

## Brook House Interview 3 Notes

Sarah Newland (Head of Tinsley House) – 17 July 2017

3.15 Describe Brook House to someone who doesn't know anything about them?

So, when people ask me where I work and I say the Gatwick immigration removal centres, then they ask what they are and what the difference is. So I normally describe Brook House as built like a prison, prison wing style accommodation, holding nearly 500 adult men of any nationality that you could possibly name on a day. Some of them have been here for a very long time, some of them get very frustrated. There are days when there can be incidents of violence, assaults, fights, self-harm. There are kind of underlying cultural issues that can cause problems at any given time. So it's really...it feels sometimes like a bit of a melting pot of just lots of people who are very frustrated with their situations and don't want to be here.

4.20 Relationship with Home Office?

On a personal level, positive relationship. Open and transparent as a client. Acknowledge when they've not done something, not assisted, or issues on their side. Some policy issues they also get frustrated. The difference for us is we have to face the people that are affected by those decisions and that can be really difficult. It can be really difficult to sit with the detainee and try and justify something that you perhaps don't agree with on a personal level, and I think they feel that too.

5.10 Have you had to deal with that a lot?

Sometimes we get difficult individuals or issues here. People managed quite closely. I can understand *how you would feel that way*. We tie ourselves up in knots, particularly with some of the more high profile cases we deal with. Some people become a name rather than a person.

6.30 Tinsley and Brook are very different, despite being on the same road, run by the same company and under the same legislative framework. That's partly about the physical environment but that's also about the risk profile of individuals put in Tinsley (e.g. first time detainees) cf Brook (ex-FNOs, more challenging).

7.10 Escorting?

Wasn't detainee-facing, it was office job. 200-employees. Quality assurance, which is difficult since remote working. Lots of use of force, allegations of assault, viewing CCTV footage. Co-ordination with Professional Standards Unit.

9 Staff working on escorts cf in IRC?

Macho, ex-military or ex-police, suggestions about racism and xenophobia. We did a bit to change that, recruit more diversely and governed more closely.

10.30 Would you describe IRCs as 'masculine' environments?

No. I would've described overseas like that, in the beginning. IRCs more diverse.

11.45 Less governed or subculture?

I think it linked back to where that service began. There was no control and restraint, y'know, it was best endeavours to get someone onto a plane. Don't get me wrong, detainees could be very violent – bite, spit – but you're trained to deal with that.

12.40 Good member of staff here?

Calm, listen, they can tell someone 'no' when they need to, earn respect by being honest, saying 'yeah yeah yeah' raises expectations, being honest about what you can or can't do for someone. Calm and patient, e.g. staff on E-wing deal with those really challenging Ds. Bit more mature, got some life experience. They can let it roll over their heads.

14 Bad qualities?

People who think this is all about physical presence and force, that's an issue. We've had situations where we've weeded those people out during the training cos we've seen that in the C&R training. Y'know, people who perhaps enjoy hands-on more than I think you should. It's always a last resort and it's never a good experience for anybody. Where we see that people have an inability to control themselves in that situations then we'll not continue with their employment.

14.45 Biggest issues at Brook House?

Undoubtedly the biggest issue for some detainees is the length of time it takes to get their situation resolved. Some here for 18 months or 2 years. In prison, I knew what my sentence was. Friends in prison estate say lifers know what's coming. Uncertainty, basically. As a senior manager, when you've managed someone through self-harm, difficult behaviour...then they get released. Why didn't that happen earlier? Frustration with the Home Office, particularly when they decide they want to go. Difficult to get a travel document.

I think the other bit is the environment. Brook House, for me, feels more oppressive than Tinsley House. And I think .... people argue the Ds here deserve to be here because they're too difficult to manage in another centre. But if you look at them purely as a person, I can feel it. I'm here for a day. So I'm sure they, over a period of time, would feel kinda worn down by this kind of environment. Y'know, the noise, the starkness, even the ceilings are quite low. The banging of the doors. I think it all just increases someone's stress or anxiety.

17.30 Is it good to have Brook House and Tinsley House next to each other?

Yeah. Detainees are more relaxed. Generally a much calmer vibe.

I'd be fascinated to see, as a social experiment, what would happen if you put the entire population of Brook House in Tinsley House.

19 Healthcare?

Certain members of staff who do a brilliant job and are understanding of challenges officers have. And detainees sometimes want something they can't or shouldn't have. But there have been instances with certain detainees where I, a non-clinical member of staff, have been pushing for someone to get the attention they need when it should have been coming from healthcare. E.g. a guy on food and fluid refusal who I took one look at and could see he wasn't okay. Another, a guy in a wheelchair sat outside for a number of hours then sent to Tinsley House.

Brook House has disabled rooms, has lifts etc. far easier access than Tinsley House. By the time he's at Tinsley House, just get him out.

21 Question about suicide and self-harm and what you do to prevent it?

Gives a good answer. RDs, threats a lot (the boy who cried wolf), manipulate the system...

[How you try to prevent SSH in an IRC?]

There's quite a lot in place to try and identify those individuals, so things like the induction process, asking those questions when detainees arrive, checking through the information on the movement order to see if there's a history, and then things like monitoring, you'll have seen on the handover, to be aware if RDs are served, knowing that that's specifically the trigger, linking with the Home Office and making sure we're ready to respond to them. ... There's quite a lot of policy and process around it, but I think sometimes the best tool is just having someone to listen. And I think sometimes staffing pressures just don't allow people do sit and talk to detainees for long enough to understand how they're feeling and have a little bit more of an awareness of their situation and what might cause them to self-harm.

22.35 I think the other difficulty is people make threats a lot, so when you hear that day in, day out, several times a day, it can kind of erode your ability to identify when it's genuine, like the boy who cried wolf. You get a lot of detainees who will manipulate the system, so they'll say they're gonna self-harm if they don't get X, Y and Z. Or they'll know that being on a constant watch means they'll be in a certain area of the centre that they prefer, so you do get detainees who understand the process enough to manipulate it. We've had two very recent cases of detainees who kept themselves on constant observations to avoid being returned to prison. Whereas, you got to know them to the point where you thought, I don't actually think you genuinely want to hurt yourself, I think you just understand that it makes it more difficult for us to transfer you to prison if you're on constant observation. So those things don't help.

23.30 [Death in custody?]

Not in an IRC, but I was on the overseas contract when **D3489** died. But I dealt with the kind of peripheral elements of his death at the time.

Got call saying he was blue lighted to hospital, then call to say he'd passed away. Quite late in evening. Process of managing a death went up above my grade, my key role in that was dealing with the staff. I met with them the next morning, kind of saw how affected they were by it. And I was I guess kind of acting in a bit of a welfare role, cos they all had to give statements, make reports, so I facilitated those and was there as a support for them.

I went to the coroner's court and to the criminal court. Again that was supporting a middle manager who'd been a use of force instructor on the contract at the time. He had made quite a lot of representations about how C&R wasn't an appropriate method of restraint for people on seats on aircraft. It was from that that HOMES came about – that package has been agreed, signed off and medically approved.

I've seen what it's like to stand up and be questioned over your profession or what you did or your part in that, and I've also seen the devastating effect that that had on those members of staff that were on the removal. I don't sit here and pretend to know what happened on that aircraft because I wasn't there and there have been many different versions of events from

different people who were involved, and I guess no one will ever know whether what they did caused his death or who played what part in that, but y'know I know on a personal level that marriages broke up, got into debt, y'know, it really did affect them. And that will stay with me in my career in managing these things, so having seen the worst outcome, I think just makes you focus in a little more on things at times when other people might not see it through the same eyes, I'll be like, "No no no, we're doing this now".

27 [Broader implications for G4S?]

The physical element of it, those staff were up to date with training on C&R and first aid. I knew first hand that the allegation that they'd sort of pushed his head down – what was referred to ... they said they'd used a technique called "carpet karaoke", where they pushed **D3489**'s head down. And I knew the efforts that a lot of us in the organisation had gone to to stop that practice and to make sure that people understood that it was completely outlawed, it wasn't to happen, that people could report it confidentially if they were concerned about it.

And then there was also the element around the racist texts that were found on one of the officer's phones and there was an insinuation there that there was a bit of a culture, but I think – as I kind of alluded to earlier – we tried to eradicate that culture but arguably you can only deal with an issue when an issue comes to light, and sometimes it was just a case of waiting until those issues came to light and you could deal with them. So I thought it was very unfair to kind of suggest that everybody that worked on that contract behaved that way, cos it just wasn't the case. And in fact the vast majority of them did a good job under very difficult circumstances, but there were obviously some in there who didn't behave in the way that you'd expect.

28 [Near misses?]

30 I remember at Colnbrook a guy had cut himself this way [vertically] very badly and made serious incisions to his arms and was losing a lot of blood, that was an emergency situation. The vast majority of acts of self-harm that I've seen have been more a cry for help and attention, so they've been more superficial cuts or a ligature but they've pressed the cell call before they've done it so it's a kind of like, "I need some attention. I need some help." I've been fortunate never directly been involved in someone who has hung themselves and then been found. I know in some of our prisons people have come pretty close and the effect it has on people. But no I haven't seen what I would call a serious attempt for quite a while, quite a long time.

31 [Suggested earlier issues about how we learn from cases. Expand on that?]

Need to ensure new practices are embedded, everyone understands this, why you're doing it.

32.20 [Mentioned earlier a lot of stuff in place. Is the policy adequate? Change anything?]

In terms of ACDT, I think it ... I think with a lot of things, it's the quality. So you can take two ACDTs for same issues, one can be good the other poor. And that's usually to do with the people that have engaged in that process and their commitment to it, their understanding of it, their desire to engage with that D, build a relationship with that D and sort of listen and support. So I can probably pull ten names of staff off the top of my head that I would want to do every constant watch, cos the difference they make to the individual and the quality of the document when they're in charge of it is exemplary. But a lot of the time it can feel too going through the motions.

33.45 [Are there common reasons why people are self-harming or on ACDT?]

Removal directions are always, 99% of the time the reason behind a constant watch. And that's just because they don't wanna go back to that country. The frustration certainly exacerbates it. So there's a gentleman down on E wing who's been on a constant – he's not at the moment I think he's still on hourly obs – but there's a real question over his nationality. And he's almost caught in a vicious circle with it, and that undoubtedly has been the reason why he's been on constant obs in the past.

And I think sometimes there can be cultural influences. I've spoken to Ds in the past who don't find cutting themselves particularly – y'know it's not as shocking to them as it is to us, because culturally it might happen or it's more accepted. People of different faiths. So Islam has a view on suicide and self-harm, I think that can exacerbate it for detainees cos they know they shouldn't but they can't kinda help themselves. So I think there are a lot of reasons behind it. And there are themes, but there might be a mixture of different themes for different people, so I guess what I've learned over the years is, it might look very similar on paper but don't assume because you're dealing with people, and there might be a small detail in there that might be the most relevant detail, because people think, "Oh this is just about removal directions".

36 [So if removal directions is a significant risk, you're not making a decision about that. What can staff here do in those circumstances to look after them while decisions are being made by people elsewhere?]

Supporting detainees in returning I think is really important because the reason that they give for not wanting to return is quite often – particularly if they're young and have been in the UK for a long time – is coupled with not knowing that country, not knowing anybody there, not knowing how to get from the airport to X place, not knowing how they're going to live, how they're gonna support themselves. So I think having organisations or people that can assist them in making that transition would help. And I think asking the questions around, "Why don't you want to go?" but if you're gonna go, "What can we do to help you once you get back?" And I think you know that's what contractors are starting to look at more and more is like, actually the removal doesn't start when they get picked up by the escorts, it starts when their told they're going. And trying to really unpick with them, y'know, what's this really about, and the decision's been made. So if we could do three things to help you go back in a better way, what would they be? But yeah sometimes it doesn't matter what you do, they are not gonna change their mind about wanting to go, and that's when it's hard because it ultimately ends up in them being taken out of BH in a waist restraint belt or under restraint and it's just not the best way for anybody.

38 [Are there issues if the country where they're being returned to, there aren't mental health services available or different ideas about depressions or mental illness?]

Absolutely. Yes. Or even if third country cases. E.g. speaking to a gentleman who is Iranian but being returned to Germany, so if they come through a third country that's where their asylum claim has to be considered. And he doesn't even wanna go back to Germany and you think, well Germany's a kind of civilised European country but the level of support that he will get as an asylum seeker varies in Germany to what it does here. And those sorts of factors are also inhibitor for us, because we again don't have control over that decision. And y'know I've seen

some of the most disruptive cases are actually going back to European countries rather than their kind of home nation if you will.

39.10 [Human rights law influence on suicide and self-harm?]

No I don't think I've seen any kind of direct influence. I mean detainees will sort of appeal against their removal or deportation on human rights grounds, e.g. right to family and private life or Article 3. Staff here familiar with Human Rights Act but I don't think in all my time in immigration detention I've seen a difference, if I think back to Colnbrook it was very similar then to what it is now, particularly with men it's around them having children and not wanting to leave them. But I'm not sure that the legislation around it has made a difference to SSH.

40.30 [Anything could be done better for at risk people?]

Environment, I think is a big one, particularly here. We do our best with E wing but again that's a smaller wing. Arguably the physical environment is very similar, and I think if you're feeling particularly vulnerable, I'm not sure how being in a room at Brook House would help that.

[E wing can be quite noisy?]

Some of the people there you shouldn't ever put together. E.g. some say they're hearing voices, others having post-traumatic flashbacks, then you've got MH concerns person who bawls TV at whatever time in the morning. Push from HO for care suites and better consider how you manage Ds at risk, but I think just having a designated area with a similar environment has probably not gone far enough.

42 If you could change anything?

As a contractor, I'd like to have more control over the detainees that we have here. Some detainees are here that don't need to be here, could be somewhere more open and relaxed. More control over who we get here would certainly help. I personally would like to change the environment. Yes it serves a purpose but it might fuel the issues. It's chicken and egg: does environment respond to behaviour or does environment drive behaviour?

44 Is Brook House (and Colnbrook) a dumping ground?

Yeah and it's a cop out when people say they can't take someone. Excessive disruptive behaviour conference call: many come to us.

46 Escort issues?

I've got an element of insider knowledge on escorts. I know they can manipulate not going if they don't want to and have I seen that happen? Yes. IMB and HMIP persistently criticise night moves. Tascor says in the morning we do courts and other things. Yes, but that doesn't help the detainees. They do cause us some pain.

48 G4S?

Families, end detention of children, Yarl's Wood. Set up pre-departure accommodation. Got quite a lot of negative attention in early days (Bernardo's possibly even more).

It almost became a sort of tag-line where we were criticised in the media, y'know, G4S the Olympic-bungling, government-overcharging, **D3489** murdering private outsourcing company is now looking after families with children. On a personal level, that was quite insulting. The part

of the company that bungled the Olympics or overcharged the gov't on tagging weren't the part of the business that was doing this, so you do feel that you get a sort of slung in and criticised just cause we're a huge company that does a diverse portfolio for the gov't. But yes undoubtedly it's quite easy to Google G4S and get a little tick-list of things we've done wrong and add them into any story you're gonna run about G4S. And it did get to the point, how long are we gonna keep talking about the Olympics? So yeah, that hasn't helped.

50 Has it ever demoralised staff?

Undoubtedly. Stuff at Medway. I watched it and others did. That hit very close to home. Similar uniforms and similar environment. It was the same customer – YJB. Credit to the Home Office, they said 'We understand this is a different part of the business' but they could easily have taken a negative view of us because of that. Us, as in the local team here.

51 Has anything changed?

You do get used to it, you do get desensitised. Get a sixth sense about whether it will escalate or whether it's handbags. Some days it's loud and rowdy, but that's just some detainees or a certain nationality. Other days it's quiet and that's eerie.

54 What's important for me to understand?

It's hard because so little is known about it. To outsiders, and probably to you before you came, it probably feels like we're doing all this behind closed doors and it's all very secretive and the only time it comes out in the press is when something bad happens. Inevitably, the media spin on HMIP reports will usually pull out the sensationalist stuff rather than the really good work that staff do day in and day out. I think the HO don't help that because they're very closed. Whereas our prison establishments invite people in, they have quite a lot of academic research going on. We're sort of, 'Oooh no!' The difference is, society understands if you've committed a crime you go to prison. Immigration is far more political and far more emotive.