

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

# **Drumkeen House**

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

**2 February 2016**

## **Glossary of terms**

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# Fact page

**Task of the establishment**

To hold immigration detainees for up to 24 hours

**Location**

Belfast, Northern Ireland

**Name of contractor**

Tascor

**Last inspection**

19 November 2013

**Escort provider**

Tascor

# Overview

Drumkeen House is the centre of the Home Office's immigration enforcement operations in Northern Ireland. Within the building there is a reporting centre, where individuals subject to immigration control attend at regular intervals as a condition of their temporary admission to the United Kingdom. Approximately 50 individuals report there each day. The reporting centre is open from Monday to Thursday. Once a decision has been made to remove someone from the United Kingdom and there are no barriers to removal, the Home Office may detain the individual at the reporting centre. In such cases, they may be held briefly in the short-term holding facility located within Drumkeen House. In addition to the reporting centre, a Home Office immigration, compliance and enforcement (ICE) team also operates from Drumkeen House. Using intelligence, the ICE team arrests individuals with an irregular immigration status in the community, at Belfast City Airport or at Belfast docks. Some of those arrested by the ICE team are held at Drumkeen House.

No detainees were held during the inspection. In the previous three months, 42 detainees had been held. Owing to the low number of detainees held, the facility was not permanently staffed. Instead, Tascor staffed the facility on an *ad hoc* basis, supplying two detainee custody officers (DCOs) only when needed. The facility remained largely unchanged from our 2013 inspection and comprised an office for DCOs which overlooked the two holding rooms. An independent monitoring board does not visit this 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 2013, we made three recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test, one of which we found at this inspection was achieved and two were not achieved.
- S2 Escort vehicles were clean and well stocked. Detainees were not routinely handcuffed as they were transferred from vehicles to the facility. Detainees were given a rub-down search in private on arrival. They could make a telephone call shortly after arrival.
- S3 Male and female detainees were held separately, and DCOs had good oversight of the holding rooms. Suicide and self-harm warning forms could be opened if necessary. DCOs carried anti-ligature knives when they had detainees in their custody.
- S4 Tascor did not have a safeguarding adults policy. Children were not held in the facility. In the rare instances when the Home Office had removed a family with children, they had used the family interview room next to the reporting centre, which was a more appropriate environment for children than the holding rooms.
- S5 Force was rarely used, with only one use in the previous six months. Detainees could maintain contact with their legal representatives. In the previous three months, 42 detainees had been held for an average of 44 minutes.

## Respect

- S6 At our inspection in 2013, we made two recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test, one of which we found at this inspection was achieved and one not achieved.
- S7 The two holding rooms were clean but the fixed table and seats were unwelcoming. Toilets were insufficiently screened and lacked seats or lids. Staff told us that they routinely introduced themselves to detainees, although DCOs' name badges were difficult to read.
- S8 Detainees could practise their religion. Those with disabilities had access to the reporting centre's adapted toilet if necessary. They could complain formally in writing. Apart from biscuits, food was not stored in the facility but staff would buy sandwiches or snacks if a detainee was hungry.

## Activities

- S9 At our inspection in 2013, did not make any recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test.
- S10 There were sufficient activities for detainees to engage in, given the short periods of detention.

## Preparation for removal and release

- S11 At our inspection in 2013, we made one recommendations in relation to this healthy establishment test, which we found at this inspection was not achieved.
- S12 Most detainees were transferred to the residential short-term holding facility at Larne House. Staff gave detainees contact information about Larne House in writing, but in English only. Detainees could not access email or the internet.



# Section 1. Safety

## Escort vehicles and transfers

### Expected outcomes:

**Detainees under escort are treated safely, decently and efficiently.**

- I.1 The private security firm Tascor managed the facility and provided escort services on behalf of the Home Office. No detainees were escorted to or from the facility during the inspection. Detainees were escorted to the facility from the Belfast airports, docks and local police stations, and most journeys were short. The escort vehicle we inspected was clean, comfortable and stocked with water, a welfare box, a first-aid kit and an anti-ligature knife.
- I.2 Staff told us that detainees were not routinely handcuffed when moving to or from the facility but that they would be if this was necessary to manage individual risk. DCOs said that they used a guiding hold to escort detainees from vehicles to the facility.

## 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.**

- I.3 The facility did not have dedicated staff but Tascor supplied two DCOs when detainees were to be held. Home Office staff routinely provided advance notice of new arrivals to Tascor, to allow sufficient time for the facility to be prepared.
- I.4 We were told that, on arrival, detainees received a rub-down search in one of the holding rooms, behind a portable screen, which allowed some privacy. DCOs said that they would not admit detainees without the relevant authority to detain (IS91) document.
- I.5 Detainees were not permitted to keep mobile phones with cameras and internet access. In these cases, alternative phones were provided for detainees to use with their own SIM card. All detainees were offered a free telephone call on arrival and were encouraged to give their friends, family and legal representatives the telephone numbers of the payphones in the holding rooms, for incoming calls. Staff told us that they could exchange currency, if required, to allow a detainee to make an outgoing call from the payphones, and that they would allow detainees to use the office telephone if necessary.
- I.6 A small amount of spare clothing and some basic toiletries were available for detainees if required, and this was sufficient, given the short-stay nature of the facility. DCOs telephoned a medical triage service if advice on medication or health issues was needed. In the case of an emergency, staff called the emergency services.

## Bullying and personal safety

### Expected outcomes:

**Detainees feel and are safe from bullying and victimisation.**

- 1.7** The risk of bullying between detainees was minimal, given the low numbers held and short stays. Men and women were held separately, to avoid unwanted sexual attention. DCOs had good oversight of both holding rooms through large windows in their office. As an additional safety mechanism, both holding rooms were covered by closed-circuit television and the footage was retained on a hard drive.

## Self-harm and suicide prevention

### Expected outcomes:

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

- 1.8** Four anti-ligature knives were held in the DCOs' office, and each DCO wore one when a detainee was held. DCOs completed a suicide and self-harm warning form if a detainee indicated an intention to self-harm. This information would accompany the detainee as they travelled on to the residential short-term holding facility at Larne House, where assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT) case management documentation for detainees at risk of suicide or self-harm could be opened and the detainee fully assessed.

## 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.<sup>1</sup>**

- 1.9** Tascor staff did not know if the company had a safeguarding adults policy, and were not aware of the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking. Tascor operational managers were not aware of links with adult social services. Notices in several languages in the holding rooms encouraged detainees who had been 'exploited' to call the Northern Ireland Law Centre.

## Recommendation

- 1.10 Tascor should develop local safeguarding processes with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Local Safeguarding Adult Partnership. (Repeated recommendation 1.11)**

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

## Safeguarding children

### Expected outcomes:

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

- I.11 Children were not held at the facility. Home Office staff told us that on one occasion they had had to remove a mother and her daughter to the Republic of Ireland. The mother and daughter had been arrested by Home Office immigration enforcement officers and been asked to wait in a family interview room before they were driven to the Republic. The interview room was a more suitable environment in which to hold children than the holding room. It had a carpet and soft, movable chairs, and the walls were painted to soften the institutional feel. A manager from the Home Office immigration, compliance and enforcement team confirmed that it was rare for them to take enforcement action against a family.

## Use of force

### Expected outcomes:

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

- I.12 DCOs had used force on only one occasion in the previous six months. A female detainee had refused to leave the building to board a vehicle that was transporting her to the Republic of Ireland. Two DCOs had held the detainee's arms to usher her onto the van. Paperwork showed that force had been necessary and used as a last resort. DCOs had made efforts to encourage the detainee to comply, by talking to her with the help of an interpreter and letting her communicate with her solicitor before guiding her onto the vehicle.

## 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.**

- I.13 Detainees could maintain contact with their legal representatives by telephone and fax. A notice in English and other languages promoted the work of the Northern Ireland Law Centre, the Law and Migrants Rights Centre and the Northern Ireland Centre for Ethnic Minorities. A notice promoted the Civil Legal Advice telephone helpline, which would have been helpful to detainees transferring to England. However, some notices were out of date: a notice promoted the services of Refugee and Migrant Justice, which had gone into administration more than five years earlier.

## Casework

### Expected outcomes:

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

- I.14 In the previous three months, 42 detainees had been held, for an average of 44 minutes. The longest period of detention was two hours and 10 minutes. Detainees were not always given

a copy of their reasons for detention in a language they could understand. If detainees could not read English, Home Office staff used a professional telephone interpreter to explain the contents of the notice.

## Recommendation

- I.15 Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand.** (Repeated recommendation I.17)

# Respect

## Accommodation

### Expected outcomes:

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

- I.16** The facility had two clean holding rooms, where men and women could be held separately. The holding rooms contained a television and DVD player, and a fixed table with four seats. One of them also had a baby changing unit attached to the wall. Staff were able to control the temperature of each room. A toilet cubicle was situated in each of the holding rooms but these did not have seats or lids and were only partially screened, as the doors had large gaps at the top and bottom, which did not provide sufficient privacy. Hand-washing facilities were clean and in working order, and a choice of sanitary protection for women was freely available.

### Recommendation

- I.17** **Detainees should have access to toilets with seats and floor to ceiling screening, which provide suitable privacy.** (Repeated recommendation I.19).

## 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.**

- I.18** Staff told us that they routinely introduced themselves to detainees and addressed them by their preferred names. Staff wore several name badges, to allow them access to various buildings and facilities, but the writing on them was too small for detainees to read easily.

## 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.**

- I.19** Staff had completed equality and diversity refresher training within the previous year. Religious items, including prayer mats, compasses and religious texts, were provided on request but were not freely available in the holding rooms. A professional telephone interpreting service available for non-English speakers between September and October 2016 had been used on three occasions. A few books and newspapers were available in foreign languages. Detainees with disabilities could use the adapted toilet facilities on the ground floor of the adjacent reporting centre if required.

## 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.**

- I.20** Secure complaints boxes, together with pens and complaints forms in a variety of languages, were available in the holding rooms. Complaints boxes were emptied regularly by Home Office managers. A dummy complaint that we placed in a box was collected by a manager shortly after we left the facility.

## 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.**

- I.21** Both holding rooms had a water fountain, and bottled water, biscuits and hot drinks were available from a vending machine on request. Hot meals were not provided, owing to the short-stay nature of the facility, but staff told us that they would use petty cash to buy sandwiches at a nearby supermarket if a detainee was hungry.

# Activities

**Expected outcomes:**

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

- I.22** There were sufficient activities to occupy detainees held for short periods, including an appropriate range of books, as well as magazines and newspapers, although these were mainly in English (see section on equality and diversity). There was a television and DVD player in both holding rooms and some DVDs were available. Detainees could not go outside for fresh air or exercise but this was offset by the fact that they were held for only short periods in the facility.

# 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.**

- I.23** Detainees were not permitted to have visitors owing to the short-stay nature of the facility. They did not have access to email or the internet to inform family or friends of what was happening but telephone access was facilitated (see section on arrival). Most detainees were transferred to the residential short-term holding facility at Larne House on departure from the facility. Small cards with the address and contact details for Larne House were routinely provided to detainees transferring to further detention but these were in English only. Personal property was returned to detainees on departure, and large property bags were available if required.

## **Recommendation**

- I.24** **Detainees should have access to email and the internet.** (Repeated recommendation I.31)



# Section 2. Recommendations and housekeeping points

## Recommendations

To the facility contractor

### Safeguarding (protection of adults at risk)

- 2.1 Tascor should develop local safeguarding processes with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Local Safeguarding Adult Partnership. (1.10, repeated recommendation 1.11)

### Casework

- 2.2 Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand. (1.15, repeated recommendation 1.17)

### Accommodation

- 2.3 Detainees should have access to toilets with seats and floor to ceiling screening, which provide suitable privacy. (1.17, repeated recommendation 1.19)

### Preparation for removal and release

- 2.4 Detainees should have access to email and the internet. (1.24, repeated recommendation 1.31)

## Section 3. Appendices

### Appendix I: Inspection team

Colin Carroll  
Fiona Shearlaw

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

Detainees should not be handcuffed unless an individual risk assessment suggests otherwise. (1.2)

**Achieved**

Tascor should develop local safeguarding processes with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Local Safeguarding Adult Partnership. (1.11)

**Not achieved** (recommendation repeated, 1.10)

Detainees should be issued with and allowed to keep the reason for detention (IS91R) document in a language they can understand. (1.17)

**Not achieved** (recommendation repeated, 1.15)

### Respect

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

#### Recommendations

Complaints should be responded to promptly. (1.26)

**Achieved**

Detainees should have access to toilets with seats and floor to ceiling screening, which provide suitable privacy. (1.19)

**Not achieved** (recommendation repeated, 1.17)

### 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 have access to email and the internet. (1.31)

**Not achieved** (recommendation repeated, 1.24)

## Appendix III: Photographs



Drumkeen House holding rooms