

Report on an unannounced inspection of the  
short-term holding facilities at

# **Bristol and Cardiff Airports**

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

**14 October 2014**

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# Fact page

**Task of the establishment**

To hold individuals and families who have been detained at the border by the UK Border Force.

**Location**

Bristol Airport and Cardiff Airport

**Name of contractor**

Tascor

**Last inspection**

No previous inspection

**Escort provider**

Tascor

# Overview

Cardiff Airport is an international airport, located in Rhose, Vale of Glamorgan, serving Cardiff and the rest of South, Mid, and West Wales. Around 1.1 million passengers passed through the airport in 2013. Bristol Airport is located at Lulsgate Bottom in North Somerset. In 2013, it was the ninth busiest airport in the UK, handling over 6.1 million passengers.

Each airport has a short-term holding facility. This is the first time that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons has conducted an inspection at the sites. However, on arrival for the inspection it was apparent that the holding rooms at both sites were very rarely used. We found some confusion about the terms of their use. Tascor, usually tasked with operating short-term holding facilities on behalf of the Home Office were not based onsite or nearby. We were initially told that Tascor staffed the rooms when asked to do so by Border Force, but it was later clarified that they were not in fact contracted to manage the holding rooms at either site. In any event, at Cardiff, two people had briefly been detained in the rooms in the previous three months.

As a result, we were unable to conduct an inspection in the usual manner – that is, through discussion with detainees, Tascor and Border Force staff, and gathering detention data and evidence. Instead, this report summarises a number of key issues for consideration. Points apply to both sites, unless stated otherwise. The main conclusion of this inspection is that the occasional detention of people at Bristol and Cardiff airports lacks the safeguards and governance of detention in other short-term holding facilities. The Home Office should therefore review the need for the holding rooms; if they are to continue operating, they should be run to appropriate standards.

Beverley Alden  
**Inspector**

# About this inspection and report

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent, statutory organisation which reports on the treatment and conditions of those detained in prisons, young offender institutions, immigration detention facilities and police custody.

All inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

Inspectorate of Prisons reports normally carry a summary of the conditions and treatment of detainees, based on the four tests of a healthy prison that were first introduced in this inspectorate's thematic review *Suicide is everyone's concern*, published in 1999. The tests have been modified to fit the inspection of short-term holding facilities, both residential and non-residential. The tests for short-term holding facilities are:

**Safety** – that detainees are held in safety and with due regard to the insecurity of their position

**Respect** – that detainees are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention

**Activities** – that the centre encourages activities and provides facilities to preserve and promote the mental and physical well-being of detainees

**Preparation for removal and release** – that detainees are able to maintain contact with family, friends, support groups, legal representatives and advisers, access information about their country of origin and be prepared for their release, transfer or removal. Detainees are able to retain or recover their property.

Inspectors keep fully in mind that although these were custodial facilities, detainees were not held because they had been charged with a criminal offence and had not been detained through normal judicial processes. However, the fact that the holding rooms at Bristol and Cardiff airports are barely used means that this structure is not suitable. The report that follows represents basic findings and concludes with one recommendation.

# Findings

- 1.1** At Bristol Airport, 28 people had been refused leave to enter the country in the previous three months by Border Force, but none had been accommodated in the holding room. Six of these had been 'detained removals'; that is, they had been transported to a police station, detained for the night and returned to the airport the following day for a flight. The remainder had either been removed the same day, or been granted temporary admission and instructed to check in on the required flight themselves. No accompanied minors had been detained and one unaccompanied minor had been referred to social services.
- 1.2** At Cardiff Airport, four people had been refused entry at the border in the same period. Two of these had been held in the holding room before transfer to further detention, one for 30 minutes and the other for 1 hour and 55 minutes. No accompanied or unaccompanied minors had been detained.
- 1.3** Passengers who were refused entry into the UK pending further enquiries were required to sit in the passport control area. Once a decision to detain was made by Border Force, detainees were required to remain in this area, while there was a holding room at both sites, they were not staffed. Border Force staff contacted Tascor when passengers were detained requesting transport from the airport to a place of detention. This was almost always a police custody suite, where detainees would be detained overnight or for longer periods. The holding rooms were occasionally used by both Tascor and Border Force for short periods, for example, when detainees due to be removed arrived in advance of flight times or needed a comfort break.
- 1.4** Border Force staff told us that it took a long time for Tascor staff to arrive at the airports to escort detainees onwards, and that many had to wait in the passport control areas for several hours. We were told of one case at Cardiff of a Malaysian national who had been refused entry at 4.40pm; Border Force had advised Tascor of his detention and requested an escort. The man had been held in the control area until just after 10pm, when Tascor had called to say that they would not be coming as they had no team available. As a result, Border Force had granted the man temporary admission. At Bristol, an example was provided of a detainee waiting 11 hours in the passport control area for Tascor to arrive.
- 1.5** We were told that in some cases Border Force staff escorted detainees to police stations themselves, to avoid waiting long periods for Tascor. However, at Bristol not all Border Force staff were clear on whether handcuffs should be used in these circumstances, and we were told that it was likely that some detainees would be cuffed without a risk assessment.
- 1.6** There was inconsistency between the two sites regarding the completion of an IS91 (authority to detain) form. At Bristol, it was completed by Border Force staff when the decision to detain was made, while at Cardiff it was not completed until the detainee had been moved elsewhere and the authority to detain transferred to a third party, such as Tascor or a police custody sergeant. We were told at both locations that written reasons for detention were provided to detainees and explained using a professional interpreting service if required.
- 1.7** As the holding rooms were rarely used, Border Force officers were responsible for caring for detainees when they were detained in the passport control area. However, they had not received specific training in detention, such as in suicide and self-harm prevention or control and restraint. No specific risk assessment was undertaken on detention, beyond limited information in the IS91 form, when one was completed, and there was no

structured system of checks to safeguard a detainee's well-being. Staff did not use disability care plans or child care plans, or have specific training in equality and diversity.

- 1.8** All Border Force officers, at both sites, had undertaken the Keeping Children Safe training to at least level 1, with a number trained to level 2 or 3. At Bristol, there was a 'minors team', comprising four officers and a chief immigration officer; they were responsible for disseminating useful safeguarding and trafficking information but there was not always a member of this team on duty. There were clear processes for making referrals to social services. One such referral had been made by Bristol in the previous three months, and none had been made by Cardiff.
- 1.9** Trafficking training had been delivered to all Border Force officers in Bristol, and was upcoming for those in Cardiff, and staff we spoke to were well sighted on trafficking indicators. When a detainee was suspected of having been trafficked, Border Force referred them to the police rather than the National Referral Mechanism.
- 1.10** Both holding rooms were small and it was not possible to hold men, women and families separately at either site. The toilets at both locations provided insufficient screening as the doors were not of full length, particularly at Bristol, where it was easy to look over the top, and they could not be locked from the inside. There were no payphones at either site. Complaint forms, in a wide range of languages, and a basic information leaflet on detention were available in the holding rooms; however, as most detainees were not held there, they could not access these and there was no complaints box at Bristol. There was adequate material for religious practice in the holding rooms but, again, detainees could not routinely access it.
- 1.11** No food or drinks for detainees were held at either site, despite detainees often being held in passport control for long periods. Border Force staff did not hold petty cash; they told us that they had sometimes paid for food for detainees themselves. There were books, magazines and some clothing and other provisions available in the holding rooms but detainees could not routinely access these. As detainees were usually transferred into further detention at a police custody suite, no measures were taken in regard to preparation for their removal or release.

## Recommendation

- 1.12 The operation and staffing of both holding rooms should be reviewed as a priority; detainees should only be held with the correct authority, in a designated and fit-for-purpose environment, with oversight from properly trained staff and for the minimum period of time.**