

Detainees under escort at  
Gatwick North and South  
short-term holding facilities

Report on an unannounced escort inspection

17–18 August 2009

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

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# Overview

This report is based on the experiences of detainees being escorted to or from the short-term holding facilities (STHFs) at Gatwick airport, on the observation of inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Prisons, on the accounts given by staff, and on records of past escorts. The inspection was carried out alongside an unannounced inspection of Gatwick North and South short-term holding facilities on 17 and 18 August 2009.

The escort contractor at Gatwick was Group 4 Securicor (G4S). Detainees reported that escorting staff were professional and that the attitude of staff had been mainly positive. However, the communication and recording of information about detainees was uneven, and the conditions and frequency of journeys sometimes placed considerable stresses on detainees.

# Section 1: Background and methodology

- 1.1 Under section 46 of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, HM Inspectorate of Prisons has the power to inspect detainee escorts, which are under control of the UK Border Agency (UKBA).
- 1.2 On 17 and 18 August 2009, four detainees were interviewed using a pro forma questionnaire about their recent experience of escorts. Two of the detainees interviewed had come from Tinsley House immigration removal centre (IRC), one had come from Yarl's Wood IRC and one from Colnbrook IRC. Other detainees held in the two holding facilities were interviewed informally about their experience of escorts, and records relating to previous journeys were examined. We also accompanied three detainees being escorted to flights for removal from the country.

1.3 The four detainees who were formally interviewed were 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 All of the detainees understood spoken English. Three detainees were male and one was female. Their ages ranged from 29 to 40 years. Their profiles were as follows:

* Tinsley House IRC	Nigerian Nigerian	M1* M2
Colnbrook IRC	Trinidadian	M3
Yarl's Wood IRC	Jamaican	F1

\* 'M' denotes male and 'F' refers to females.

## Section 2: Findings

- 2.1 In several cases, detainees had not been offered comfort breaks during journeys lasting more than two and a half hours. Journeys had sometimes taken long and roundabout routes to pick up detainees from other centres. There had been some night time transfers, and the stress on detainees was compounded when journeys took place on successive days. The recording of journeys in IS91 (authority to detain) forms was sometimes incomplete. Escort vehicles were clean and in fair condition. New family vehicles of non-caged construction provided improved conditions. Escort staff were professional and courteous towards detainees, and most detainees found them helpful and positive. Staff were considerate when escorting detainees on foot through passenger areas. Limited information was available to escorting staff about the detainees in their care, and details in the paper and computerised information systems were sometimes incomplete. Detainees' property was managed efficiently.

### Journey lengths

- 2.2 The length of the journeys experienced by interviewees ranged from 20 minutes to three hours 40 minutes. Two detainees travelling from Tinsley House IRC had experienced very short journeys of 20 minutes and had no complaints. F1 estimated that her journey from Yarl's Wood had taken approximately three hours and it was recorded in the IS91 movement record as having taken three hours and forty minutes, including a stop at Feltham. She recalled having to change vehicles three times. Detainees who came from further afield were transferred to escort vehicles at Tinsley House which were cleared by airport security to enter the airport grounds, adding to the journey.
- 2.3 M3 said that his journey from Colnbrook IRC had taken two hours and the IS91 recorded that he was escorted at 2.45am and arrived at Gatwick North at 4.30am. This was his most recent escort journey: on the previous day he had been escorted from HMP Guys Marsh to Colnbrook IRC via HMP The Verne to pick up another detainee. He estimated that he had spent four hours in the van and felt that the diversion to The Verne had made the journey too long. He was kept on the vehicle at The Verne and was not offered a comfort break until he arrived at Colnbrook IRC. The prisoners' escort record (PER) form recorded that this journey had taken five and a half hours.
- 2.4 IS91 forms were received with all detainees and most were completed properly, although they included minimal risk information. However, the transfer record on the IS91 for M3 did not include the date and time of his escort from HMP Guys Marsh to HMP The Verne. Information about this journey was only available in the PER form.

### Cleanliness and comfort of vehicles

- 2.5 All detainees reported that the escort vehicles were clean and that they had felt safe. The two detainees travelling from Tinsley House (M1 and M2) said that they had felt comfortable in the van, and had no complaints about the temperature or ventilation. F3 reported a similar experience, although she felt that the van had been stuffy at times. M3 complained that his journey had been uncomfortable due to the vibrating of the cage inside the van and the lack of ventilation. Although he had had the option of wearing a seatbelt he said he had chosen not to because he already felt restricted by the lack of space.

- 2.6 Two escort vehicles were inspected at Gatwick South. They were reasonably clean, well ventilated and had functioning seatbelts, with sufficient space for the number of detainees and quantity of luggage for the short journey from Tinsley House. Staff did not routinely carry hygiene and emergency packs for women and children for the journeys from Tinsley House to the terminal building. A family vehicle had recently been obtained and escort staff said that they would use alternative vehicles for detainees with disabilities or special needs and that men and women would not be escorted together unless they were related. All staff who undertook escorts were subject to enhanced criminal records bureau checks which were renewed every three years.

## Comfort breaks

- 2.7 None of the detainees had received a comfort break during their journey. This was acceptable for M1 and M2 who had only travelled a short distance. However, F1 reported that she had not been offered a comfort break, despite being on the van for three hours forty minutes, and M3 said that he was not offered a break, and had not asked for one because he thought it would have been refused. The documentation for both F1 and M3 indicated that they were offered a comfort 'break' on the outset of their journeys from Yarl's Wood and Colnbrook IRCs.
- 2.8 The records we examined showed that detainees were not offered sufficient comfort breaks during some lengthy journeys. Detainees we spoke to from the holding facility at Yarl's Wood IRC also reported this. Many detainees were offered breaks and food only when they arrived at Tinsley House for onward transfer to the holding facility.
- 2.9 The two detainees on longer journeys (F1 and M3) had been offered and had accepted dry packs of biscuits, crisps and a drink during their journey. We observed all detainees arriving on escort vehicles being offered hot drinks and sandwiches.

## Escort staff–detainee relationships

- 2.10 All detainees said that they had been escorted by two members of staff. In the case of F1 this had included one female member of staff. Most detainees reported positive relations with the escort staff, and two detainees (M1 and M2) said that staff were respectful and had made the effort to initiate conversation and answer any questions. They said that the staff had addressed them by their first names and had explained why they were stopping at Gatwick North before their destination of Gatwick South STHF. M3 reported that although the staff were not disrespectful, they had been indifferent towards him and had only spoken to him when giving instructions. We observed that escort staff were polite to detainees and called them by their first names. They made every effort to put the detainees at their ease, helped them to carry property and ensured they were provided immediately with food and drinks when they arrived in the holding room.
- 2.11 We observed three detainees being escorted separately to flights for removal from the country. In each case the staff were polite and positive, and explained the situation to the detainee before walking to the aircraft. Much of the walk was through public areas and the escort attracted attention from other passengers. Although there was potential for an incident in public areas which could have been difficult to contain, staff ensured that their presence was as inconspicuous as possible.

## Information about the escort vehicle and journey

- 2.12 All detainees had been informed verbally of their journey to Gatwick STHF and understood the reasons. M3 was dissatisfied with the lack of information about his journey from HMP Guys Marsh to Colnbrook IRC. He was informed at HMP Guys Marsh that he was travelling to a removal centre but was told only after the outset of the journey that the van was being diverted to HMP The Verne to pick up another detainee.
- 2.13 Escort providers sent limited information to the holding facility staff regarding the detainees due to travel to the facility. This included their name, the reason they were attending the facility (for example, for removal or interview) and the expected time of arrival. On arrival more detailed documentation was handed to staff. At least one escort record for a detainee was incomplete and did not record when stops had been made during the journey for comfort breaks or to collect other detainees from other facilities.
- 2.14 During the inspection the computer system failed and one detainee arrived at Gatwick North without prior notification. G4S staff had to make several telephone calls to find out why he had been brought to the facility.
- 2.15 We observed detainees being given access to a telephone on arrival at Gatwick STHF to inform their family or a solicitor of their situation.

## Other issues

- 2.16 There were no reported problems with property. None of the detainees required medication and no use of force or restraint had been employed.
- 2.17 One detainee (M3) had a problem with the time of day that he was escorted to Gatwick STHF. According to the IS91 record he arrived at Colnbrook IRC at 3.15pm and was then escorted to Gatwick STHF at 2.45am the next day. Although he understood that this departure time was dictated by his flight, he said that he did not have long enough at Colnbrook to sort out his paperwork and prepare for the flight.
- 2.18 We were informed by staff at the holding facility that detainees could sometimes be subject to excessive moves around the detention estate when an aircraft was chartered by UKBA to remove a large number of detainees to their home country. Detainees in centres local to Gatwick would be transferred further afield to accommodate those being removed. The detainees moved out would then be returned to the local centres once the mass movement had taken place.
- 2.19 We observed and records showed that a significant number of detainees were transferred during the night. Late night transfers from the holding facility appeared typically to occur when there had been delays in the UKBA providing interpreters for interviews, and following lengthy waits by detainees for scheduled interviews that did not take place at the notified time.



## Section 3: Recommendations

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>To the UK Border Agency</u>
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- 3.1 Detainees should not be subject to excessive movements around the detention estate.
- 3.2 Preparations for charter flights should be managed so as to minimise stressful disruption to detainees not allocated to those flights.
- 3.3 Managers should improve the timeliness of interviews and decisions, in order to reduce the number of transfers taking place at night.

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>To Group 4 Securicor</u>
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- 3.4 Escort journeys should be as direct and as short as possible.
- 3.5 Detainees under escort should be given a comfort break if the journey exceeds 2.5 hours.
- 3.6 Details of all journeys, and of comfort breaks, should be recorded on the IS91 form.
- 3.7 Hygiene and emergency packs should be carried for all escort journeys.
- 3.8 Detainees should be told at the beginning of all journeys what the destination, distance and journey time is expected to be.
- 3.9 Escort staff should give the receiving location full information in advance about any risks, needs or special circumstances associated with individual passengers.
- 3.10 Managers should establish systems to ensure that destination staff are always notified of forthcoming arrivals, with the relevant information.