions and concerns raised about the methodology

This section addresses direct questions asked about the approach.

Are the methods efficient or appropriate? Is there unnecessary overlap between interviews and survey information? The proforma and survey questions have been refined in line with inspector feedback, but there remains some overlap. The feedback in appendix one suggests that proformas could be improved, perhaps by focusing more intensely on the key safeguarding concerns.

Some detainees ask for interviews without fully understanding the purpose, as information is only provided in English. This is true as evidenced by the interviewers' feedback, although most requested interviews are completed. We could translate the invitation slip in future (it is very simple) and an inspector has now assumed role of giving slips out and explaining the purpose.

Is it methodologically sound? The is a simple methodology designed to do two things: encourage disclosure of safeguarding issues and help understanding of detention centre culture. It was originally approved by RDT and external research specialists. It is qualitative research which makes use of numbers and percentages in some cases to show the reader the basis for the interpretation of data. This is done with disclaimers and contextual information. There is dispute over whether percentages should ever be used in presenting such information, but it is not illegitimate to do so with care and qualification (see appendix two). Every interview summary includes the following statement:

These interviews were used as one source of evidence to inform the rounded judgements made by inspectors in the body of this report. The men we spoke to were self-selecting, and the percentages here do not supplant those of our randomised survey (Appendix V). We followed up any allegations of concern and have reported on outcomes in the main body of the report where we were able to corroborate.

This is not to say that the analysis and presentation of information cannot be improved. The original senior research officer quality assured the work before publication. Since then, there has been no ongoing R and D involvement.

Is the information used effectively by inspectors? As is the case with most data, inspectors vary in their proficiency in using it. However, every report makes extensive use of the information and key findings are published in an appendix.

It is very resource intensive and reduces our flexibility. See above: this is a myth, probably persisting since the first inspection using the new methodology at Harmondsworth. It is not as resource-intensive as we think, and we are funded for it. There have been very few short notice deployments. Inspectors are booked in advance and, when the coordinator has assessed the demand, they are often stood down, rather than the other way around. There are only two IRCs in the programme in the coming year.

Could a 'surgery' drop-in format work? We have tried this in the past and it did not work well. Detainees may turn up at the same time or be concerned about being seen going into the only interview room with inspectors. However, this could usefully be explored again with better publicity and assurance of confidential interviewing space, probably in combination with booked interviews to maximise use of interviewers' time.

We do not do this in any other sector, so why this one? See above: turnover, vulnerability, specific risks to detainees and reputation.

Is it making an impact? Measures of impact include whether the work has been useful in providing assurance and evidence, and whether it has promoted confidence in HMIP's scrutiny. It has done all of these. For example, we have discovered weaknesses in safeguarding policies as a result, which have led to changed practices and much more robust whistleblowing procedures. It leads to more richly evidenced reports. It provides assurance and evidence, especially around safety where detainees routinely report feeling unsafe in very high numbers. The Home Office, NGOs and lawyers all support it. It was endorsed by the Lampard inquiry; used in defence of HMIP's work at the HASC; used in defence at the JCHR; and will be used at the imminent BH public inquiry to show that HMIP takes seriously any potential gaps in its approach.

Proposal

The DB is asked to comment, and consider the following proposal:

Form a small team including R and D, I team, and Secretariat staff to discuss ways to improve collection and presentation of information in light of the information provided in this paper. This would, for example, include:

- Discussion of consistent R and D involvement and quality assurance.
- Exploration of more time-efficient and effective ways of conducting interviews on site; for example, through inclusion of a surgery format and starting interviews in week one of the

inspection given the high number who may have left by the time we go to interview them in week two.

- Potentially broadening the pool of interviewers to include, for example, secretariat staff seeking development opportunities.
- Consideration of whether the staff survey can be extended to prisons.

HSB 22.2.20

Appendix 1: Comments on enhanced IRC methodology from interviewers

Based on responses from seven colleagues who have recently undertaken interviews

What works well?

- It provides us with assurance that we do what we reasonably can to identify abuse.
- Staff interviews have been helpful in getting new information and identifying ongoing risks, such as staff being unaware of, or unwilling to use, whistle-blowing procedures.
- It also allows use to identify weaknesses such as lack of safeguarding/trafficking awareness, which could of themselves be said to risk a kind of abuse.
- Understand clearly why we are conducting interviews
- Detainees appreciated the opportunity to be able to speak to us.
- Analysing and being aware of any themes emerging from the interviews has been helpful during the inspection.
- Templates clear and easy to follow, interview structure logical
- Guidance documents sent beforehand are good, made me feel well prepared and could hit the ground running.
- The guidance and templates enabled me to feel well prepared, having not been in an IRC/engaged with detainees before.
- Now a reasonably well-established system.
- Having set times and an identified room for the staff interviews has been helpful.
- Analysing and being aware of any themes emerging from the interviews has been helpful during the inspection.
- It's useful to have telephone number for some men, often they didn't work but occasionally they did and were helpful to track people down.
- All the parts of the enhanced methodology add significant value to the process. This is particularly true of the detainee interviews. The main value of these is that they go some way to capturing sensitive information which may not be disclosed, especially by detainees who will often be nervous that any traceable criticism of staff by them could jeopardise their immigration case. Nil findings have real value here, so that if nothing by way of dramatic revelations comes out, that does not nullify the value of the process.
- Since it has been so conclusively proven that abusive treatment in IRCs has gone under all forms of radar, including our own past inspections, we have to create opportunities for confidential disclosure.
- The light-touch semi-structured nature of the interview methodology is useful in focussing on the key issues, not opening up long discussions on a whole range of issues.

Areas for improvement?

- The main challenge concerns the logistics and the fast turnover of detainees. This means that many may have left the Centre after informing us that they would like to be interviewed. Spreading interviews over two weeks exacerbates this problem and is perhaps something worth thinking about – the sooner we start interviewing, and the more inspectors we have available in week 1, the better.
- Sometimes feel by the time we have the summary of interviews to review, we are too busy with all the info sent by the centre so we end up with info overload and not sufficient time to do it justice.
- Can be time-consuming to find and interview detainees. Not all realise the purpose of the interview. Some detainees thought the interview was about their immigration status. By the same token, we may have missed others who didn't understand how to request.

- The form to identify what the interview is about and if they would like an interview needs to be in numerous languages.
- There is some repetition in questions on the interview template.
- A lot of time is spent waiting around for people and tracking them down. They were often not in their rooms or didn't want to speak when found.
- An area to consider might be having a 'drop in' on every unit. We could staff each wing for at least a whole day, perhaps two, which would give plenty of time for people to approach us. Word of mouth would soon help explain what we were doing there. As long as we had access to a private room for confidential conversations and Big Word, I think this could work well as a kind of 'inspector surgery'.
- The language barrier is an obstacle at the moment of the first meeting.
- Some free-flowing conversations with detainees were useful in terms of highlighting the issues they wanted to speak about, but it meant it was harder to stick to the structured questions in the interview. There would also potentially be a risk of inaccurate / inappropriate interpretation and lack of confidentiality, although in all cases the detainee I wanted to speak to was happy for a fellow detainee to interpret.
- In some cases, ended up interviewing the target detainee and friend who was interpreting simultaneously.
- Maybe a solution is to use the interviews to highlight broad issues of concern rather than specific questions.
- A risk based approach would be better with our limited resources.
- In the past, researchers routinely attended IRC inspections to interview detainees. It would be a valuable career development opportunity for researchers (or others) to interview detainees.
- Do we give enough weight to underlying dissatisfactions as opposed to clear safeguarding issues? Is there a danger that some views may get lost?
- The staff interviews have been important, but time-consuming; they have often been chances for staff to air their feelings in a way that is almost more therapeutic than information-gathering. Often they are very appreciative of the opportunity for feedback which they may not get with their line manager or anyone else; but it is not our role to offer that. Perhaps the staff interviews could be scheduled for 10- or 15-minute slots.
- There is a temptation for us to get more into the dynamics of staff and management cultures than is really necessary. However, if the staff survey can be provided without too much work, it's a useful addition.

Is it worth continuing the approach and if so, why?

All said 'yes'.

- I think it is worthwhile and adds another dimension to the inspection.
- It offers an additional opportunity for detainees and staff to express their views and identify any areas of concern or what is good about the centre.
- Gives belt and braces.
- Yes, I think it is worth ensuring that we give detainees an opportunity to speak to us in some form (perhaps slightly reorganised).
- It helped to highlight issues of concern in more detail than was possible through the survey. It also helped to give us insight into individual cases, some of which felt like they were very vulnerable/victims of trafficking and perhaps should not have been in a detention centre in the first place.

- I also felt there was a real value in giving people time to be listened to. I appreciate that is not exactly what we are there for, but I felt it had value, even if we weren't able to help with their cases.
- At the risk of stating the obvious, abuse at Brook House was very well hidden. Management, the Home Office, the IMB and chaplaincy team were unaware it was happening. Lawyers visiting daily on the duty advice scheme, doctors from torture charities, people from visitors' groups, representatives from very active campaign and political groups were unaware of it.
- As regards detainees, we need to bear in mind that IRCs are very different places from prisons. It is understandable why detainees might be reluctant to report abuse experienced at an IRC, for example, through a complaint. They may also be unlikely to report abuse to an inspector they encounter, perhaps by chance, on a wing during an inspection. This is because the Home Office, rather than an independent judiciary, determines detention, length of detention, and whether to remove or not, while detainees usually no longer qualify for legal aid and are relatively powerless. They don't want to jeopardise their cases.
- IRCs work in a very different context from many prisons, it may be more difficult to identify abuse in IRCs, and these factors point to the need to adopt a different methodology to that used in, say, adult prisons.
- The extended methodology, ensures that all detainees who might have something to say, are given the opportunity to meet with an inspector. It gives an inspector time to build rapport with and gain the trust of detainees. The methodology increases the odds that we will find abuse that is otherwise well-hidden.
- There are also reputational issues. The extended methodology introduced for very good reason. The new methodology is in the public domain, including before the HASC, and has been met with approval. I do not think rowing back is in any way a sensible option. It would lead us exposed to censure, for example at the public enquiry, or if any similar example of abuse arose in the future, that we had not identified at inspection.
- Interviews provide us with a solid evidence base to make judgements, for example, about safety – without interviews, it was always difficult to evidence sufficiently why detainees in IRCs feel unsafe. Interviews also give us good evidence about other issues, such as staff understanding of trafficking and the NRM.
- Most definitely yes. It is imperative that we engage with as many detainees as we can – but the ways in which we do this could be more efficiently organised (ref drop in/surgery comment).
- It is worth continuing, partly because the high-profile nature of immigration is not going to go away, especially at a time when immigration policy is being tightened in some important respects. If we were visibly to stop this enhanced methodology now, it could easily be picked up by NGOs as evidence that we had only done it to reduce reputational damage in the immediate aftermath of the Brook House scandal.
- More importantly, the detainee interviews give an important source of information to inform our judgments. In prisons, many prisoners know of our inspections, or are at least aware of the role of independent scrutiny, and know that they can speak freely. In IRCs, two particular needs justify the addition of private interviews. Firstly, in a private conversation one can give a proper explanation and assurance of confidentiality; chance encounters in communal areas make this more difficult. Secondly, so many detainees do not have a good grasp of English. In a private interview it is natural to use telephone interpretation, as I have done on many occasions, and this enables us to access the testimony of members of language groups which are often hard for us to reach.

Appendix Two: Examples of reporting from interviews and staff survey

Examples of interview summaries published in reports:

Harmondsworth 2017

A third of staff said they did not have enough training for their role.

Only 8% of staff knew what the national referral mechanism (NRM)¹ was. While Home Office staff were most likely to be aware, even one of them did not know what the NRM was. Three Home Office staff felt under-skilled to conduct interviews with potential trafficking victims. Some said they were serving legal documents that they did not understand well enough to explain to detainees. Home Office staff also thought that training in managing difficult behaviour would be helpful for them.

Staff knowledge of whistleblowing policies or procedures was weak or non-existent for many. Some said that they had only recently become aware of whistleblowing publicity. Home Office staff were generally more confident about raising concerns and thought they would be taken seriously.

A large number of staff from all backgrounds spoke of problems with newer staff who were less able and willing to manage difficult situations. Many said they needed training in mental health and management of self-harm. Few staff were trained in first aid, and many complained about the online-only training as impractical, ineffective and insufficient.

Staff agreed with detainees about the easy availability of drugs.

Most staff said that drugs were a serious problem, especially Spice, and thought drugs came in through visits or in some cases through other staff. Some thought more should be done to prevent drugs getting in, such as more staff searching.

All health care staff said that Spice was a major problem in the centre, with frequent calls on them to attend incidents. Health staff reported that detainees told them Spice relieved the boredom and made life more bearable given the stress they experienced in detention. Cannabis and heroin were also available, along with some prescription drugs. A few staff mentioned that the presence of ex-prisoners could result in bullying and 'testing' of new batches of drugs on more vulnerable detainees.

Most staff responded that they were keen to help detainees where they could, but felt over-stretched and unable to do much that would make a difference. The majority of respondents said that staff in everyday contact with detainees behaved professionally and tried their best, given staff shortages and the lack of resources.

Two-thirds of detainees felt unsafe themselves and about half said that safety was not good enough or poor overall in the centre.

A major concern was feelings of insecurity as a result of uncertainty over immigration cases. However, in addition, many detainees ascribed feeling unsafe to the following issues:

- A lack of staff. This reinforced the overwhelming theme of the staff interviews.

¹ The body set up to identify, protect and support victims of trafficking.

- Being locked behind doors at night. Several said this made them feel unsafe and had an impact on their mental well-being. As their environment looked and felt like a prison, they felt they were treated like criminals.
- The stress and frustration of other detainees who were shouting and angry. Detainees often said they understood why their colleagues behaved like this.
- The prevalence of drugs. The vast majority of detainees said that drugs were easy to obtain, especially Spice,² and that they did not think staff did enough to address it. Several detainees suspected that drugs came in through staff and/or visits.
- A recent suicide. Some men said that this event had shaken them.

A third of staff thought the centre was not safe enough.

Most staff mentioned staff shortages as affecting safety on the units, and the problem with units being staffed by only one member of staff was repeatedly raised. The lack of a fixed work location was also considered a problem by some staff, because it affected their ability to form relationships with detainees and understand their needs and risks. They also mentioned a lack of full CCTV coverage at the centre as contributing to feelings of being unsafe.

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Brook House 2019

9% (five detainees) said they had been treated inappropriately by staff. None reported physical assault.

Two referred to the attitude of health care staff; one spoke of both poor healthcare treatment and that he was stopped from seeing a visitor and shouted at by staff, then forced to apologise to them; one cited overnight lock up; and one said an officer had entered the room uninvited and was there when the detainee woke up. None reported experiencing physical assaults. Most detainees said that other detainees were respectful and few had seen fights. Most detainees said staff stepped in quickly and stopped incidents.

All staff in our survey said they would report inappropriate behaviour, usually to managers.

Staff were usually very clear about their duty to report any concerns and/or submit a security information report. One member of staff said they would report to an external authority rather than managers because of a lack of trust in them. 12% did not believe they would be taken seriously if they made an allegation and another 9% said they probably would not be taken seriously.

² A synthetic drug that mimics the effects of cannabis but is much stronger, with no discernible odour and cannot be detected by drug tests.

Staff were generally positive about staff culture and many thought that the centre had improved over the previous year to year and a half.

Interviewed and surveyed staff mentioned helping people, having a caring role, and learning about people from different countries as factors that made them most satisfied about their work.

While many staff had not been at the centre for long, those that had been in post for long enough usually felt that the centre had improved significantly over the previous year and a half.

A number of staff said they did not believe that the type of behaviour seen in the Panorama programme would be tolerated now. A few staff raised concerns about the inexperience of the large number of new, younger staff.

Colnbrook 2019

About a third of interviewed detainees (35%) said they felt unsafe. Most said this was because of the fear of removal, lengthy detention or the availability of drugs. Very few detainees said they felt physically unsafe in the centre. None said they had been assaulted by staff and one said he had been assaulted by another detainee during a dispute over drugs. Detainees who had never been in custody before were more likely to report feeling unsafe on arrival. Detainees reported that interpreting was not always used in reception and at other times when needed, but that their overall reception experience was reasonable. Detainees who said they felt most unsafe (seven rated safety as 'poor') mentioned factors such as fear of removal, concerns about immigration cases, lengthy and open-ended detention, the fact that other detainees were stressed and sometimes angry, and the availability of drugs. One described the lack of time limit in this way: 'I don't know whether I am coming and going, I'm in limbo.' Some detainees referred to the removal of detainees in the middle of the night as causing fear; one said this was like 'mental torture' and another said, 'I don't feel safe because at night, 2 or 3 times a week, security staff come and take people away who scream. I've been told they are plain-clothes people without any ID taking them away.' Many detainees mentioned drugs, including NPS, as a significant problem in the centre.

A few mentioned feeling intimidated by other detainees, sometimes because they were ex-prisoners. However, most detainees said that other detainees were respectful and few had seen fights. Most of those who did report problems said that staff stepped in quickly and stopped them.