

Detainees under escort at  
Queen's Building, Heathrow  
Airport

Report on one unannounced and one announced  
escort inspection

2–3 July and 10 July 2007

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

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# Overview

In 2005, HM Inspectorate of Prisons conducted two pilot inspections at Heathrow airport in preparation for the then new duty to inspect immigration escorts. The subsequent report, *Detainees under escort: a short review of detainees under escort at Queen's Building and Terminal 3* (2006), informed the new immigration escorts expectations published earlier in 2007, which were in turn used to guide the inspections reported on here.

The non-residential short-term holding facility at Queen's Building holds a mix of men, women and families with children. Detainees were often transferred to Queen's Building in anticipation of removal from the country via Heathrow airport. A team of inspectors made an unannounced visit to the centre on 2 July 2007 in order to speak to arriving detainees. Subsequent visits on 3 July and 10 July allowed inspectors to interview a total of 27 detainees about their experiences of recent escort journeys.

In addition to being the main escort contractor for the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), Group 4 Securicor (G4S) managed the holding room at Queen's Building.

The escort vehicles inspected were clean and most detainees reported positively on staff. Journey lengths varied widely; the longest was a 14-hour journey experienced by a man travelling from Dungavel immigration removal centre (IRC) in Scotland. Some detainees had also experienced exhausting multiple journeys that had taken place within a short period of time. It was sometimes difficult to establish the length of some journeys from the available documentation as records had not always been fully completed. There was a general lack of information in different languages to explain where detainees were going. However, G4S had produced a series of policies and procedures, including child protection and self-harm policies, and staff were checked to Criminal Records Bureau enhanced level, which was an improvement since our 2005 preliminary visit.

# Section 1: Background and methodology

- 1.1 The majority of detainees who arrived during our visits were interviewed; at least one detainee from each van. The inspection process consisted of general observation, a physical examination of the escort vans, discussions with escort staff and structured interviews with detainees. We also examined available documentation, comprising detainee transferable documents, movement notifications issued by the detainee escorting and population management unit (DEPMU), and escort details recorded on detainees' IS91s (authority to detain forms).
- 1.2 Over 80% (24) of the detainees interviewed had come from immigration removal centres (IRCs) or short-term holding facilities (STHFs). Eight had travelled from Dover IRC or STHF, six from Campsfield House IRC, three from Colnbrook IRC or STHF, two from Tinsley House IRC, two from Yarl's Wood IRC and one from each of Harmondsworth and Oakington IRCs. The one detainee who had by far the longest journey had come from Dungavel IRC in Scotland. The three remaining detainees had travelled from Paddington police station, Jersey (from a private address) and Camp Hill prison on the Isle of Wight.
- 1.3 The 27 detainees interviewed were all asked the same set of questions about:
- Journey lengths
  - Cleanliness and comfort of vehicles
  - Comfort breaks
  - Escort staff–detainee relationships
  - Information provided about the escort van and journey
  - Property
  - Complaints
  - Medication
  - Use of force
  - Consequences of movement
- 1.4 Staff were also asked to comment on these areas.
- 1.5 Most (23) of the detainees we interviewed were male. One of the four female detainees was detained with her three children, two boys aged five and 11, and one girl of 10. Six (five men and one woman) spoke little or no English and were interviewed using a professional telephone interpreting service. Their profile was as follows:

## Women

- Malawi (QF11)
- Filipino (QF16)
- Pakistani (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QF24)
- Ghanaian (QF27)

## Men

- Turkish (QM1)
- Bangladeshi (QM2)
- Brazilian (QM3)
- Brazilian (QM4)
- Chinese (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QM5)
- Indian (QM6)
- Brazilian (QM7)

- Brazilian (QM8)
- South African (QM9)
- Jamaican (QM10)
- Jamaican (QM12)
- Pakistani (QM13)
- Mexican (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QM14)
- Congolese (QM15)
- Bangladeshi (QM17)
- Indian (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QM18)
- South African (QM19)
- Indian (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QM20)
- Nigerian (QM21)
- Ghanaian (QM22)
- Brazilian (QM23)
- Bangladeshi (interviewed using a professional interpreting service) (QM25)
- Cameroonian (QM26)

## Section 2: Findings

2.1 Journey lengths varied from 20 minutes to 14 hours for a man travelling from Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in Scotland. Some detainees had experienced exhausting multiple journeys that had taken place within a short period of time, including a single woman with her three young children, one of whom had medical problems. It was sometimes difficult to establish the length of some journeys from the available documentation as records had not always been fully completed. Most detainees thought the escort vehicles were clean and safe, though there were complaints about the lack of ventilation and the discomfort on long journeys. Comfort breaks and refreshments were not always offered to those whose journeys extended beyond two and a half hours. Escort staff were generally considered to be polite and helpful. No information was given to detainees in their own languages and while detainees generally knew where they were going, many had been given little time to prepare for their journey. A number of detainees were being removed without their money being returned to them and without their property, including mobile phones containing crucial contact names and numbers. G4S had produced a series of policies procedures, including child protection and self-harm policies, and staff were checked to Criminal Records Bureau enhanced level, which was an improvement since our 2005 preliminary visit.

### *Journey lengths*

- 2.2 Journey lengths varied from approximately 20 to 30 minutes for two detainees (QM12 and QF16) who had come from nearby Colnbrook IRC, to 14 hours for another detainee (QF15) who had travelled from Dungavel IRC in Scotland. Only four detainees had travelled for an hour or less to get to Queen's Building, 16 detainees had travelled for between one and three hours, and seven detainees had travelled for more than three hours. Detainees often arrived at Queen's Building well in advance of designated flights, which were sometimes subsequently cancelled.
- 2.3 Some detainees had to make multiple journeys in quick succession leading up to their transfer to Heathrow airport. For example, QF24 and her three children had an 11-hour journey to Tinsley House. This journey began at 9am and concluded at Tinsley House at nearly 8pm that same day (11 hours). The family spent one day at Tinsley House before being moved to Queen's Building, a journey of three hours. Holding room logs for the previous three months showed that detainees then spent an average of four and a half hours in Queen's Building, though a dozen people had been held there for 18 hours or more. Some detainees had also experienced tiring and disorientating night journeys. For example, QM9 was escorted from a police station in Leicester, where he had been held for two nights, to Campsfield House IRC. According to his records he left the police station at 10.05pm and arrived at Campsfield House at 3.20am the following morning. He was escorted again at 10.30am the next day to Queen's Building.
- 2.4 Staff at Queen's Building generally knew who was coming into the building on a daily basis but did not know what time they would arrive. Escort staff usually phoned shortly before their arrival so the custodial staff were ready to collect the detainees.
- 2.5 The IS91 forms were present but not always complete for each detainee. Missing starting details for escort journeys, in particular, created the impression that detainees had been in transit for extended periods of time for what should have been a much shorter journey. We

were told that IS91s did not always arrive with the detainee and one of the detainee custody officers recently had to ask for one to be faxed over.

#### *Cleanliness and comfort of vehicles*

- 2.6 Most detainees described the escort vans as adequate. Seven detainees described the vans as uncomfortable and confined, and six complained about the temperature and lack of ventilation. One detainee said he asked for the air conditioning to be turned on but was ignored. We travelled between airport terminals in the back of an escort vehicle and found even this short journey uncomfortable without air conditioning and with no possibility of opening a window. In an improvement since the 2005 escort inspection, vehicles had darkened windows to allow passengers some privacy.

#### *Comfort breaks*

- 2.7 Fifteen of the detainees interviewed had been on journeys lasting more than two and a half hours. Of these, four detainees said they were offered food and drink during the journey. An additional three detainees said they were offered water, which tended to coincide with depot stops. QM19 said that he was not able to eat before he left the IRC as he was unaware that he was being picked up so early in the day. He was not offered refreshments during his journey and so did not receive a sandwich until the early afternoon.
- 2.8 Only two of the 15 detainees said they were offered comfort breaks. The detainee travelling from Dungavel said that he was told before the start of his journey that he would be able to make comfort stops and he stopped twice on the journey. One detainee asked to use the toilet during a depot stop.

#### *Escort staff–detainee relationships*

- 2.9 The majority of the detainees interviewed said that escort staff were polite and friendly. QF16 said that there was one male member of staff who asked a lot of questions in a challenging way which upset her, but some staff helped her and her brother carry their luggage. QM20, a detainee with no English, said that staff did not try to interact with him during the journey. A further two detainees said that escort staff were unable to answer their questions. The detainee brought from Dungavel IRC said that staff lied to him about the eventual destination in order to get him in the van: he was apparently told they were going to see his family (who live in the UK).

#### *Information about the escort vehicle and journey*

- 2.10 Some detainees said they had been told verbally that they would be travelling to Heathrow airport, but this was always in English. Those detainees who understood little or no English had not been provided with written or verbal information in their own language.
- 2.11 Only one detainee said he had been given written information about the escort vehicle or journey, or what would happen next. Other detainees had received only their removal directions, which explained the date and time of their flights. One said he had been told about but not given his removal directions. While detainees knew the time of their flights they said that were not told about the time of their escort to the airport. This was their main area of complaint. Detainees from IRCs said they were given only 30 minutes in some cases to get ready and to pack their belongings, which meant that they were unable to have a shower or to



eat before they left the centre. They were therefore unable to let family know that they were being moved to a different location before leaving the IRC. Detainees could use a phone at Queen's Building if they had the money to do so.

#### *Other issues*

- 2.12 One detainee said that escort staff had to use physical force to get him on the van as he had refused to be moved, but we were unable to review his documentation as he left the facility very shortly afterwards.
- 2.13 Seven detainees said that they did not have any property with them apart from the clothes they were wearing as they had effectively been picked up off the street. A number of detainees had been told by IRC staff that their property, including official documents, could be delivered to them at the airport, but they discovered this was not true on arrival. As we found during the 2005 review, staff told us this was a recurring problem, which was causing detainees undue distress.
- 2.14 One detainee said he had to leave his property at the prison he had come from, and another detainee said his mobile phone and address book were taken from him by immigration officials some days previously and that, despite repeated requests, these items could not be returned. He became visibly distressed when talking about this in interview as it meant he was returning to his home country without the means to contact anyone he knew and with nowhere to live.
- 2.15 Other detainees complained about having no money. If detainees entered Queen's Building with only foreign currency they were unable to use the payphone in the facility as staff could not exchange foreign currency for sterling. While detainees were able to keep their mobile phones for their personal use in Queen's Building, phones with camera functions were confiscated, leaving some detainees without the opportunity for any form of outside contact. One detainee also complained that he had not had his money returned to him when he left an IRC. He was extremely concerned as he had just £15, which was not enough to pay for even his transportation once he arrived at his destination. Staff told us that private money was often not transferred to detainees before their removal. We were told of instances in which staff had given their own money to detainees so that they had at least some money when they arrived at their destination.
- 2.16 Two detainees stated that they were taking medication at the time of their escort, and another detainee had medication included with his official documentation. None complained about medication provision during their escort journey. QF24 told us that her son had recently had his appendix removed, and that following his operation, the doctor informed her that he should not travel long distances. During their journey to Tinsley House she said that her son was vomiting and in pain. QF24 was distressed during the interview and was unable to tell us how the escort staff dealt with this situation.
- 2.17 No detainees said that they knew how to make a complaint about their escort experience, though none expressed a desire to make one.

## Section 3: Recommendations

- 3.1 Escort journeys should be as direct and as short as possible.
- 3.2 Detainees awaiting flights should be brought to Queen's Building as close as possible to the time of the departure.
- 3.3 IS91s should arrive with all detainees; they should be properly completed and include full escort details.
- 3.4 Detainees should be given information about where they are going and what will happen next in a language they can fully understand.
- 3.5 Detainees should be given sufficient notice of their planned escort so that they have time to have a shower and eat a meal before leaving, as well as to alert their family to their journey.
- 3.6 Detainees under escort should be given a comfort break and refreshments if the journey exceeds two and a half hours and this should be recorded.
- 3.7 Detainees should be offered a free telephone call on arrival at Queen's Building.
- 3.8 There should be formal and consistent arrangements to enable detainees to recover essential property and money prior to removal.