

Inquiry's report reveals "toxic" culture at Brook House IRC

The Brook House Inquiry, established to investigate the mistreatment of individuals detained at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), published its report on the 19 September 2023. The Chair, Kate Eves, makes 33 important recommendations which she said, "need to be implemented to ensure that other detained people do not suffer in the same way as those at Brook House did."

The Inquiry, which was established following the broadcast of the BBC *Panorama* programme "*Undercover: Britain's Immigration Secrets*", identified 19 instances over a five-month period, in which there was credible evidence of acts or omissions that were capable of amounting to mistreatment contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The most serious of these incidents involved the application of pressure to a detained man's neck while he was in extreme distress.

The Chair, Kate Eves, said "That I found this number of incidents took place within such a limited timeframe of five months is of significant concern. In my view, these incidents were able to happen because of a combination of factors. Under the Home Office and its contractor, G4S, Brook House was not sufficiently decent, secure or caring for detained people or its staff at the time these events took place. An environment flourished in which unacceptable treatment became more likely."

The Report also examines ten of the most significant issues affecting Brook House, which led to a negative experience for many detained people and contributed to conditions where mistreatment was more likely to occur. For example, the physical environment of Brook House was entirely unsuitable for detaining people for anything other than a short period of time. The Chair also heard evidence that the indefinite nature of immigration detention caused uncertainty and anxiety for detained people and had a detrimental effect on their wellbeing. The Chair has recommended that the government introduce a time limit, whereby those detained at Immigration Removal Centres, including Brook House, should be kept there for a maximum of 28 days. Other issues included the failure to follow safeguarding rules and procedures, excessive use of force and a "toxic" culture amongst G4S staff at Brook House.

The Chair has made 33 recommendations which, when implemented, will not only ensure that what happened at Brook House does not happen in the future but will also provide a more humane, compassionate and professional environment for immigration detention. The failure to act on previous recommendations is a dark thread that runs throughout this report and the Chair has urged the Home Office and other recipients of her recommendations to publish their responses within six months: "It is my sincere hope that more than mere lip service will be paid to this report. The events that occurred at Brook House cannot be repeated."

Notes to editors:

The full report will be available on the Brook House Inquiry website and gov.uk from 12:00pm on 19 September 2023.

The scope of the Inquiry was set out in its Terms of Reference. The Inquiry set out to:

- Investigate into and report on the decisions, actions and circumstances surrounding the mistreatment of detainees broadcast in the BBC *Panorama* programme ‘*Undercover: Britain’s Immigration Secrets*’ on 4 September 2017.
- Reach conclusions with regard to the treatment of detainees where there is credible evidence of mistreatment contrary to Article 3 ECHR, and then make any such recommendations as may seem appropriate.

Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights states: *No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*”.

Key terms:

- For the purpose of the Inquiry, the term “complainants” is used to refer to any individual who was detained at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre during the period 1 April 2017 to 31 August 2017 where there is credible evidence of mistreatment of that individual.
- “Mistreatment” is used to refer to treatment that is contrary to Article 3 ECHR, namely to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Recommendations:
- 33 recommendations have been made, and these can be found in Part E of the Report.

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