

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

First Witness Statement of Debra Elizabeth Weston

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 14 July 2021.

I, **DEBRA WESTON**, date of birth DPA, Detention Engagement Team (DET) Operational Manager at Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) ("Tinsley House IRC"), employed by The Home Office, Immigration Enforcement (HOIE) at Tinsley House IRC, Perimeter Road South, Gatwick Airport, West Sussex, RH6 0PQ, **WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:**

Introduction

1. I have been the Immigration Manager for Tinsley House IRC since 2009.
2. In so far as the contents of this Statement are within my own personal knowledge, they are true, otherwise they are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.
3. The answers provided below are to the best of my knowledge and recollection, with reference to the documents noted in the Rule 9 request and to a limited set of documents drawn to my attention by those advising me in the period provided for drafting this statement. Should the Inquiry wish me to consult any other documents, I would of course be able to do so if given sufficient time.

Background, Attendance at Brook House and my role at Brook House

4. I started my civil service career in November 1978, joining the Metropolitan Police Service as a trainee typist located in New Scotland Yard. I progressed to typist transferring to A8(Traffic) and was promoted to Personnel Secretary then

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Senior Personnel Secretary. In October 1987 I was seconded to the Home Office working for a Chief Constable in the Police Scientific and Research Department eventually transferring over to the Home Office. In September 2000 I successfully secured the position of Deputy Contract Monitor at Tinsley Immigration Removal Centre where I remained, gaining promotion to Contract Monitor in October 2009.

5. Tinsley House opened in 1996 and originally had two Home Office teams consisting of a team of 1 Higher Executive Officer (HEO), 1 Executive Officer (EO) who were responsible for monitoring the contract; and a team of 1 Chief Immigration Officer, 4 Immigration Officers who dealt with residents face to face; as well as an Administrative Assistant who completed administrative tasks for both groups.
6. In approximately 2005 the teams merged resulting in one Home Office team covering both elements, the contract and contact with residents. This resulted in a team consisting of 1 HEO, 1 EO and 4 Administrative Officers (AOs). This was replicated across the Immigration Removal Centre Estate, with varying staffing profiles.
7. In late October 2016 Tinsley House IRC closed for refurbishment and it was at this time that the Pre-Departure Team (PDT) Pilot was established. This team consisted of 1 HEO (myself); 7 EOs, known as Engagement Officers, (namely Carole Martin, Vanessa Smith, Colin Case, Helen Bennett – the foregoing having been temporarily promoted to EOs from their substantive grade of AO – and Jenny Van-der-Berg, Robert Watkins, and Faisal Younas who were substantive EOs); and 5 AOs known as Engagement Support Officers, (namely Rory Corbett, Leigh Dwain, Alec Holton, Heena Patel and Hennah Akhtar). Robert Watkins, Faisal Younas and Jenny Van-der-Berg (who had previously worked at Brook House) were specifically recruited to the pilot team and the other staff were already working in Brook House or Tinsley House IRCs. Further recruitment was already in place to fill existing and future vacancies and this resulted in further

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Engagement Support Officers being recruited, namely Reece Finnigan, Luke Enness, Aneka Coley, Nicole Tytler, Edwina Yeomans, Elizabeth Powell, and Natasha Barber.

8. The Engagement Officer's role was to build a rapport with residents from initial induction through to departure encouraging compliant behaviour and voluntary return to their home countries with an overall aim of reducing time spent in detention. The team provided information as to residents' case progression, explaining and promoting the reimbursement scheme and the advantages of the scheme, the reduction in length of a ban from returning to the UK, and advising of the consequences of poor behaviour. The Engagement Support Officer's role was to provide administrative support to the Engagement Officers, enabling them to concentrate on progressing cases through to removal, by: receiving and printing paperwork received in the Inbox for service; forwarding Rule 35 reports; receiving responses to said reports noting the Rule 35 log ensuring compliance with Detention Service Order (DSO) 9/2016 as well as other DSOs affecting the work of the PDT; dealing with enquiries involving healthcare; building rapport with other business areas within and outside Brook House; acting in a collaborative manner; receiving phone calls from residents, caseowners, officers, and healthcare staff; and obtaining/providing information as required.
9. My role was ensuring that everyone understood the role and responsibilities of the PDT pilot team, embedding new recruits, arranging training/upskilling, compiling rosters, arranging business literature, and liaising with G4S and in particular the welfare team. I have provided the Inquiry with an August 2016 document, 'Pre-Departure Team, Definition and responsibilities'. HOM0331950
10. I attended the G4S morning induction that took place with newly arrived residents on, I think, D wing (induction wing) when I could, to promote the work of the PDT. I normally accompanied G4S Welfare Officer Owen Syred who worked very

closely with the Home Office, demonstrating what I considered to be care and empathy for the residents.

11. The PDT pilot commenced in earnest in January 2017 and by March 2017 the PDT pilot was deemed to be a success. With Tinsley due to open in April 2017, recruitment took place for further staff to ensure all positions at both Tinsley and Gatwick were filled. This resulted in Edwina Yeomans, Nicole Tytler, Aneka Coley, Rory Corbett, Vanessa Smith, Carole Martin and Luke Enness being successful in promotion to Executive Officers and therefore taking on the role of Engagement Officer.
12. Tinsley House reopened in late May 2017 and at this point the team at Brook House was split with Nicole Tyler, Aneka Coley, Colin Case moving to cover engagement at Tinsley. I covered both sites although most of my time was spent at Brook House until November 2017.
13. I covered the role of PDT Immigration Manager from November 2016 – November 2017 predominantly based at Brook House. The original Home Office team at Brook House had been split with the contact staff (except for Heenaxi Patel who remained with the contract team) coming under the umbrella of the PDT and the Immigration Manager, Paul Gasson and the two Executive Officers, Simon Levett and Zakia Bassou (until February 2017 when she was replaced with Heenaxi Patel who had gained promotion to EO) continuing with contract monitoring work. The original team members at Brook House and Tinsley House would also highlight any contract issues with the team as per normal practice prior to PDT roll out and this continues.
14. During my time at Brook House as PDT immigration manager I was based largely in the Immigration Office. This was at the front of the main building, on the second floor above the visits hall. The wings are positioned on either side of the main building in an “H” formation. I did on occasions visit the wings, detainee

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reception, canteen, interview corridor, visits hall; following the airing of the Panorama programme I walked around the centre every day with the Deputy, Stephen Skitt, raising the profile of the Home Office in an attempt to allay any fears that some residents had following the programme. We commenced these walkarounds on 4th September 2017 in an attempt to not only raise the availability of the Home Office but to de-escalate any tensions following the airing of the Panorama programme. I think these walkarounds continued, possibly until the end of October 2017. Prior to the Panorama programme and as stated in paragraph 31 below, PDT staff were reluctant to walk around in the centre. Any concerns raised by residents were taken forward with G4S or caseowners but I do not remember any specific details (although I am happy to provide contemporaneous emails). On the whole I don't recall that there were fears being raised by a significant number of residents but I do recall one resident who we saw and interviewed who did have concerns relating to staff and residents in Brook House, and we worked with him (D1467). I address this matter in paragraph 74 below [HOM0331953] [HOM0331955] [HOM0331956] [HOM0331962] [HOM0331963] [HOM0331964] [HOM0331968]

15. In November 2017 I returned to Tinsley House IRC as PDT Operational Immigration Manager. Tinsley House IRC was my original location and with the PDT now being rolled out across the IRC estate and recruitment for staff at Brook House and Tinsley House complete, I returned. The name of the PDT changed in mid-January 2019 to the Detention Engagement Team (DET), I believe this was to reflect the actual role of the team. The team and I based at Tinsley House IRC returned to work at Brook House IRC in April 2020 as a result of the COVID restrictions due to resident numbers being reduced to zero at Tinsley House IRC (I can provide the Inquiry with a summary table of the number of residents at Brook House since that date by month). The Brook House and Tinsley House IRC teams were combined to ensure business continuity during the pandemic and during this time I share the HEO DET Operational Manager role.

The Contract

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16. As stated earlier my role was Contract Monitor for Tinsley House IRC and as such I had a good understanding of the requirements of the contract awarded to G4S in 2009 for Tinsley House and although there were some differences, the Brook House contract was, I think, very similar. I have never undertaken contract monitoring for Brook House. The Home Office required G4S to maintain safety and security at both sites and comply with Operating Standards, Detention Centre Rules and Detention Service Orders. The contract was awarded in 2009 when Brook House opened but changes to the requirements of Schedule D were made during subsequent years. As set out in Schedule D, the Home Office had a number of operational requirements covering things like maintenance of security and safety, admissions and discharge, healthcare, catering, and welfare and regime.

17. The contract for Tinsley House was monitored by a variety of means - observations, review of reports/logs received, discussion at a variety of meetings i.e. Health and Safety, Detainee Consultative, Weekly, Monthly, and Quarterly Contract meetings (also attended by Home Office Commercial colleagues), Estate Planning, Security etc and engagement with residents and staff while in the centre. A log populated by Home Office and G4S staff was maintained of any failures and successes and this would form the basis of weekly discussion. Some examples from the Tinsley House log in 2015 include a continuing issue of bed bugs (G4S arranged external pest control and consideration was given to refurbishing of soft furnishings); a lack of breakfast items (G4S provided information and contingency plan); a broken cigarette lighter in courtyard (G4S repaired); a panic alarm failure in interview room; and lack of staff in front reception (G4S identified a permanent staff member to fulfil this role). Depending on the severity or outcome these could be escalated to monthly, possibly quarterly contract meetings. G4S would raise failures and successes at weekly meetings and provided a monthly report to these meetings self-reporting failures/success, providing statistics, identifying trends of incidents/safeguarding issues within the Gatwick IRCs. Notes of these meetings were available for all participants with action points. Any changes to the contract

would be noted and a Notice of Change letter would be issued by Home Office colleagues in the Commercial team. Similar arrangements existed at Brook House.

18. During my time at Brook House (November 2016 - November 2017) my responsibility was to ensure of the Home Office's meaningful engagement with residents in order to encourage their compliance with the returns process – as set out in the PDT mission statement - and as such my responsibility for monitoring of the contract at Tinsley House ceased. Although I remained as a point of contact for the refurbishment works at Tinsley House and as such did attend some of the monthly and quarterly contract meetings with G4S during the relevant period. I would continue to identify and pass issues to contract colleagues during my time at Brook House relating to Brook House, i.e. late presentation of residents for interview, lack of G4S staff in the welfare office and interview corridor. The interview corridor is the area where residents' interviews take place with the Home Office staff, legal reps, police etc, as well as video link bail hearings. I do not remember what the staffing profile for this area was but, if G4S staff were not available to Home Office staff or residents at advertised opening times then this would be considered a failure. I would raise the concerns via an email to the Contract Monitor.
19. Staffing was an important area for us, the Home Office, to monitor as shortages had the potential to have a big impact on residents. Staff shortages could lead to a lack of activities, delay in providing meals and visits for residents at the advertised time, resulting in a detrimental effect on their experience in an Immigration Removal Centre. Education, Healthcare and Facilities were also important areas for the same reasons and of course value for money was an important issue.
20. My impression, which was based on those that I directly worked with both at Brook House and Tinsley House, was that the welfare of residents was important and this was reflected in the setting up of the Joint Welfare Group by the Head of Detention Operations in September 2014. This group was set up following a

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thematic review of Welfare in IRCs by the HOIE, Detention Operations, Compliance and Monitoring Team published in February 2014. The group consisting of representatives from the Welfare Departments of all the IRCs met quarterly, the aim being to share experience and identify best practice to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to welfare concerns across the estate. Some of the issues raised related to repatriation of property, availability of duty legal reps and other issues that residents raised. Discussion of these issues at the quarterly meetings was to identify best practice with a view to a consistent approach across the IRC estate. The composition of the Group consisted of the Head of Detention Operations, Immigration Manager with responsibility for Welfare and the Welfare Officer (or nominated representative) from each IRC. I attended as the Immigration Manager with responsibility for Welfare. In my opinion the meetings were effective to identify best practice and work was ongoing to develop a welfare record to be shared when residents moved from one IRC to another thus preventing the recipient welfare officer in the IRC having to start from the beginning if the resident had any issues e.g. tracking down missing property etc.

Welfare of detained persons

21. The Adults at Risk policy was relevant to the work of the PDT at Brook House in that we would review the arrival paperwork of all residents, checking what “level” (according to the policy) they had been identified as (by others), and would prioritise our meetings with those identified as Adults At Risk. As a team, one of the things we were looking to do in the induction process was to identify individuals who were particularly fearful or distressed by being detained. The identification of residents as Adults at Risk and the levels indicated by the Adults at Risk Policy did assist us in this process by bringing to our attention those new arrivals who had additional needs and our role was to try and allay their anxieties by explaining our role and signposting those who can assist them during their stay at Brook House. The prioritisation of AAR residents was to ensure that those with

additional needs were dealt with in a timely manner and with early interaction from DET would hopefully reduce any anxieties they had.

22. The role of PDT Engagement Officers was to build a rapport with residents, to identify any issues residents may have during their stay, and to identify vulnerabilities and raise such issues with caseowners, healthcare and G4S as required. From my point of view, I do not think the introduction or implementation of the AAR policy placed a burden on staff, instead it put the work that staff at an IRC were doing anyway on a formal footing. During the relevant period the administration of the policy was completed by HOIE contract colleagues based at Brook House. Neither I nor my team had a role in actually applying the Adults at Risk policy as we did not make decisions about detention, but we would of course raise any issues or concerns we thought were relevant to the appropriate caseworker. Insofar as I was able to see the operation of the Adults at Risk policy at Brook House during the relevant period, it appeared to me to be operating effectively.

23. In respect of the Rule 35 process, my team's involvement was limited to receiving the relevant reports from medical staff and then forwarding them on to the caseworkers to consider, and if necessary, chasing responses. There were occasions when caseowners would have to be chased for responses although I cannot say how often these delays occurred nor the reason or length of time. There was a requirement to forward a log on a weekly basis to a generic email address. This action sat with Contract Compliance colleagues. I believe the Rule 35 process operated effectively during the relevant period. As far as I am aware process according to the DSO 9/2016 was followed.

Detainee Forum Meetings

24. Prior to my time in Brook House, while I was at Tinsley House I was aware of Detainee Consultative Committee Meetings (as they were called). I was not

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involved in these sorts of things at Brook House IRC and I cannot recall whether they took place during the relevant period.

Complaints

25. In Brook House I had no involvement in the complaints processes save for complaints which involved the PDT team.

26. I recall dealing with a complaint in February 2017 made by D4013 D4013 a resident about a member of my team, Jenny Van-der- Berg. The complaint involved an allegation of racism. On receipt, the complaint was forwarded to the Detention Services Complaints Unit who I believe forwarded to Home Office Professional Standards Unit (PSU). The PSU referred it back for action to be taken by staff on site. The basis of the complaint was investigated with the complainant and the accused, and both were interviewed. The complainant had based this complaint on overhearing other residents complain about the individual, and he also referred to her attitude towards him during meetings concerning the voluntary departure process, but did not give any specific examples of racism and accepted that what he described could not be described as racist behaviour. The officer agreed that with hindsight she had been dismissive towards the resident and took this as a learning point. This resulted in the complaint not being upheld and a response (which I drafted) was emailed to the complainant. The officer was not disciplined but accepted her dismissive attitude was not helpful and took this away as a lesson learnt, advising that she would consider her behaviours in future engagements.

27. Another example of my involvement in the complaints process concerns a visitor who identified as transgender who complained in February 2016 about their treatment in Tinsley House IRC (specifically discriminatory remarks and treatment by a G4S officer when checking ID for entry as a visitor). As I recall this complaint was passed to the PSU to deal with. The PSU report found that part

of the complaint was substantiated: she had been treated differently when trying to gain entry as a visitor. The PSU investigation also highlighted inappropriate comments made by G4S officers, which came to light during the investigation. The report made 7 recommendations and resulted in an officer being suspended and disciplined by G4S for inappropriate conduct falling under gross misconduct. He subsequently resigned, and his DCO certification was suspended with automatic revocation after a period of six months. The officers investigated were Detention Custody Officer (DCO) Nick Pears, and Detention Custody Managers (DCM) Ian MacDonald and Darren Cook. I recall sharing the recommendations with G4S (Stacie Dean) to review and report back accordingly. G4S were to carry out their own investigation but I do not recall the outcome of their review.

28. During my time at Tinsley House IRC in both roles I ensured that the requirements of the DSO on complaints was adhered to. I, on occasions, emptied the complaint boxes and dealt with complaints received by forwarding to the Detention Services Complaints Unit and completing the local log. In this regard I have been involved on the periphery of numerous complaints (in the way described in the preceding sentence) and have dealt with a small number of complaints involving my team members. I have also been involved in considering the accreditation of officers as a result of complaints involving G4S staff members. On 19 September 2017 I was emailed and asked for my views by the Home Office Certification Team Manager on the revocation of the certification of three DCOs (John Connolly, Nathan Ring, Calvin Saunders), following the G4S investigation into the incidents shown on Panorama. I agreed with revocation.

29. I feel the complaints process satisfies residents/visitors needs as any expression of dissatisfaction will be dealt with on receipt be it verbal or written. Residents would be encouraged to complete a DCF9 form, this is the official form appended to Detention Service Order 3/2015 (this DSO provides the process to be followed when dealing with complaints in an Immigration Removal Centre, etc) but it is not mandatory and a complaint received in any form will be considered. Residents can

also approach the Independent Monitoring Board with any concerns providing a more independent avenue for submitting complaints.

Contact with Detained Persons

30. I generally remained in the HOIE office as my role was to oversee the PDT resolving any issues and taking forward any challenging queries escalated to me. I did engage with residents during the relevant period, probably on average of 2-3 times a week. This engagement would have been sporadic and would have involved service of papers, relaying information during their initial induction on the Wing led by G4S or at the request of G4S to provide information to a resident whose frustration at being detained was escalating. For example, requesting that consideration be given to escorts being dropped if the resident showed compliance with return resulting in an earlier flight, possibly. I would telephone or email the caseowners to hasten removal on behalf of residents. On one occasion, I saw a resident in the interview corridor who was very frustrated at his continued detention and was demanding to see officials of the Home Office. I together with my line manager, Ian Castle (who I took along due to the threatening behaviour displayed by the resident D119) saw the resident in the interview room to discuss his frustrations and although we didn't have any answers to the discussion, which was challenging, resulted in the resident calming down and he returned to the wing with no issues. In my experience letting residents have time to express their frustrations quite often resulted in a better working relationship. I would use an interpreter or on occasions a fellow resident, but this was always with the agreement of the resident. I always tried to engage with residents in a manner that I, or any of my family/friends would expect to be dealt with displaying empathy, respect and dignity.

31. During my time at Brook House it became clear that Home Office staff in the PDT were reluctant to walk around the centre due to fears of being harassed, shouted at or overwhelmed with questions by residents which could lead to a detraction from

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their engagement role. I am aware that on one occasion prior to the relevant period, during an official visit something was thrown at the visitors. Despite my best efforts and due to workload it proved difficult to get PDT staff to go into the areas frequented by residents. Engagement Officers were fully employed engaging and if they entered the centre they would invariably be overloaded with questions thus eliminating them from their face to face engagement. I did, following the Panorama Programme encourage a couple of the support officers to accompany me into the centre with the Deputy Director, Stephen Skitt and in my absence they would accompany Stephen.

32. I also hosted visits to the centre from HOIE colleagues and officials from other countries' Missions based in the UK to provide insight into the conditions and facilities of the accommodation.

Culture

33. Working in a custodial environment can be challenging and some of those accommodated at Brook House were on occasions, very challenging individuals with some having learned behaviours from time spent in Her Majesty's Prisons (HMP). I was familiar with several G4S and Home Office staff at Brook House, some having previously worked or been cross deployed to Tinsley House. I do not believe there was a specific culture different from other IRCs at Heathrow and Gatwick. Judging by my observations and from talking with staff at Brook House I knew, I thought that they did try to spend time with residents and to build relationships and achieve an empathic rapport. I felt that due to the challenges of Brook House staff did not always have as much time as they would like to spend with residents. This was due, in my view, to the staff/resident ratio coupled with tasks that officers have to complete during their shift, e.g. reporting writing, assisting residents in contacting legal reps, family etc. I do not feel qualified to recommend an adequate number of officers that should be rostered at Brook House during the day but feel that it should be a lot more than the Tinsley House

profile which, if my memory is correct was approximately 23 officers but the buildings are very different as described below.

34. In relation to staff morale prior to and during the relevant period I do not think it was different from any other time, some were low because of having to work at Brook House which compared to Tinsley House – which is dormitory type accommodation (at the time predominantly 3 residents to a room); accommodated a total of 116 (I think) residents; a two storey building with association space - is noisy and crowded. After the airing of the Panorama programme I felt there was a sense of shock and disbelief with officers feeling betrayed. I believe they felt betrayed as some would have worked closely with those who were shown on the programme. I personally was shocked as some of those featured were known to me and I never had any inkling that those known to me would behave in such a manner. I always felt that staff at Brook House were keen to work with residents to progress their cases to resolution and I had no concerns in relation to how those detained were dealt with and the protection of vulnerable residents.
35. From my point of view, my attitude towards people who were detained at Brook House would be to focus on their experience during detention and the progression of their case towards whatever outcome that might be (whether deportation/removal or release into the community). I felt very strongly that everyone should be treated the way we would expect ourselves or our family to be treated, and for me a successful outcome when someone left the centre would be if they felt they had been listened to by us and treated with respect. Given the purpose of immigration detention, some Home Office staff will have had to focus more on the particular outcome of somebody's case, but in my experience everybody's attitudes were respectful and humane.
36. During the relevant period I had no reason to think that G4S had any different attitudes to persons who were detained and that is why I found the programme particularly shocking and did not reflect the good work that staff were doing at

Brook House to ensure the security and safety of those in their care. During my time at Tinsley House and Brook House and working with a number of G4S staff I never had any inkling that the behaviour I saw on the Panorama programme could occur in Brook House or Tinsley House IRCs. In my experience G4S staff displayed empathy and a can do attitude to keep residents' spirits buoyant as far as it was possible to do so.

37. For that reason, at the time I had no particular concerns about the values or culture of G4S and the Home Office.
38. In terms of G4S senior management, as far as I was aware they shared the same values and priorities as the Home Office. In particular I am aware that Ben Saunders had a background in social work and he seemed to me to have a particular focus on care for residents. The G4S values were displayed in the entrance stairwell at Tinsley House and the gate house at Brook House.
39. My experience at both Brook House and Tinsley House is that whenever I have asked staff to go above and beyond to help a detainee they have always been willing to do so.
40. Some G4S staff members shared what they believed to be unfair treatment with me in relation to the management of G4S staff by their managers and I always encouraged them to raise this through the proper channels or the whistleblower line. The general themes related to unfairness in how staff perceived they were being dealt with; issues with getting time off when requested relating to roster, favourable treatment by some to others at the detriment of others; reporting on staffing issues relating to contract returns e.g. staff moved to Brook House but still showing on the Tinsley Roster with the potential for double counting.

41. I found the G4S staff that I came across had an empathetic attitude but could be assertive if the situation required it to those detained at Brook House during my time at Tinsley and Brook IRCs.
42. I had no particular concerns about the values/attitudes of any of those employed at Brook or Tinsley IRCs and feel that officers were very aware of their responsibilities in keeping those detained safe and positive in regard to their situation. As stated earlier (paragraph 40) there were moans and groans about G4S management but I always advised that they should raise through their management chain or whistleblower line. In my experience officers were alert to any deterioration in a residents mood/behaviour raising such concerns as required.
43. I was not aware of anyone bringing drugs into Brook House nor did I ever experience any racist, homophobic, or misogynistic attitudes or behaviour or bullying by any member of G4S or Home Office staff at Brook House. I do not recall any occasions where someone raised concerns about the treatment of detained persons (either individually or collectively) whether informally or as a “whistleblower”, by either Home Office or G4S staff. Although as mentioned above (paragraph 27) I am aware of a complaint regarding treatment of a transgender visitor.

Oversight, monitoring and outside involvement

44. Having reviewed recommendations 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23, 5.24, 5.5, 5.27, 5.35 and 5.44 in the HMIP Action Plan (VER000116), I can confirm that to the best of my recollection I was not directly involved in this area of work at Brook House as it did not relate to the PDT, although it might be that my team had some minor involvement elsewhere.
45. In response to the Inquiry’s question, I do not recall receiving any complaints about victimisation of residents.

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46. The Independent Monitoring Board are volunteers who attend the centre to monitor how the centre operates, ensuring fair and humane treatment of residents. They have a duty rota with members attending on ad-hoc occasions, meet with the HOIE and Service Provider monthly to discuss success and failures. During rota visits members would approach HOIE staff requesting updates on individuals or raising any concerns they may have with a resident. They advertise their services around the centre and have their own post boxes for residents to make contact. In my role at Tinsley House I attended IMB meetings however given my role in the PDT at Brook House during my time there I don't recall attending IMB meetings but I probably had contact with IMB members if they had questions or wanted updates when they visited the office.

47. The Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group are a charitable organisation predominantly made up of volunteers and they befriend residents regularly visiting, offering financial and emotional support. Literature/awareness was available via the welfare office. I did not have any involvement with this group at Brook House.

48. Medical Justice is another charitable organisation who provide support for residents in health-related matters. I was aware of them but did not have any direct interaction with them at Brook House.

49. Bail for Immigration Detainees was known to me and provided a presentation to the Joint Welfare Group in April 2017 raising my understanding of their work. They are another charitable organisation who challenge immigration detention, and who assist detained persons with bail applications. Awareness of their service is available in the Welfare Office and I think G4S were in discussion with them about attending the Gatwick IRCs. I had no other contact with this group at Brook House but have shared their work with colleagues who interact with residents to signpost their availability in applying for bail, and assisting with legal matters.

50. I cannot recall any other similar organisations involved at Brook House.

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Training

51. When I moved temporarily from Tinsley House to the PDT pilot at Brook House I did not receive any particular training. Building on previous training and with the introduction of the PDT pilot a training schedule for PDT staff was drawn up. This included a variety of modules aimed at gaining a broader understanding of the differing business areas, i.e. the Third Country Unit, Criminal Casework, the Voluntary Return Service, and the Reimbursement Scheme. I do recall sitting in on some of these modules with staff. I believe the training assisted me in gaining an understanding of what was expected of me in my role but experience is important as no two days are the same with differing situations/questions arising. Most staff in the PDT were existing staff who had been working at Tinsley and Brook Houses and had already receiving training/guidance in relation to contact with residents and contract between G4S and the Home Office.

52. Some of the training delivered to the PDT team would have been a refresher for some, including myself, because they had attended this training before. From memory Personal Safety Training for HOIE staff was refreshed annually. Race Relations and some other mandatory training may have also been in place. I cannot recall any other refresher training for HOIE staff. I also encouraged new starters to undertake some of the G4S training modules to broaden their knowledge and gain an insight into the training that the officers attended. I also attended some modules.

Relationship with G4S staff

53. I believe I had a good collaborative working relationship with staff at all levels at Brook and Tinsley Houses. All parties had their own management and reporting elements but those who I engaged with regularly definitely wanted the best outcome for residents.

Staffing levels

54. I am asked to comment on the following: *G4S was contracted to provide 668 hours of DCO time per day. The contract required at least two DCOs on duty on each residential wing throughout the day.* I have addressed staffing levels in paragraph 33 above.

55. In my role at Brook House I did not have any involvement in monitoring staffing levels. I do know that staffing was monitored, with G4S providing a minimum number of hours of DCO time each day. I was aware from my role at Tinsley House IRC that this could be a very complex area of the contract which changed over time. In my work at Brook House I do not recall having any particular concerns about staffing levels. I do not recall ever having to raise an issue relating to staffing levels on the wings, although I may have raised concerns about staffing on the interview corridor, which I think possibly was an issue about whether G4S were correctly patrolling the corridor. It should also be noted that during my time at Brook House, with Tinsley undergoing refurbishment, staff from Tinsley House were deployed to work at Brook House.

56. Any concerns around staffing would have been expected to be raised by the contract compliance team through their management to G4S; discussed at weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings.

57. It is difficult now to recall whether I was aware of G4S staff or managers raising concerns over staffing levels. I would not necessarily have expected any issues of this kind to be raised with me, given my role in the PDT.

58. I do not recall any issues being brought to my attention about the staffing levels of the healthcare team, who were a separate contracted entity to the on-site welfare team referred to previously, while I was working at Brook House. As far as I am able to recall Healthcare were able to meet the demands of residents and all

requests from the PDT were met. Nor do I recall being aware of any staffing issues with the activities team.

Treatment of detained persons

59. If I was on site I would be aware of any planned or spontaneous Use of Force either by the submission of an IS91 Part C (this is a Home Office document populated by those working in an IRC to provide supplementary information to the caseowner) or by discussion at the morning meeting or direct contact from the G4S Oscar 1 (who was the G4S employee on site at any one time with overall responsibility for the centre).

60. I recall witnessing one Use of Force, I think during the relevant period, which involved a resident who the HOIE had been trying to remove from the UK or return to a Prison, I can't fully remember. The officers were in protective clothing, including head wear, and the resident was located in E wing. The officers were briefed, and another officer gave the resident an opportunity to walk from the room in an attempt to de-escalate a developing situation, but the resident refused. Officers in protective clothing then entered the room of the resident who had been known to self-defecate to prevent his extraction from the room. On entering the room, the resident began to defecate and throw excrement at the officers. I remained in the association area of E wing some distance from the room, but an officer was filming the situation. One of the officers came out of the room and immediately entered the shower as excrement had entered his headwear and I believe his mouth. The removal was aborted, the resident was relocated to another room, and officers were stood down. At the conclusion of the Use of Force, Officers are required to complete paperwork in line with the DSO. I do not recall being involved in any review or lessons learnt following this incident, and I did not necessarily expect to be. One of the requirements of the contract monitoring role is to, where possible, observe planned use of force incidents and in the absence of other Home Office staff being available and in light of the resident's

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previous behaviour I took the decision to attend and observe the use of force referred to above. I cannot recall the resident's name or the names of the officers involved nor can I confirm that the necessary paperwork was completed in relation to this incident although, the contract monitoring team were aware and would have requested the paperwork if it was not completed and provided to them by the 24 hour deadline.

61. Based on what I knew, I personally do not believe that Use of Force was excessive at Brook House (aside of course from the sort of abusive unauthorised use of force depicted in the Panorama programme, of which I was unaware at the time). I am unable to comment on different and alternative techniques.

Detained Persons as time served foreign national offenders (TSFNO)

62. I have no reason to think Time Served Foreign National Offenders being co-located with other residents caused difficulties in managing the welfare of those detained at Brook House. Different residents have different backgrounds and difficulties which could lead to behaviours which affected others. I personally do not think it is helpful to label groups of individuals, and I try to approach every resident on an individual basis. I was aware that those residents who had come from a custodial environment may act in certain ways because they were used to being in that kind of environment, which could be either positive or negative, whereas those who were completely new to the experience of being detained would be in a different position, but in my view the reactions of residents were very individual.

Abuse of detained persons

63. I did not have any specific concerns about the abuse (verbal or physical) of detained persons (either individually or collectively) at Brook House by staff.

64. I cannot recall any specific incident but during my time at Gatwick IRCs there have been occasions when a resident has self-harmed in view of other residents or another resident has come across a resident who has self-harmed. On these occasions staff from healthcare and G4S encouraged the resident(s) to talk with a professional or staff member as a means of working through any distress etc. I cannot otherwise recall any concerns about abuse (verbal or physical) of detained persons (either individually or collectively) at Brook House by other detained persons.

The Panorama Programme

65. I have viewed the programme again but do not think I worked with Callum Tulley and I did not appear in the programme.

66. The airing of the programme did have an impact on staff morale at Gatwick IRCs and in my opinion it left staff in shock, disbelief and feeling let down as I believe that the staff do all that they can to ensure the safety and security of those in their care.

67. I believe most residents were aware of the Panorama Programme and those that weren't quickly became aware. G4S and HOIE held meetings with residents to allay any fears that residents had by explaining that a number of the staff portrayed in the programme were no longer on site and that the behaviour shown in the programme was not acceptable; some residents requested transfers but I cannot remember if the requests were agreed to; some potential residents refused to come to Brook House because of the Panorama programme; some residents were very vocal at these meetings in relation to Brook House and these concerns were noted and where possible resolved., e.g. one of their complaints was a lack of strings for a guitar. Steve Skitt took responsibility and the strings were provided I and other PDT colleagues walked around the centre with, on most occasions, the Deputy

Director of G4S (Stephen Skitt), daily showing a presence, speaking with individuals, taking queries and providing responses later in the day.

68. Apart from the foregoing I do not recall what other changes, if any, occurred but I was only present for a couple of months following the programme and the fall-out was managed by HOIE contract compliance colleagues.

Specific individuals

69. From the list provided I certainly knew Nathan Ring, John Connolly, Slim Bassoud and Jo Buss. I might have had some interaction with the others but did not know their names.

70. Nathan Ring, John Connolly and Jo Buss had worked at Tinsley House. Nathan as an officer before becoming an Oscar. John as an officer and at one time an activities officer (if I remember correctly), and Jo worked in healthcare. My interaction with them was always on a professional level and at no time did any of their behaviours or language cause me any concern. I knew Slim from Brook House where he worked as an Assistant Custody Officer, I would see him in the gate house to say hello to. I never actually worked alongside him or engaged in a working capacity.

71. I did not ever hear them use derogatory, offensive and insensitive remarks about detained persons, nor was I told about them having done so, and I did not witness any incidents of them verbally abusing or physically abusing or assaulting detained persons, nor was I told about them having done so.

Suggestions for Improvements

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72. Working at Tinsley House and then Brook House is my only experience of a custodial environment except for visits to other IRCs. It is my personal belief that the environment where someone is held can affect their behaviour. I don't imagine anybody welcomes being detained, but if I imagine for myself being detained during the relevant period at Tinsley House I think I would have found it personally more manageable than at Brook House, as Brook House was a busier environment which was physically more like a prison. Brook House was built to Category B prison standard and from what I have seen of the inside of a prison on TV the wings are prison like.

73. From the point of view of someone currently working at Brook House in my capacity as DET Operational Manager it is difficult to suggest any changes for improvement because the pandemic has significantly changed the current operation at Brook House. A new contract has been awarded to SERCO and there are a number of changes already introduced e.g. increase in staffing, change to regime times which I believe will be an improvement for residents accommodated at Brook House. Further detail in relation to the improvements proposed by SERCO would be available from Home Office Commercial colleagues.

D1467

74. I have been asked to address a series of questions concerning a G4S Brook House IRC Investigation Report, ID number BH/1/001 [SXP000159] which has been provided to me by the Inquiry

HOM0331951	HOM0331952	HOM0331954	HOM0331957	HOM0331958	HOM0331959	HOM0331960	
HOM0331961	HOM0331965	HOM0331966	HOM0331967	HOM0331969	HOM0331970	HOM0331971	HOM0331972

75. In relation to Allegation 2 (page 12 of the report), I had a meeting with D1467 on 15 September 2017. He informed me that he had been a safer community orderly and reported to 'Jan and a manager' (he didn't add any name and I didn't ask) information that resulted in a find of an iPhone, drugs and weapons and that he believed that Jan told the 'gang leader' which led to him being beaten up by other detainees. He also reported that he felt threatened by detainees and officers

mentioning the names of two officers. The information provided by D1467 was brought to the attention of my managers Michelle Smith and Ian Castle, as well as the G4S Deputy Director, Stephen Skitt via email dated 16 September. I cannot comment on the information D1467 provided on the 19 September to the investigation team which is said to conflict with his earlier account (mentioning DCO McMillan and not Jan) as I was not involved in that investigation.

76. In relation to Allegation 7 (page 17), the claim that two detained persons who had attacked D1467 at Brook House on 29 December 2016 were moved to the Verne where he was transferred was not mentioned in my meeting with D1467 on 15 September 2017 although I can see that it was mentioned in D1467's Solicitor's letter of 14 September 2017.
77. In relation to Allegation 10 (page 22), I can confirm that the information I received on 15 September 2017 was shared with Home Office and G4S management in addition to the agreed support plan.
78. In relation to Allegation 14 (page 29) D1467 stated at our meeting that he had received threats since appearing on the Panorama programme but did not give any specifics. I met again with D1467 on 18 September 2017 when he stated that officers had entered his room on Saturday 16 September 2017 stating that they tried to wake him up but his roommate woke and asked what was going on, so the officers left. I forwarded the information to Michelle Smith, Home Office and Stephen Skitt, G4S copying in Ian Castle and suggested that CCTV be viewed. I do not know if this suggestion was taken further. He did not mention a call on his mobile phone.
79. Finally, in relation to Allegation 15 (page 30), I do not know the outcome of the internal investigation referred to in the report which concerned a complaint that a woman working in the shop bought in drugs.

<u>Statement of Truth</u>	
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
Name	Debra Weston
Signature	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> Signature </div>
Date	4 November 2021

Witness Name: Debra Elizabeth Weston
 Statement No: First
 Exhibits: None