



5 April 2010

020 7035 2123

NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00.01, THURSDAY, 7 APRIL 2010

SHORT-TERM HOLDING FACILITIES – MUCH IMPROVED

Since our inspection programme began, there has been much improvement in the physical environment in which immigration detainees are held, and in their management and care, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing a thematic report on short-term holding facilities.

In 2004, HM Inspectorate of Prisons began inspecting short-term holding facilities (STHFs) at ports and immigration reporting centres. These facilities are intended to hold people detained for short periods before removal or during investigations by immigration officers after arrival in the UK, as well as people awaiting transportation to a longer-term place of detention. The airport facilities are generally located airside and are particularly inaccessible to the public. Police stations are also regularly used to hold immigration detainees.

Inspectors were pleased to find:

- a number of facilities previously considered unfit for purpose have been rebuilt or substantially refurbished;
- G4S, contracted by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to run STHFs across the UK, has developed a range of policies to support the humane and welfare-focused approach to detention;
- many detention staff have shown a decent and respectful approach, encouraged by G4S to focus on detainee welfare; and

- Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) are still being appointed to provide more constant oversight of facilities, while the most established IMB at Heathrow Airport has been notably effective in driving forward standards.

Some concerns, however, remain:

- unrelated men, women and families were still being co-located;
- there was a lack of staff awareness of their responsibilities in relation to children, who continue to be detained frequently in STHFs;
- there was a lack of information in different languages and too little use of interpretation; and
- a few facilities have, as a result of a lack of funding or management focus, shown limited if any progress.

Nick Hardwick said:

“For most of those detained, short-term holding facilities (STHFs) are their first experience of detention and they are likely to feel fear, stress and uncertainty. Some will have been refused entry and will be waiting for a return flight. Others will have been picked up from their homes during early morning operations by immigration enforcement teams. An STHF therefore needs to provide a safe and decent environment in which the detainee can use the time available to prepare for their return, release or transfer.

“The independent inspection process is an important safeguard for detainees and I am pleased to see that in the period covered by this report, standards have risen. I hope this report will encourage further improvement.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 7 April 2011 at www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. This short thematic review covers inspections of short-term holding facilities across England and Scotland, as well as three centres near Calais, which took place from 2004-2010.
4. By the start of 2010, G4S was contracted or sub-contracted by UKBA to run all of the UK's STHFs, except for the facility at Colnbrook, which is managed by Serco alongside the immigration removal centre. During the period covered by this report, Taylormade Security managed the Harwich facility and Dover Harbour Board managed the Port of Dover facility, though both were eventually sub-contracted to G4S. In November 2010, UKBA announced that the re-tendered STHF contract had been awarded to Reliance, which takes over from G4S in 2011.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1415 Monday to Friday if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick. Or email jane.parsons@justice.gsi.gov.uk.