

# **BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY**

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## **First Witness Statement of Mr Jamie Macpherson**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 18 March 2021. I have been authorised by the charity Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group (The Orchard, 1-2 Gleneagles Court, Brighton Road, Crawley, RH10 6AD) to provide this witness statement.

I, Jamie Macpherson will say as follows:

### **Introduction**

1. I am providing this witness statement in the capacity of a Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group (“GDWG”) volunteer visitor. I have been a GDWG volunteer visitor (“Volunteer Visitor”) for approximately 10 years and my first visit to the Gatwick Immigration Removal Centres was in 2011. For approximately five and a half years, I have also been a GDWG Trustee.
2. I first became involved with GDWG after I met an existing Volunteer Visitor. Before that I had lived in a village near Gatwick and I would give people lifts to the airport. During these journeys I recall seeing the prison-like structure and I was interested because I didn’t know we had a prison in the area – this was in fact Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (“Brook House”).

### **GDWG Volunteer Visitors**

3. The role of a Volunteer Visitor is to provide support to the individuals who are held within the Gatwick Immigration Removal Centres (Brook House and Tinsley House). As a visitor we are paired with a detained person within either Brook House

or Tinsley House and we commit to visiting them, where possible, on a weekly basis for approximately one hour.

4. We are usually paired with one detained individual for the duration of their detention. During this time, we try to offer the detained individuals support and assistance with resources (e.g. clothing and phone cards). We also act as 'befrienders' who are there to give emotional support and to listen to them, but not to pass judgment.
5. We are told, from the moment we become a Volunteer Visitor, that if any legal issues are raised during visits it is not for Volunteer Visitors to provide legal advice. These types of issue are to be reported back to the GDWG central office and the office staff will then refer them on to specialist organisations if it is appropriate to do so.

#### Pairing of visitors and detained persons

6. The 'pairing' of detained individuals and Volunteer Visitors is not random. The GDWG caseworkers run drop-in sessions for detained persons at Brook House on a weekly basis. During these meetings the GDWG caseworkers take a note of the detained person's situation.
7. Using the information obtained during the drop-in sessions, the GDWG caseworkers try to match each detained person with a suitable Volunteer Visitor. For example, if the relevant detained person is very distressed or has mental health problems, the GDWG caseworkers would not pair them with a new volunteer. Accordingly, due to my level of experience, I am quite often paired with long-term detained people or those who are particularly distressed. Previously I have visited three detained persons who have been detained at Brook House for more than one year.

### Follow-up work

8. Following each visit there is no expectation or stipulation that Volunteer Visitors provide any feedback to the GDWG central office. However, if a detained person raises concerns about basic issues (e.g. accessing their Solicitor, contacting Bail for Immigration Detainees (“BID”) or requesting a rule 35 report) during a visit, we are advised to report this to the GDWG central office staff and they will investigate, if they deem it appropriate to do so. I think that most Volunteer Visitors do regularly report back to the GDWG central office because they want to help the individuals they are paired with by ensuring that any necessary information is fed back to their GDWG caseworkers. Each detained person is allocated a GDWG caseworker.
9. The only exception to this rule is if we have any concerns about the detained person committing suicide or self-harming. In this scenario we are told to:
  - a. Report our concern to Brook House staff before we leave the centre; and
  - b. Report the concern back to the GDWG director at the earliest opportunity.

I have never had to report this type of concern to the Brook House staff.

### Raising Concerns and Complaints

10. I have been asked whether, as per GDWG’s website, I saw “*Assisting detainees to make complaints about mistreatment*” to be part of my role as a Volunteer Visitor during the Relevant Period (i.e. 1 April 2017 to 31 August 2017). The website explains that this is a role for Advocacy Support Volunteers, rather than for Volunteer Visitors. If Volunteer Visitors had concerns about a detained person we have always been encouraged to share those concerns with the GDWG central office, not to keep it to ourselves. I don’t think I have ever felt it was my role to make complaints on behalf of a detained person and so I would refer such issues to the GDWG central office - I would not take it on myself.
11. On the one occasion where I was asked by a detained person to help them make a complaint, I, as well as reporting the matter to GDWG central office, suggested that the detained person contact the Independent Monitoring Board (“IMB”). I cannot

recall whether this was during the Relevant Period or not. I know IMB had told us in or around the Relevant Period that GDWG should not make complaints to the IMB on the behalf of detained individuals. The IMB told us that the detained individuals should contact them directly, whereupon the IMB would take up the complaint with G4S.

12. I don't think that those detained at Brook House will have had a lot of faith in this complaints process however, because I think that IMB were perceived as being a branch of G4S.

13. I am not aware of any means by which either GDWG or detained persons could complain directly to the Home Office.

Support for Volunteer Visitors

14. There is a Volunteer Visitor support group. This meets every six to eight weeks and has been running throughout the 10 years that I have been a Volunteer Visitor.

15. The support group meetings provide an opportunity to share information and feedback on what is happening at Brook House with other Volunteer Visitors. The meetings also provide a space in which we can speak, in confidence, about our experiences during visits. This allows Volunteer Visitors to use the sessions for self-help and to access emotional support from the volunteer visitor community.

16. For example, some visitors may have been visiting a detained person for a prolonged period and then that individual is suddenly removed from the country – this is a situation that the more experienced visitors will have encountered themselves and so they can explain how they overcame the situation and the emotions involved.

17. The support group meetings are not used for reporting concerns about detained persons or the general management of Brook House. These types of issue should be reported by Volunteer Visitors to the GDWG central office.
18. Aside from the formal support group, I also share lifts with some of the other Volunteer Visitors when we are visiting Brook House. On our journey home after a visit, we often talk about our experiences and seek one another's advice on any issues or concerns we have following visits.

### **GDWG Trustees**

19. As mentioned above, I have been a GDWG Trustee for five and half years. The role of a GDWG Trustee is, primarily, to provide financial oversight in respect of the running of the charity to ensure the organisation remains solvent. The Board of Trustees also provides input into the organisation's overall strategy but does not get involved in the day to day running of the GDWG organisation. The Director of GDWG also attends the Board of Trustee meetings to provide a report on the current work of the organisation – these reports provide the Board with a flavour of the relations between GDWG and the management of the Gatwick Immigration Removal Centres.

### **Experience of attending Brook House as Visitor**

20. I would like to provide some background information about the general experience of being a visitor to Brook House during the Relevant Period and the processes that all visitors had to adhere to when visiting those detained in Brook House.

#### **Book a visitor slot**

21. The first step before any visit is booking a visitor slot. This process has to be completed at least 24 hours before a visit takes place and is completed online or by telephone.
22. You are only allowed to visit one detained person per visitor slot. I did on one occasion try to visit two detained individuals during one afternoon visit period, as I

was covering for another Volunteer Visitor who was on holiday. I was prevented from doing so by the G4S staff and I was told that I would have to come back during a separate visitor slot if I wanted to see more than one detained person. This makes visiting more than one detained person very time-consuming and can make it difficult to provide cover for Visitors when they are unable to visit.

#### Registration

23. Upon arrival, in my opinion, Brook House always feels very dehumanising and presents as a very strange place to visit. The first step on arrival is to register at the gatehouse - this involves an Officer checking one's passport and proof of address. I would then be photographed by an Officer before being given a wrist band and a lanyard.
24. This process takes a while, as often the camera breaks and the Officer overseeing registration has to start the whole process again. Despite this process being completed on a computer, we have to provide a new picture every time we visit Brook House and so this delay can (and often does) re-occur on every visit.
25. Before we leave the registration area, because we can't take any personal possessions beyond this point (we are not allowed to take so much as a tissue) all our possessions have to be locked in a locker. The only possession you are allowed to take beyond this point is a small amount of change (to a maximum value of £4), so that we can use the vending machines (e.g. to buy a cup of tea). Historically, Volunteer Visitors had been able to take a pen and notebook with us during visits, but in 2018 G4S stopped this and, to the best of my knowledge, they never explained why. More recently we have again been allowed to take a pen and notebook with us.

#### Reception

26. Following registration, you are directed to Reception - this involves walking across the car park and entering an 'airlock'.

27. The 'airlock' is a space between two sliding doors that are operated remotely by staff behind a glass screen.
28. After the airlock, a pat down search takes place. Once it is completed we are allowed to enter a holding room, where we stay until an Officer collects us and escorts us across the court yard to the Visit Hall reception area. This part of the process is usually completed as a group, with multiple visitors escorted across the car park at the same time.
29. Before we arrive at the Visit Hall reception area, we have to pass through four locked doors and an airlock. I know that some Volunteer Visitors have historically been put off on account of the claustrophobic environment created by this process. As a visitor, I always feel that these security measures give Brook House the feeling that it is somewhere dangerous people are held – a place to protect the public from those inside, rather than a facility to house vulnerable people pending their removal from the country.
30. I have also visited Tinsley House as a Volunteer Visitor on a number of occasions (both before and after the Relevant Period). The process we are required to follow at Tinsley House is much more humane and means that visiting the individuals detained in Tinsley House is less intimidating. For example, there is a much quicker check-in process and you only have to go through one locked door to reach the Visit Hall. The Tinsley House staff also appear to be much more relaxed compared to those at Brook House – for example, they don't patrol the Visit Hall during visits and I also understand that those detained at Tinsley House are not locked in cells at night. They can enter and leave their rooms and can go into the corridor or use the bathroom (but cannot move freely around the entire centre at night).

### Visits Hall

31. On arrival at the Visits Hall, we were not allowed to enter the hall until an Officer was present. Inevitably, we would therefore spend some time waiting in the Visit Hall corridor – on numerous occasions I have been kept waiting, sometimes up to 20 minutes, to enter the Visit Hall. I believe the requirement that an Officer is present in the Visits Hall before you enter is intended to be a security measure to prevent drugs, and other contraband items, entering Brook House.
32. During this time the Visit Hall Reception staff used a ‘tannoy system’ to call the detained person up from their room on the wings. In my experience this system did not work very well because staff often mispronounced the detained person’s name. When this happened, it didn’t feel like staff deliberately mispronounced their names but it felt like the staff did not consider it important enough to get it right and they were not concerned about any mistakes.
33. Once the detained person had arrived at the Visit Hall corridor they were told someone was there to see them. Sometimes the detained person would be late for a reason and in the past officers have made comments to me like ‘they kept you waiting’ or ‘they should be grateful that someone found time to visit them’. These comments were critical of the detained person and made me feel very uncomfortable.
34. When the detained person first arrived in the Visit Hall, we were able to shake their hand and/or hug, but the Officers did not like prolonged physical contact. I am also aware that family and friends visiting detained individuals were not allowed to hold hands during visits due to the G4S visiting protocols. I have previously witnessed Officers reminding family and friends and detained persons that they could not touch one another.
35. I can recall one incident where the GDWG Office received a complaint from Brook House management about inappropriate contact between a Volunteer Visitor and a



detained person because they had been holding hands during a visit. If I remember correctly the G4S Officers thought this physical contact between a Volunteer Visitor and a detained individual was unprofessional. As Volunteer Visitors our role is to befriend and support the detained person and this includes comforting the person if distressed. I felt that perceiving a gesture of support as inappropriate without knowing the circumstances was overly critical and unfair.

36. Once we were inside the Visits Hall we had to sit in accordance with the prescribed layout (i.e. with visitors sitting on chairs directly opposite to the detained individuals, with a small table between us). We were not allowed to move the chairs or the tables and we were not able to sit next to the detained person we were visiting. These requirements were rigorously imposed by the Officers. This rule made our visits less relaxed and made it more difficult to create an atmosphere of trust and friendship. It would also have been helpful to sit closer to someone who spoke with a very quiet voice.

37. During visits, the Visitor Hall usually has a total of ten to fifteen people in it at a time. I have visited Brook House on occasions where it has only been myself and the detained person I am visiting present in the Hall. I found these situations particularly odd, as we were sometimes asked to sit at the table and chairs closest to the Visit Hall reception desk. This made it very easy for staff to overhear our conversation from their desk and I think it made it very uncomfortable for the detained individual to speak freely with me.

#### Conversation

38. In my experience, the conversations that you have with detained individuals when visiting Brook House are very varied. Some detained persons just want to tell you about the developments in their case each week, whilst others want to speak about anything other than their case (e.g. football, family). Some individuals would raise concerns about their treatment, for example concerns that they weren't getting the healthcare treatment they wanted or needed.

39. Although the Visits Hall was a very noisy environment, the detained persons would often be worried about being overheard. On top of this, G4S staff patrolled the Visits Hall every 10 minutes or so – I believe this was part of G4S policy. During these patrols the detained person would usually go silent whilst the officer walked past. Although it was hard to tell if staff were listening to your conversation, I think they would have been able to overhear if they wished to do so. I think the risk of being overheard by staff would have potentially prevented detained individuals from telling us things that they found embarrassing or distressing.

#### Language Barriers

40. Some of the detained persons that Volunteer Visitors assist do not speak any English. For these situations, GDWG had managed to get various dictionaries placed in the Visits Hall. This meant, for example, that when I was visiting an Iranian detained person who spoke no English, I was able to spend an hour picking out words from a Persian-English dictionary – this was not ideal, but it allowed some communication and helped him learn some English.

41. Unfortunately, it is not possible for other detained persons who are fluent in English in the relevant language to act as translators in this scenario, because the G4S policies only allow visitors to meet with one detained person per visit.

42. Historically GDWG has tried looking into electronic translation devices, but these all need Wi-Fi access, and this is not available within Brook House. Similarly, GDWG has historically had some English language training / translation packs made up and placed into the Visits Hall. However, these packs were removed by G4S, either intentionally or by mistake. We were never got told where or why they had gone.

43. In my opinion language difficulties are not limited to Volunteer Visitors and Detained Persons, but are also apparent between the G4S Officers and the family,

friends and relatives that are visiting detained persons. Although the staff are quite polite to Volunteer Visitors, there have been many times when I have considered the behaviour of staff to be rude and hostile towards the family or friends of detained persons.

#### Staff

44. I cannot remember the names of any of the staff members that I interacted with at Brook House during the Relevant Period because I did not feel it was necessary to record that information and also because there was a high turnover of staff at that time. In any event, during visits my interactions with the Brook House staff were usually limited to the exchange of pleasantries. I never got the impression that the staff were encouraged to talk to me and I think they were also very limited in what they could say.
45. One thing I do recall staff frequently apologising for during the Relevant Period were the delays to visitors accessing the Visit Hall. The staff explained that these delays were because they were short-staffed.
46. Although there were some kind and helpful staff members at Brook House during the Relevant Period that I believe were working to help those detained in Brook House in difficult circumstances, I was disturbed at times to see other staff members' approach to non-GDWG visitors (e.g. detained individuals' friends and family). For some context most Volunteer Visitors are white, whilst the detained individuals' family members are often not. I felt that some of the Brook House staff spoke to the Volunteer Visitors differently to the way that they spoke to detained individual's family members and friends. In particular I think that the way staff members raised their voices and used a disrespectful tone when speaking with detained individuals' families and friends could be interpreted as being racist and discriminatory.

47. I am aware from conversations that I had with members of the GDWG central office team, that the staff in Brook House's welfare department were quite cooperative towards GDWG and were certainly more cooperative than general Brook House management staff. GDWG used to take the welfare department copies of the GDWG leaflets and posters so that they could put these up on the Brook House wings. We couldn't check that this had happened as we never went beyond the Visit Hall, but we had no reason to believe it had not.

**Visits during the 'Relevant period'**

48. During the Relevant Period, I was paired with four detained individuals and I visited Brook House twelve times in total.

49. Of the four individuals that I was paired with during the Relevant Period:

- a. One of them I had seen for approximately 12 months prior to the Relevant Period and saw for a 14 month period in total. This detained person's name was D191;
- b. One of them I had seen three or four times before the Relevant Period;
- c. One of them I only saw during the Relevant Period and I only visited once; and
- d. One of them I only saw during the Relevant Period and I saw them on two occasions.

50. Of the four individuals I visited in the Relevant Period, only D191 has provided consent for me to provide the Inquiry with evidence about my visits. Accordingly, I will not be providing any details about the other three detained individuals that I visited during the Relevant Period.

D191

51. I started visiting D191 in or around February 2016 and continued to do so until he was moved to an IRC near Heathrow in May 2017.

52. [D191] was originally moved to Brook House from prison following a custodial sentence. Upon the expiration of his custodial sentence he had been listed for removal from the UK to Somaliland. As part of this process, [D191] was told that the removal process would be more expedient if he signed up to a voluntary return. Very early on in his detention [D191] did sign up to voluntary removal, but then spent 14 months in Brook House. I know that this caused him great concern, as he was never able to get any information from his caseworker at the Home Office because they always asserted that his removal was 'imminent'.
53. From discussions with [D191] and his legal representatives, it is my understanding that the Home Office were unable to obtain the necessary removal papers for [D191] from the Somaliland authorities and it was this issue, and failure by the Home Office over many months to offer Section 4 accommodation, that resulted in his prolonged detention at Brook House

#### Closed Visits

54. During the time that I was visiting [D191] there were several occasions when he had been placed on 'Closed Visits'. These visits were not meant to take place in the main Visit Hall but should have been held in small anteroom ("Closed Visit Room").
55. The Closed Visit Room was divided into two by a glass panel. The visitor enters the room via the Visits Hall, whilst the detained person enters the other side of the room directly from the Brook House wings. I understand that this arrangement was intended to prevent visitors having any direct contact with the relevant detained person. Unfortunately, the glass panel did not have a microphone system, or any form of grill, to speak through and accordingly it was very difficult to hear those you were visiting in the Closed Visits Room.

I used this room on a number of occasions with [D191] but there was a complete lack of consistency over closed visits. On two occasions I was able to persuade Visits

Hall staff, following consultation with the Brook House Security team, to allow [D191] to enter the Visits Hall.

56. During the two periods of time I had to use the Closed Visit Room, [D191] had been placed on closed visits because he had been alleged to have used 'Spice'. I was told that this arrangement was necessary to prevent [D191] receiving Spice from visitors. This information led me to raise the issue with G4S as I knew that I was [D191] only visitor during this period and therefore wanted to know what evidence they claimed to have that I was supplying him with Spice. As I had not been providing him with Spice, I knew they could not have any evidence. This gave me the impression that Closed Visits were being used, in [D191] case, as a punishment. I tried to raise this issue with Brook House Security team and on two occasions I waited for more than an hour in the Visits Hall corridor while staff telephoned security about my wish to speak with them. On both occasions I was told that they were in meetings and were not available to see me. They suggested that I telephone instead. I telephoned several times but there was never anyone available to speak to me.

57. I tried to raise the issue with the then GDWG Director, but due to the state of the relationship between G4S and GDWG he didn't want to risk destabilising the relationship further.

### **Mistreatment of detained persons**

#### **Staff**

58. Prior to the Panorama documentary being broadcast, it never occurred to me that physical mistreatment of detained persons at the hands of Brook House staff could be taking place.

59. After the documentary had aired, in late 2017 or early 2018, I was made aware by [D191] that he had been subjected to physical mistreatment whilst he was at Brook House. He explained to me via WhatsApp messages (sent from Somaliland

following his removal) that whilst he was detained at Brook House he had been physically detained by three officers after he had taken Spice. One of these officers, during the restraint, had used what [D191] felt to be excessive force and it had left [D191] worried that he had suffered a permanent injury. I understand that one of the officers involved in this incident was called 'Steve', but I cannot recall [D191] having told me his surname. I believe that 'Steve' held a management position within Brook House.

60. When I was told about it, I got in touch with [D191] legal representative about it. I understand that this incident was the subject of a complaint by [D191] legal representatives, leading to an investigation being carried out by the Home Office Professional Standards Unit ("PSU"). A PSU report later concluded that they would not be upholding [D191] allegations.

61. When I learnt of [D191] mistreatment at Brook House, I was surprised and shocked. Although I was visiting [D191] during the period when this incident would have occurred, he did not mention it to me during my visits. I think this might have been because he thought he was already in enough trouble with staff at Brook House and the Home Office - he was, at the time, complaining about the delays to his removal and was regularly trying to contact the Home Office to see why it was taking so long. I think it was also around this time that he started using spice, which caused his mental health to spiral downwards.

62. As regular visitors to Brook House, Volunteer Visitors get a general feeling of the centre and are well placed to gauge the atmosphere within the Brook House Centre. I am therefore unsure why the issue of mistreatment by Brook House staff was not picked up by the Volunteer Visitor community. I can only guess that detained people, who are under intense pressure and often very vulnerable, were concerned that reporting mistreatment to a Volunteer Visitor might lead to more mistreatment by detention staff or might harm their immigration case.

#### Detained Persons

63. Although I was not aware of mistreatment of detained persons by Brook House staff during the Relevant Period, I did get the impression that Brook House could be a stressful environment and I did hear stories about hostile incidents between the individuals detained at Brook House. I was never expressly told about these incidents by any detained persons, but I heard stories from other Volunteer Visitors of disputes between those detained at Brook House bubbling over into physical violence.

### **Healthcare**

64. Healthcare, or the lack of access to Healthcare, is probably the most common complaint that you receive as a Volunteer Visitor from detained individuals. I understand that it is often difficult for those detained at Brook House to get the Brook House Healthcare team to take their situations seriously and often detained individuals feel that their complaints are dismissed as being minor or irrelevant. I think there was a particular problem with the treatment of mental health conditions. The routine response for any health issue was for the Healthcare Team to offer detained persons paracetamol.

65. For example, shortly before the Relevant Period, but whilst I was visiting D191 he saw Healthcare regarding toothache. It took approximately 6 months from the date of his initial complaint to Healthcare before he received treatment for an abscess on his tooth. Within this 6 month period there were various delays, for example on one occasion he was taken to hospital for an x-ray on a Saturday morning, but upon arrival he was told his appointment had been two days earlier and the x-ray department was closed on the weekend.

66. Other detained individuals that I have visited have told me that upon arrival at Brook House all of their prescribed medication was removed from them, even if they had come directly from a prison where the medicine had been prescribed by that institution's healthcare team. Once the medication had been removed from them, they faced a long wait to firstly see a doctor within Brook House and secondly to



get the medicine made available to them. This process was, understandably, very distressing for those affected.

67. I would always report these types of issues to the GDWG central office. The problem that GDWG faced was that there were so many issues with Brook House and Healthcare that the GDWG central office would be complaining constantly if it raised every single issue with G4S. Accordingly, the central office had to pick and choose which issues they raised. This process was made more difficult because G4S told the GDWG central office that it was not GDWG's place to make complaints about Healthcare.

68. One of the GDWG trustees was also told in a Brook House stakeholder meeting that it should be detained persons making complaints, not GDWG. However, often the detained persons would not have the English skills or confidence to do that. It is of concern that our assistance in this regard was frowned upon by G4S.

#### Mental Health

69. Most of the individuals that I have visited at Brook House have had some form of mental health problem. In my experience, even those who are mentally strong when they arrive at Brook House, tend to develop some form of mental health problem during their detention at Brook House. It is therefore difficult, in my opinion, to avoid the conclusion that this is the result of the Brook House environment and the experience of being detained.

70. I think that is, at least partially, because those detained at Brook House find it difficult to get any information about their cases (e.g. how long they will be in detention, when they will next get an update on their case). This also isn't helped by the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, there are no regular mental health check-ups.

### Rule 35 Reports

71. I was broadly aware of the use of rule 35 reports within Brook House during the Relevant Period. I know that at least one of the individuals that I was visiting during the Relevant Period had alleged that they were a victim of torture and so a rule 35 report was completed by one the Brook House Healthcare GPs.
72. The individual concerned told me that they felt the GP's approach to the rule 35 report was perfunctory, and in their opinion the GP did not take their situation seriously. This left the person I was visiting feeling as though their experiences and fears had been dismissed.
73. I recall the report dismissed the detained person's claims because of a purported lack of proof of torture. The detained person was not content that the report was a full consideration of their situation and after correspondence with Medical Justice, arrangements were made for a further rule 35 report to be prepared. I believe that the detained person was released from detention before the further rule 35 report was completed.

### Substance Abuse

74. Spice became a real issue at Brook House during the Relevant Period. It was very prevalent within Brook House. I was aware of reports during the Relevant Period of people taking Spice and being left unconscious and incapacitated. On at least one occasion I saw ambulances arriving at Brook House and was told by the person I was visiting that they were there to assist a detained person who had taken Spice.
75. The increased prevalence of Spice at Brook House, in my opinion, correlated with it being made an illegal substance - I had never heard it mentioned before it was made illegal. I think the resulting increase in the drug's financial value must have made it sufficiently profitable to justify the risk of smuggling it into Brook House.

76. I know that efforts were made to try and reduce the availability of drugs within Brook House. For example, all visitors were searched. However, I don't see how drugs could get into Brook House through the Visits Hall given the processes and procedures I have described above. I was once told that staff were not subject to a full search each day, but were just subject to spot checks.

#### Mental Capacity Issues

77. Over the course of the 10 years that I have been a Volunteer Visitor I have visited detained persons who were clearly in a distressed state and could potentially have had mental capacity issues. For example, I remember telephoning one detained person that I had visited several times during the relevant period and them saying that they didn't know who I was and becoming very distressed. That individual often found it difficult to communicate with people and I think he became lost within himself.

78. In that instance, I reported my concerns back to the GDWG central office to make sure they were aware of his distressed state. I remember that they also tried to call him and spoke to him.

#### **Brook House Facilities**

##### Mobile Telephone Signal

79. Prior to visiting any individual that I am paired with at Brook House, out of courtesy I try to text them and say that I am going to arrange a visit. Occasionally, if I think that someone needs a bit more support than I can provide in a weekly face-to-face visit, I will also phone them between face-to-face visits.

80. I am therefore very aware that there is poor mobile phone signal in Brook House and on some wings there is no signal at all, unless the detained person is on the wing corridors. This can be problematic as it means there is very little opportunity, and/or privacy, for detained persons to make telephone calls. It is also very noisy in the

corridors as the sound reverberates and the heavy doors crash when they are closed making it difficult for the detained person and whoever they are speaking to, to be heard clearly.

81. In my opinion, the lack of mobile phone signal combined with the lack of privacy in Brook House, would have made it difficult for a detained person to discuss any concerns about their treatment at Brook House on the telephone without staff and/or other detained persons overhearing them.

#### Internet Access

82. I am aware that those detained at Brook House have no access to WIFI. This can be challenging for the detained persons, as they often preferred to contact friends through social media. I believe that the only internet access available to them is via the computers in the library, but these do not allow access to social media.

#### Cell Sharing

83. During the Relevant Period I was aware of concerns that detained persons were going to be held in three person cells. I know that this was concerning for detained persons and their visitors, because of the stress it would place on those required to share a small living space with two other people. However, to the best of my knowledge, I never visited anyone that was placed in a three person cell.

#### **Brook House following Panorama**

84. Following Panorama being broadcast, there were a few superficial changes to the arrangements at Brook House. For example, they made changes to the Visit Hall so that the furniture was less structured. This meant that visitors could move the furniture and could sit next to the detained individuals that they were visiting.
85. There were also other small changes in the approach of Brook House staff. For example, I understand that Serco now require their staff to refer to those detained in Brook House as 'residents', rather than 'detainees'. Personally, I feel that this is

rather insulting to those detained at Brook House because it makes the centre sound like a hotel when in reality the ‘residents’ are not free to come and go.

86. I am not aware of any changes having been made to other aspects of Brook House procedure addressed in my statement, for example the complaints process. As far as I am aware, these have remained unchanged following Panorama.

### **Brook House at Present**

87. I haven’t been to Brook House in person since the first COVID 19 ‘lockdown’ started in March 2020. Volunteer Visitors did start providing telephone support to those they were paired with during the first COVID 19 lockdown but approximately six weeks after the first lockdown commenced most of the individuals detained at Brook House were released back to the community. I understand that there are currently, approximately, 20 individuals detained at Brook House.

### **Recommendations**

88. Having considered the evidence I have set out above, I would make the following recommendations to try and prevent a recurrence of the mistreatment identified on Panorama:

#### **a) Respect**

In my view, a lack of respect for detained people, and a culture in which those who are detained are disbelieved, lie at the heart of the dehumanisation and mistreatment of detained people at Brook House. Improved recruitment, training and supervision of detention and healthcare staff, and Home Office staff, including better training on issues of race and cultural matters, and changes to combat the existing culture of disbelief in the accounts of detained persons, will provide better protection against abuse occurring and improve levels of trust by detained people in staff.

**b) Time limit on detention in immigration detention**

In my experience the absence of a limit on the amount of time that a person can be detained in immigration detention leaves those detained feeling like they are at the very bottom of society, diminishing their self-value. One detained person once said to me that at least if he had committed a crime and had been put in prison, he would have a clear custodial sentence whereas as a person detained within the immigration removal system you have no clear indication or assurances as to how long you will be locked up. By providing a defined time limit on immigration detention, you safeguard the self-value of those detained and I think this will make them more inclined to report any mistreatment.

**c) Healthcare**

As I have mentioned, lack of access to healthcare and inadequate treatment are very common subjects of concern to detained persons. Improved provision of healthcare, especially mental health care, is needed. In my experience the mental health of detainees I have visited deteriorates the longer they are detained. I consider that regular mental and physical health assessments should be conducted to check that a person is fit to be detained. There should be improved training of doctors in the making of Rule 35 reports and Home Office staff in responding to those reports.

**d) Segregation**

I am aware that during the Relevant Period, segregation of those detained at Brook House was commonly used to try and prevent disruptive behaviour. I am aware, from the conversations that I have had with detained persons and the Volunteer Visitor community, that in many cases where isolation was used to prevent disruptive behaviour, the detained person involved felt they were raising legitimate issues about their individual cases and they felt that they had to be non-compliant to ensure their voices were heard. In my opinion, in those types of situation isolation should not be used punitively and discussion and mediation should be used to attempt to resolve disputes in the first instance.

e) **Staffing**

As I have mentioned in my statement, inadequate staffing levels impacted on how long it took for Visitors to access the Visits Hall. In my opinion this gives those detained and their visitors the impression that visits were not considered a priority. I think the cause of delays should be addressed to restore and safeguard the self-value of those detained within Brook House.

f) **Complaints**

A more robust complaints procedure that detained people can trust is required if detained people are to feel safe in making complaints against staff.

g) **Improved communications between Home Office staff and detained people**

If the individuals within Brook House are not given sufficient information about why they are being detained, and/or are not properly updated on their cases, then their ability to rationalise their situation and their understanding of what they can do to extricate themselves from Brook House is significantly inhibited. In my experience this leads to those detained losing their sense of identity and their sense of purpose and increases the harm inflicted by detention. I think it is important that the communication between the Home Office and detained people is improved and as part of this, detained people should be able to regularly meet the Home Office caseworkers making decisions about their lives.

h) **Facilities at Brook House**

Improved mobile telephone signal and Wi-fi access to Brook House, including on the wings, and permitting detained persons the use of social media, would enable them to keep in better contact with friends, family, the Home Office and legal representatives and others assisting them, thereby reducing isolation and promoting better mental health.

i) **Relationship between Brook House Management and GDWG**

There is a need for those managing Brook House to have a good understanding of the important role that GDWG play in befriending and advocating for detained persons; they need to view the work of GDWG as being in the interests of the safety and well-being of detained persons, and should facilitate, rather than hinder, the work of GDWG.

j) **Visits by GDWG Volunteers and family and friends**

Affording greater privacy during visits would enhance the value of visits which are so important in helping a detained person to maintain their sense of self and dignity. This is particularly so when people are detained for long periods and when family and friends are visiting shortly before a detained person is to be removed.

Closed visits should be used sparingly or not at all and not for punitive purposes.

Volunteer visits would be improved for those detained people who do not speak English if they can be accompanied by a detained person to act as an interpreter.

If a GDWG visitor wished to visit two people in succession in an afternoon or evening time slot, this should be permitted.

It would reduce the time that Volunteer Visitors must spend getting into the Centre if they do not have to be photographed on every visit. This would also reduce pressure on Brook House staff at times when there is a queue of people waiting to register for visits.

GDWG visitors should continue to be allowed to take a pen and notebook into the Visits Hall. This greatly assists the Visitors' ability to provide feedback to GDWG main office on detained persons' needs.



<b><u>Statement of Truth</u></b>	
<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	Jamie Macpherson
Signature	<b>Signature</b>
Date	19.05.2021