

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

Sandford House

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

1 December 2015

Glossary of terms

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Fact page

Task of the establishment

To hold individuals who are being removed from the United Kingdom.

Location

Homer Road, Solihull

Name of contractor

Tascor

Last inspection

17 September 2012

Escort provider

Tascor

Overview

Sandford House in Solihull contains the largest immigration reporting centre in the Midlands. Each weekday 250-350 individuals subject to immigration control report to the centre as part of the conditions of their temporary release or entry to the UK. Home Office Immigration Enforcement teams operate from the building. Sandford House also has a short-term holding facility (STHF) used to hold a maximum of 10 individuals who have reported to the centre or been arrested by Immigration Enforcement. The facility is located at the rear of Sandford House, next to the reporting centre. There had been 116 detentions in the three months prior to our inspection.

The private contractor Tascor ran the facility on behalf of the Home Office. It was open from 8.30am until 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, and staffed by a male and female detainee custody officer (DCO). The facility comprised a DCOs' office, which overlooked a single holding room. Two detainees were held during our inspection. An Independent Monitoring Board regularly visited the facility.

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.

All Inspectorate of Prisons reports 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 kept 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.

Summary

Safety

- S1 At our inspection in 2012, we made three recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test; at this inspection, one of these was achieved and two were not achieved.
- S2 The escort vehicle we inspected was not clean. Facility detainee custody officers (DCOs) actively followed up movement orders¹ but these, together with vans, often arrived late. Detainees were routinely handcuffed for the short distance between the rear of the building and escort vans, regardless of individual risk. Most detainees arrived after presenting themselves to the reporting centre. A male and female DCO were on duty. Staff could clearly monitor the holding rooms but men and women could not be held separately. DCOs carried anti-ligature knives but of the two who were on duty during our visit, neither had witnessed a self-harm attempt. Formal safeguarding arrangements and links with adult social services were minimal. As at our last inspection, children were not held at the facility.
- S3 Force had been used on a non-compliant detainee shortly before our inspection. DCOs were trained in the Home Office manual for escorting safely. Detainees could maintain contact with their legal representatives. In the previous three months, there had been 116 detentions with detainees held for an average of four hours and 16 minutes.

Respect

- S4 At our inspection in 2012, we made two recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test; at this inspection we found one was achieved and one not achieved.
- S5 The holding room remained largely unchanged, although the gaps under the toilet doors had been removed. DCOs spoke to detainees in a calm and courteous manner and took time to explain the procedures. Detainees could practise their religion. DCOs sometimes used professional telephone interpreting. Detainees could make written complaints but Tascor had not received any since at least 2013. Snacks and fresh fruit were freely available to detainees, and DCOs offered microwave meals.

Activities

- S6 At our inspection in 2012, we did not make any recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test.
- S7 There were suitable activities and reading material for detainees, but the small television set was fixed too high to watch comfortably. Detainees could not access the open air.

¹ A movement order is a document that gives instructions to the escort contractor, Tascor, to transfer a detainee between locations. The Detainee, Escorting and Population Management Unit of Immigration Enforcement issue movement orders by fax. Without a movement order Tascor cannot transfer a detainee.

Preparation for removal and release

- S8 At our inspection in 2012, we made one recommendation in relation to this healthy establishment test, which was not achieved.
- S9 Detainees could not receive visitors but had good access to telephones and faxes. Detainees could not send or receive emails or access the internet. DCOs made efforts to help a detainee pass cash to a family member. Detainees received basic contact information about their next place of detention.

Section 1. Safety

Escort vehicles and transfers

Expected outcomes:

Detainees under escort are treated safely, decently and efficiently.

- 1.1 During our inspection, a vehicle arrived from Bristol to collect some property for a detainee previously held to deliver it to Campsfield House immigration removal centre (IRC), but Sandford House DCOs knew nothing about this property. The vehicle was not clean inside and there was an unused urine bag on one of the detainee seats. The van carried the appropriate food, water and other items.
- 1.2 On the day of our visit, a woman was detained at 11.15am from the reporting centre, and it was clear that she would need to be taken to Yarl's Wood IRC. The Bristol van had returned to the Bristol depot, even though the facility staff had asked the crew to transport the detained woman. The Tascor national control room then arranged for one of its Manchester crews to take her to Yarl's Wood, but the movement order was not received from Immigration Enforcement's Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit (DEPMU) until 2pm, which was then apparently too late for the Manchester van to collect her. Although the holding room staff had been chasing progress on this movement, she was not collected until 3.15pm. Staff confirmed that such a delayed wait for a movement order or van was not uncommon.
- 1.3 Detainees who were taken to another destination from the holding room were escorted to a van in a private car park at the back of the building, which was not visible from outside the fence. All detainees were handcuffed for the short walk to the van; staff said that they had no discretion in this, and that some detainees objected as they were compliant, had never been handcuffed before, and had not been charged with a crime.
- 1.4 We were told that Immigration Enforcement did not routinely bring people to the holding room who had been arrested in the community, as they were usually taken to a police station. Sandford House was only used for this purpose in larger operations where there was insufficient capacity in police custody.

Recommendations

- 1.5 **The Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit (DEPMU) should issue movement orders promptly, and escort vehicles should be arranged as quickly as possible.**
- 1.6 **Detainees should not be handcuffed unless there is specific information indicating an increased risk of escape or harm to the detainee, staff or the public.**

Arrival

Expected outcomes:

Detainees taken into detention are treated with respect, have the correct documentation, and are held in safe and decent conditions. Family accommodation is suitable.

- 1.7 DCOs said that they always received notice of detainees arriving. They were emphatic that they would never accept anyone without a formal authority to detain (IS91), and that Immigration Enforcement staff always respected this.
- 1.8 A male and a female DCO were on duty at the time of our inspection, and were the regular staff when the facility was open. If either were not available for work, we were told that replacement staff ensured that one male and one female officer were always on duty.
- 1.9 Arriving detainees were given a rub-down search in the open DCOs' office; during our inspection the female DCO searched a woman in the presence of several men. The DCOs were careful in explaining to detainees what would happen and offering support. One detainee was from Sri Lanka and spoke little English. The Immigration Enforcement officer had used telephone interpreting within the short term-holding facility (STHF) staff area before handing him over to the DCOs, but the DCOs did not use professional interpreting in their explanations to this detainee.

Bullying and personal safety

Expected outcomes:

Detainees feel and are safe from bullying and victimisation.

- 1.10 DCOs told us that they had not witnessed bullying between detainees. They had good oversight over the holding room through a large window from the DCOs' office. CCTV cameras covered the facility and the outside area. The CCTV footage was recorded and could be reviewed. The two detainees held during our inspection, a man and a woman who were unrelated, were held together. DCOs told us that if a female detainee received unwanted sexual attention they would consider allowing her to sit in their office, but this had never happened.

Recommendation

- 1.11 **Unrelated male and female detainees should not be held in the same holding room.** (Repeated recommendation 1.8)

Self-harm and suicide prevention

Expected outcomes:

The facility provides a safe and secure environment which reduces the risk of self-harm and suicide.

- 1.12 Both DCOs on duty carried anti-ligature knives. Neither had witnessed an incident where a detainee had attempted to harm themselves. We were told that if a detainee threatened self-harm, DCOs completed a suicide and self-harm warning form and filled in the relevant information on the person escort record, and would also alert the escorts to the risks. A

suicide and self-harm warning form had been opened in October 2015 after a detainee threatened to kill himself.

Safeguarding (protection of adults at risk)

Expected outcomes:

The centre promotes the welfare of all detainees, particularly adults at risk, and protects them from all kinds of harm and neglect.²

- 1.13** Tascor did not have a national safeguarding adults policy but the telephone number of the national interim Tascor safeguarding manager was displayed in the DCOs' office. There were no formal links between Home Office staff and the local authority social services. Detainees were held for short periods and those entering the facility from the reporting centre were already known to the Home Office. The Disclosure and Barring Service had checked DCOs to the enhanced level.

Safeguarding children

Expected outcomes:

The facility promotes the welfare of children and protects them from all kinds of harm and neglect.

- 1.14** As at our last inspection, DCOs and Immigration Enforcement staff said children were not detained at the facility, except if a family being transported via Birmingham took a toilet stop there. In the previous three months, no children had been held. There was a range of children's books and activities available, and baby changing facilities. Both DCOs had attended a one-day training event run by the children's charity Barnardo's.

Use of force

Expected outcomes:

Force is only used as a last resort and for legitimate reasons.

- 1.15** Both DCOs had been trained in the Home Office manual for escorting safely.³ In October 2015, facility DCOs and escorts used force against a refractory detainee, who had threatened to kill himself. He tore down posters, threw information cards across the holding room and tried to escape through a locked door. The relevant documentation we reviewed showed that Tascor officers made good efforts to deescalate the situation using a telephone interpreter, and the DCOs placed the detainee in a waist-restraint belt and handcuffs. A paramedic confirmed that the detainee was fit for further detention and escorts transferred him to an IRC.

² We define an adult at risk as a person aged 18 years or over, 'who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation'. 'No secrets' definition (Department of Health 2000).

³ The Home Office manual for escorting safely is a restraint package developed specifically for transferring non-compliant immigration detainees. The package includes techniques to restrain detainees in the confined environment of a Tascor escort vehicle and aircraft.

- 1.16** Home Office staff wore anti-stab vests to interview a 55-year-old woman in the holding room during the inspection, which was disproportionate and did little to soothe her anxieties. DCOs did not wear protective clothing when interacting with the same detainee minutes later.

Recommendation

- 1.17** Immigration staff should not routinely wear protective clothing when interviewing detainees in the holding room, unless documented risks indicate the need for this.

Legal rights

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are fully aware of and understand their detention. Detainees are supported by the facility staff to exercise their legal rights freely.

- 1.18** Detainees could keep in touch with their lawyers by telephone and fax, and we saw this happening. One detainee received incoming calls from his lawyer on the holding room payphone. Another detainee asked officers to fax papers to her lawyer, which they did. A notice in different languages in the holding room promoted the Civil Legal Advice helpline.

Casework

Expected outcomes:

Detention is carried out on the basis of individual reasons that are clearly communicated. Detention is for the minimum period necessary.

- 1.19** In the previous three months, there had been 116 detentions. The average detention was four hours and 16 minutes, with the longest being eight hours and 50 minutes.
- 1.20** All detainees held during our inspection had the appropriate documentation authorising their detention (form IS91).
- 1.21** We observed an immigration officer carefully and clearly explain to a detainee who spoke English the reasons for her detention, her bail rights and what was likely to happen next. The officer gave her written reasons for her detention (IS91R) and a form to apply for bail to a chief immigration officer (IS98A). The officer served a notice on the detainee informing her that removal directions had not been set yet; one of the reasons for her detention was 'your removal from the United Kingdom is imminent'. Another detainee complained verbally to the immigration enforcement officer that he had not received notice that his application to remain in the UK had been refused.

Respect

Accommodation

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are held in a safe, clean and decent environment.

- 1.22 The holding room was unchanged since the previous inspection and was reasonably well maintained. There were six fixed plastic chairs on either side of a table, and a row of four padded seats against a wall. A cleaner came every weekday. Staff were able to control the air-conditioning and heating.
- 1.23 There were separate small toilets for men and for women within the holding room. These were now sufficiently screened from the main room, and the previous gaps under the doors were no longer there, but they were only thinly partitioned, which limited privacy, especially when both men and women were held. Apart from a bin for sanitary items in the women's toilet, the toilets had only an unlined plastic bin without a lid, which did not appear to have been cleaned recently.
- 1.24 Detainees' property was stored in a box under a table in the staff area, with valuables kept in a safe. Packs of spare clothes were available in four sizes. There were also blankets, pillows and pillowcases. The Tascor information booklet was displayed in 16 languages on the wall. A duty operational manager from Tascor inspected the holding room each month.
- 1.25 There was a baby change facility with disposable mats and nappies, some toys and children's books in various languages. There was a drinking water fountain and a payphone. There was some natural light through frosted glass.
- 1.26 DCOs on duty had up-to-date first aid training. If a detainee arrived with medication or had medical needs, DCOs called the contracted medical triage and advice line, or rang 999 if there were a medical emergency – we were told this had happened recently when a detainee collapsed. One detainee who arrived during our visit said that he had medications at home, and staff did all they could to help him contact a relative or his doctor. Staff reported that detainees were normally given temporary admission if they needed to go to hospital, unless two extra DCOs were available to escort them to the hospital and back.

Positive relationships

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are treated with respect by all staff, with proper regard for the uncertainty of their situation and their cultural backgrounds.

- 1.27 DCOs that we observed took time to explain procedures to detainees, and always spoke in a calm and courteous tone. They addressed one detainee by her first name. They told us about the value of defusing tension and de-escalating situations through their interaction. We observed two interviews by Immigration Enforcement staff in the staff area of the STHF. In one, the holding room was not otherwise occupied and the officer sat in privacy with the detainee, talking her through the interview carefully and considerately (see paragraph 1.21). In the second case, where the detainee was more agitated, another Immigration Enforcement officer spoke more sharply and abruptly to him in the DCOs' office in the presence of five other people (including the two inspectors). The detainee became much calmer when the DCOs spoke with him subsequently.

Equality and diversity

Expected outcomes:

There is understanding of the diverse backgrounds of detainees and different cultural backgrounds. The distinct needs of each protected characteristic, including race equality, nationality, religion, disability, gender, transgender, sexual orientation, age and pregnancy, are recognised and addressed.

- 1.28** A prayer mat was provided, with copies of the Qur'an and a Bible. One of the DCOs on duty spoke four languages, which had been helpful on several occasions. The staff were familiar with the use of telephone interpreting, and recounted recent occasions when they had used it.
- 1.29** The equality and diversity policy was displayed but staff said that they had not received specific training on equality and diversity issues, or on the implications of a range of protected characteristics. They had not had training on the particular issues faced by detainees in the immigration system. DCOs completed a disability care plan if a disabled detainee were held.

Recommendation

- 1.30 All staff should receive refresher diversity training, including a course on the wide-ranging backgrounds of, and particular issues faced by, detainees in the immigration system.** (Repeated recommendation 1.32)

Complaints

Expected outcomes:

Effective complaints procedures are in place for detainees which are easy to access and use, in a language they can understand. Responses are timely and can be understood by detainees.

- 1.31** Detainees could make written complaints. Complaints forms were available in a range of languages and could be deposited in a locked complaints box in the holding room. The box was emptied daily by an immigration officer. Tascor had not received any detainee complaints at the facility since at least 2013.

Catering

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are offered varied meals to meet their individual requirements. Food is prepared and served according to religious, cultural and prevailing food safety and hygiene regulations.

- 1.32** Microwave meals and sandwiches were available, as well as fresh fruit and snacks in the holding room. Staff offered hot and cold drinks regularly. There were helpful photographic menus to explain the food options to detainees who did not speak English.

Activities

Expected outcomes:

The facility encourages activities to preserve and promote the mental and physical well-being of detainees.

- 1.33** There was a range of books and games available, including chess and draughts, playing cards, a hand-held games device, activity packs and puzzles. Staff brought in a daily newspaper and there was a monthly delivery of magazines and periodicals, including a Bengali newspaper, and the weekly edition of *China Daily*. Paper and a pen were available in the room. There was a small television mounted behind Perspex high on the wall, which would have been uncomfortable to watch for long periods. Detainees had no access to the open air. People were detained for much longer at the airport, sometimes for up to 24 hours. Many had disembarked straight from flights and wouldn't have access to the fresh air for some hours before arriving at the airport.

Preparation for removal and release

Expected outcomes:

Detainees are able to maintain contact with the outside world and be prepared for their release, transfer or removal. Detainees are able to retain or recover their property. Families with children and others with specific needs are not detained without items essential to their welfare.

- 1.34** Detainees could not receive any visitors, including legal advisers – who they could communicate with by telephone or fax. Detainees had adequate access to telephones, including their own mobiles (if they had no camera or internet access), a Tascor mobile, the payphone, or, in the last resort, the office telephone. Staff were ready to send and receive faxes on detainees' behalf, and offered this on their arrival. However, detainees did not have access to the internet and could not send or receive emails.
- 1.35** During our visit, a detainee wished to pass on the money she had with her to a member of her family. Staff took care in helping her to contact her family, and arranging for someone to come in to collect the money. It was normal for items to be handed in or out in this way.
- 1.36** DCOs gave detainees small cards with details of the IRC or residential STHF to where they were being transferred.

Recommendations

- 1.37** **Detainees should be able to receive visits.** (Repeated recommendation 1.39)
- 1.38** **Detainees should have access to the internet and be able to send and receive emails.**

Section 2. Recommendations and housekeeping points

Recommendations

To the Home Office

- 2.1 The Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit (DEPMU) should issue movement orders promptly, and escort vehicles should be arranged as quickly as possible. (1.5)
- 2.2 Immigration staff should not routinely wear protective clothing when interviewing detainees in the holding room, unless documented risks indicate the need for this. (1.17)

Recommendations

To the facility contractor

Escort vehicles and transfers

- 2.3 Detainees should not be handcuffed unless there is specific information indicating an increased risk of escape or harm to the detainee, staff or the public. (1.6)

Bullying and personal safety

- 2.4 Unrelated male and female detainees should not be held in the same holding room. (1.11, repeated recommendation 1.8)

Equality and diversity

- 2.5 All staff should receive refresher diversity training, including a course on the wide-ranging backgrounds of, and particular issues faced by, detainees in the immigration system. (1.30, repeated recommendation 1.32)

Preparation for removal and release

- 2.6 Detainees should be able to receive visits. (1.37, repeated recommendation 1.39)
- 2.7 Detainees should have access to the internet and be able to send and receive emails. (1.38)

Section 3. Appendices

Appendix I: Inspection team

Colin Carroll
Martin Kettle

Inspector
Inspector

Appendix II: Progress on recommendations from the last report

The following is a list of all the recommendations made in the last report, organised under the four tests of a healthy establishment. The reference numbers at the end of each recommendation refer to the paragraph location in the previous report. If a recommendation has been repeated in the main report, its new paragraph number is also provided.

Safety

Detainees are held in safety and with due regard to the insecurity of their position.

Recommendations

The DEPMU should issue movement orders promptly, especially where detainees are known to have a history of self-harm. Escort vehicles should also be arranged quickly. (1.4)

Not achieved

Unrelated male and female detainees should not be held in the same holding room. (1.8)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.11)

All DCOs should routinely carry anti-ligature knives. (1.14)

Achieved

Respect

Detainees are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention.

Recommendations

Toilets should be adequately screened. (1.26)

Achieved

All staff should receive refresher diversity training, including a course on the wide-ranging backgrounds of, and particular issues faced by, detainees in the immigration system. (1.32)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.30)

Preparation for removal and release

Detainees are able to maintain contact with the outside world and be prepared for their release, transfer or removal.

Recommendations

Detainees should be able to receive visits. (1.39)

Not achieved (recommendation repeated, 1.37)

Appendix III: Photographs

Solihull main holding room



Solihull main holding room

