

BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY

First Witness Statement of John Kench

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 7/1/2022.

I, John Michael Kench, of DPA will say as follows:

Introduction

1. At the time I was the Central Detail Manager

Background and role

1. My role at Brook House was that I would deal with the staff on a daily basis to ensure the centre was fully staffed, also I would plan the annual leave and overtime where needed.
2. I started as a Detention officer at Tinsley House 27 years ago. I then became the IT Manager. From there I was given Transport to look after. The next role I was given was the Central Detail Manager and then looked after Brook House and Tinsley House where I completed my service at 26 years.
3. I have reviewed document CJS004133, which is an example of the rota on 29 June 2017. This was an Excel spreadsheet that was created to help us monitor

Witness Name: John Michael Kench
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the staffing levels for the following day; this was done by one of my colleagues and given to the night Manager.

Staffing Levels - General

4. At document VER000227, page 4 paragraph 27 I stated that 32 people was the safe working load for DCOs and that two people should be on each wing. It is suggested by Ms Lampard [paragraph 32] that the Home Office did not mandate specific numbers of people anywhere at any one time. These numbers were what the Senior Managers specified and was not discussed with me unless we were greatly under staffed.
5. At document VER000227, page 5, paragraph 45 I say staffing at its worst involved 24 members of staff being present and that this happened an average of 3 to 4 times a month. In my opinion the lower the staffing the more work other staff will have to do and this was managed by the daily Detention Custody Managers.
 - a. This impacted on the running of Brook House again in my opinion this would be the Detention Custody Managers and how they would use their staff, however staff would have to take on more tasks.
 - b. I deemed 36 to be the minimum safe level of staffing given the amount of posts that need to be covered by staff.
6. There is discussion in document VER000227 page 6 about when the requirement of 32 staff members came in. I can't remember the dates for this.
7. There is discussion in document VER000227 on page 7 about how I thought 32 staff members was too few. Staffing numbers were decided by the senior management team.

8. You have asked me to explain whether I consider that the staffing plan of four DCOs on the larger residential wings A and C, three on B and E wings, four to staff the official visits corridor and the visits hall, three to manage activities and one to work in the welfare office was sufficient. The staffing numbers was given to Detention Custody Managers they would change the daily roster to suit the needs of the centre.
9. In document VER000227 on page 5 at paragraph 59, I stated that a bonus scheme for overtime working was not made very clear to staff. The bonus was explained to staff via a notice to staff, the staff came to me to book their overtime and it was explained again. This had no bearing on the staffing levels until they were made aware that they had to complete x amount of hours from one date to another, this was not fully understood by staff taking part.
10. In document VER000227 at paragraph 144 and 151 I stated that *'have a little knock here and we'll be off for weeks and get paid for it'*. What I meant by that was that new staff soon picked up from the existing staff that following an injury at work they could hang it out indefinitely.
11. In document VER000227 at pages 11-12, I explained the system for staff requesting days off. Staff requesting days off will be determined on staffing levels as the annual leave days where planned at the end of the previous year. However extra leave days where given by swapping a day where we were short for a day where we had enough staff.
12. In document VER000227 at paragraph 187 I stated that refresher training can lead to the centre being understaffed. To resolve the shortness due to refresher training it would be re-scheduled.
13. In document VER000227 at paragraph 241, I stated that on some days all of the staff members are new (and so new staff members can't always be paired

with more experienced ones). You have asked what problems this could cause. All staff completes a training course, we try to pair new staff with experienced staff where possible, and this cannot always be achieved.

14. In document VER000227 at paragraphs 122 to 132, I stated that I believed that profit was prioritised over efficiency, and that saving money was prioritised over balancing staffing against appropriate spending bearing in mind safety. I was always made aware of the wage bill and the budget and was not to overspent.

- a. I was given this impression by Senior Management.
- b. In relation to the 17 staff members I was supposed to hire after 60 new beds were added in 2017 I would say that this was not done as far as I know.
- c. I consider Senior Management and HR to be responsible for this.

15. I have no comments in relation to Steve Skitt's responses to the issues around staffing levels during his Verita interview. This was not known to me.

16. I have no comments in relation to Sara Newland's Verita interview regarding staffing levels. This was not known to me.

17. I have no comments in relation to Ben Saunders' Verita interview regarding staffing levels. This was not known to me.

18. I have no comments in relation to Lee Hanford's Verita interview regarding staffing levels. This was not known to me.

19. As to favouritism regarding rostering, I did hear from staff that certain staff members were given better jobs than others; this would have been the Detention Custody Managers.

20. As Central Detail Manager I would know how many staff to expect as the rosters were given to the night Managers for the following day. What we cannot anticipate is the amount of staff that would not turn up for their shift for one reason or another.

Staff Retention

21. The retention of staff has always been a problem, a lot of staff used Tinsley House and Brook House to gain qualifications to move on to better employment (for example the Police Force).

22. Leave for long service at Tinsley House was in place before Brook House was established. Leave for long service at Tinsley House was stopped when G4S took over the contract from G.S.L. and brought back any excess leave above 25 days.

23. Morale was at its highest when there was a shortness of staff.

Recruitment and new staff

24. I stated in document VER000227 at paragraphs 120 and 144 that new staff are 'poisoned' by existing staff who complain. It doesn't take long for new staff to pick up on old staff habits. I cannot remember the atmosphere of staff between April 2017 – August 2017.

25. It was a lot harder to work at Brook House than Tinsley House; this is because Brook House had a lot more detainees than Tinsley House and there was a family section at Tinsley House and would not require as many staff.

Response to Panorama

26. At page 14 of document VER000227, I referred to paying staff "tornado" rate for 5 September, as decided by Ben Saunders and Steve Skitt. I am not sure of

the date, however I was asked to pay staff Tornado Rate to staff coming into work for extra hours.

- a. Tornado rate is an enhanced hourly rate that is paid to staff as overtime is paid at a flat rate.
- b. In my opinion this should not have been used as this is an hourly rate of approx. Commercially sensitive This is and should only be used when staffs are dispatched to another establishment in trouble for example the fire at HMP Yarlswood.

<u>Statement of Truth</u>	
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.	
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.	
Name	John Kench
Signature	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 20px; text-align: center;"><h1>Signature</h1></div>
Date	7 th February 2022

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