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**BROOK HOUSE IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE –  
FUNDAMENTALLY UNSAFE**

A year after it opened, Brook House was fundamentally unsafe, said Dame Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing a report on an announced inspection of the immigration removal centre at Gatwick airport.

By the time of the inspection, in March 2010, managers could be expected to have resolved the teething problems often experienced by new custodial establishments. Surveys, interviews and observations all showed a degree of despair among detainees about safety which inspectors had rarely encountered.

Specifically:

- bullying and violence were serious problems and – unusually for the immigration estate – drugs were a serious problem;
- many detainees were ex-prisoners and a number compared their experience in Brook House negatively with that in prison;
- there had been significant staff turnover, and while many staff tried hard to maintain control, many felt embattled and some reported feeling unsupported by managers;
- as a result, use of force was high, separation was often used as a punishment, contrary to the Detention Centre Rules, and freedom of movement had been restricted;

- many key safety procedures were poor: reception was stark, first night procedures were inadequate, response to security intelligence was slow and there was no drugs strategy;
- superficially, relationships between most staff and detainees were reasonable, but interaction was limited and staff needed more support and training in working with detainees;
- there were insufficient activity places, because Brook House had been designed on the assumption that detainees would stay for a short time, but in reality many stayed for lengthy periods;
- mental health services were inadequate; and
- there was no multi-disciplinary risk management of those about to be removed to minimise difficulties and distress, and two oppressive holding rooms for detainees facing removal were entirely inappropriate, lacked governance and needed to be immediately decommissioned..

There were some positive aspects: those at risk of self-harm were well cared for, faith provision was good, and there was in general good access to the internet, phones and faxes.

Anne Owers said:

“The challenges of opening a new immigration removal centre should not be under-estimated, particularly with inexperienced staff and challenging detainees, many of them ex-prisoners. The challenge at Brook House was significantly compounded by poor design, which built in boredom by providing too little purposeful activity on the erroneous assumption that detainees would only be staying a few days.

“But none of this can excuse the fundamentally unsafe state of Brook House, which must be urgently addressed by G4S and UKBA. In particular, staff need more support and visible leadership, order and control must be restored to ensure safety, relationships and dynamic security must be improved, and steps must be taken to provide more activities and better welfare support.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 12 July 2010 at [www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons](http://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 announced inspection was carried out from 15-19 March 2010.
4. Brook House Immigration Removal Centre, at Gatwick Airport, holds adult male detainees on behalf of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and is run by G4S.
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 Dame Anne Owers. Or email [jane.parsons@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jane.parsons@justice.gsi.gov.uk).