

“We question the reasons for detaining many of these people”

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group’s response to HMIP’s inspection report on Brook House Immigration Removal Centre

2 February 2012

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group welcomed the findings of the most recent HMIP report on Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), which criticised its use of the separation unit to manage detainees’ behaviour as “excessive”, “often illegitimate” and “inappropriate”.

Brook House IRC was opened in March 2009 and is operated by a private security company, G4S. The centre is situated near Gatwick airport and can accommodate over 400 male detainees. In March 2010, the centre was described as “the least safe immigration detention centres we had ever visited” by HMIP. The latest report published on 31 Jan 2012 was based on HMIP’s unannounced inspection which had taken place between 12 and 23 September 2011.

Nic Eadie, Director of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, said that the report’s findings mirror what migrants held in Brook House had told his organisation “We hear from many detainees who are placed in the separation unit in the centre for fairly minor infractions, such as objecting to being transferred to another removal centre. There is a wide feeling amongst detainees that ‘the block’ is used as a punitive measure, and that decisions to be put into the unit are made unfairly and are disproportionate to the ‘offence’ committed. We have also long had concerns about people with serious mental health problems being held in isolation, and in poor conditions, apparently because their behaviour could not be managed on the main wings of the centre.”

Long-term detention is a primary concern for Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group, as many people they support have been held for many months and even years in detention, with little chance of their removal happening in a reasonable period, as the law dictates. This includes people who come from countries to which there are well-documented obstacles to removal, such as Iran, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Iraq.

Mr Eadie continued “We question the reasons for detaining many of these people, where it is clear that removal will not take place in a timely fashion. It seems to make no sense to us to detain people for extremely long periods, at great expense to the public purse and at the same time being hugely damaging to the individual, especially when many are eventually released back into UK society either by the courts, who often award damages for unlawful detention too, or by the UK Border Agency themselves, who eventually recognise that they cannot be removed any time soon.”

He added “Brook House is, and will always be, an unsuitable place to hold people for any great length of time, as it was essentially designed to hold people for short periods only. For all the best efforts of the staff who work there, many of whom do a good job in supporting detainees, there are always going to be problems inherent in the centre. A lack of space for any constructive activities or education means that there will always be little to keep detainees occupied, and this in itself causes huge frustration, boredom and anger, which will always make the centre more difficult to manage.”

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group was set up in 1995 when the UK Immigration Service began to detain people at a small holding centre near Gatwick Airport. The following year, Tinsley House Detention Centre opened. A new detention facility at Gatwick, Brook House, opened in March 2009. GDWG supports detainees held at both centres. GDWG has now grown to around 90 volunteers,

who visit and befriend asylum seekers and immigration detainees at Tinsley House and Brook House. The group believes that each detainee has a right to be treated with respect and compassion, whatever the outcome of their case.