

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00:01, 18 DECEMBER 2007****HEATHROW DETENTION FACILITIES: INADEQUATE CONDITIONS AND SOME POOR TREATMENT**

Though some limited improvements had taken place in the five short-term holding facilities at Heathrow, conditions in general were inadequate, there were procedural weaknesses and at two facilities – Terminal 4 and Queen’s Building – inspectors observed inappropriate staff language and behaviour, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing a report on follow-up inspections.

These five short-term holding facilities (STHFs) account for a significant proportion of short-term immigration detention. The STHFs in the four terminals largely cater for those who have just arrived and are being questioned or refused entry. The fifth, at Queen’s Building, mainly holds those being removed after having spent some time in the UK.

Inspectors found some positive developments, with improvements in the environment, more for detainees to do, and better supervision. They were particularly pleased that there was now regular independent monitoring, by an Independent Monitoring Board.

In three of the STHFs, inspectors saw good and supportive relationships between staff and detainees. This was not the case in Terminal 4 and particularly in Queen’s Building. Some staff used inappropriate language. At Queen’s Building, inspectors witnessed extremely unprofessional behaviour by an immigration officer and a detainee custody officer, which resulted in a detainee being held in separation, in considerable distress (see paras 1.4 -1.5).

There were other serious weaknesses

- The facilities were inappropriate for the purpose. At Queen’s Building, detainees slept on the floor on improvised bedding. Only two STHFs could separate women and men.
- The arrangements for the care and protection of children were inadequate in all the STHFs. The local children’s safeguarding board was unaware that children were held there.
- Arrangements for monitoring and recording use of force were inadequate and could not provide assurance that it was used properly and only when absolutely necessary.
- Complaints procedures and monitoring were inadequate
- There was no medical presence on-site, so staff had to decide whether to call help.

Anne Owers said:

“It is welcome that some changes have taken place. But it is clear that it will not be possible to provide appropriately safe and decent facilities in the current settings. The remodelling of the airport provides an opportunity to specify and provide suitable accommodation.

“There are still procedural weaknesses: in monitoring the use of force, providing an effective complaints procedure and proactive medical service, and in particular the protection and support of children, which BIA and the contractor need to work on immediately.

“They also need to ensure that staff are appropriately supervised and monitored in their relationships with, and language about, the detainees in their care. All of these changes

will, however, be greatly assisted by the presence of an Independent Monitoring Board to visit and report regularly on conditions and treatment in these hitherto hidden detention facilities.”

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into Heathrow airport short-term holding facilities is available from [http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspect\\_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html](http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html)
2. The follow-up inspections took place between 2-4 July 2007.
3. Anne Owers is available for interview. To request an interview with her, please call 020 7210 8803.

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