

GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP

*Registered Charity No. 1124328*

*A Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales No. 4911257*

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| **Policy title** | Visiting people in detention who pose a safety risk |
| **Approved by**  **Date** | Anna Pincus  August 2022 |
| **Date ratified by Board** | September 2022 |
| **Date revision next due** | September 2024 |

**Staff and Volunteer Policy on detained people who pose a safety risk**

1. Past experience shows that the vast majority of people in detention are very appreciative of the service they received from GDWG and show respect to visitors. This policy aims to ensure equal and non-judgemental treatment for all those who seek our support, without undermining our organisation’s key values. Most important, it is intended at all times to preserve the safety of Group members. This is particularly relevant where people in detention behave inappropriately to staff or volunteers. GDWG will not accept behaviour which is verbally or physically inappropriate, abusive or threatening.

2. When accepting a service from GDWG, a detained person will be informed that this is based on two-way respect. Although we accept there may be a need for people in detention to vent anger and frustration, this must be set against the well-being of our staff and volunteers.

3. Some people in detention awaiting deportation have served criminal sentences. There is no obligation by the authorities to inform us of their convictions. Although they may do so, we cannot assume we know everything relevant in this area. Similarly, although a detained person may inform their GDWG caseworker of their criminal convictions, this is not a condition of receiving a service from GDWG. Indeed, people in detention with no criminal convictions are not necessarily going to pose less of a risk to GDWG members than those who have convictions.

4. When allocating a visitor to someone in detention, advocacy co-ordinators will take into consideration relevant matching considerations. This can include relevant interests, e.g., poetry. It may also include considerations of age and gender. If a person in detention is known to have served a long prison sentence, they may be allocated an experienced visitor if one is available to visit.

5. GDWG staff and visitors should be alert to the possibility that any of us can be uncomfortable with the behaviour of a person in detention. It is important to stress that we do not expect anyone to continue visiting where this is the case. If staff or volunteers are uncertain about any behaviour encountered or feel challenged by a new situation, we recommend volunteers explore this with a member of staff and that staff explore with their colleagues or line manager.

Unacceptable behaviour can include:

- Rudeness

- Lack of respect

- Manipulative behaviour

- Repeatedly overstepping boundaries, e.g., asking you out, frequent phone calls

- Threats and aggression, including sexual aggression (physical or verbal; overt or by innuendo and implication).

Any of these behaviours might be exhibited during face-to-face meetings, calls, texts or other means of communication. The unacceptable behaviour might be directed at a GDWG member or at others in detention or elsewhere. If as a result of the unacceptable behaviour you are concerned for the safety of anyone else in detention, this is a matter of adult safeguarding and you should report this to the GDWG Director.

6. If you visit someone whose views are challenging, please also discuss this with a member of staff. We recognise that visitors may encounter ways of looking at the world that are very different to their own, and this may be unsettling. It is important to bear in mind that people in detention may have grown up with very different cultural and ethical norms and we still wish to offer them acceptance and respect. We expect visitors to be open minded to the views of others but appreciate that in extreme cases it may be necessary to terminate visits.

7. GDWG staff providing the drop-in service at Brook House meet detained people privately in one of the “legal rooms”. IRC staff are not within sight or earshot, and an alarm bell is provided if the staff member needs to call for assistance. To prevent the possibility of being held in the room by the detained person, the staff member may consider sitting nearest the door so their exit is clear. However, facing the door may be considered more of a priority for reasons of outlook onto the corridor and to give the person space to behave authentically without being in sight of the officers.

8. Should issues of unacceptable behaviour arise, one of the advocacy co-ordinators in the office should be informed as soon as possible, so the problem can be discussed and a way forward agreed. In their absence, the matter should be referred to the Director. It may be necessary to draw a visitor’s attention to the GDWG Code of Conduct and to the Guidelines on Contact with People Formerly Detained if the visitor may have contributed to the issue themselves.

It may be that:

* Strategies can be suggested for the visitor to counter this behaviour.
* A staff member can talk to the person, and explain that this is not acceptable behaviour. It may be necessary to point out that if it continues, it might lead to visits from that visitor being stopped.
* The person can be visited by someone else.
* The visitor or staff member needs support following an issue arising. As well as being offered the opportunity to discuss this on a 1:1 basis, visitors can be reminded they can use their buddy or local group for support. Area coordinators and experienced visitors from the local group should be sensitive to the possibility of such problems and encourage the sharing of views.

9. We recognise there may be times when a detained person’s behaviour to a volunteer or staff member can pose a particular challenge. In exceptional circumstances, this may lead to the termination of visits, and even withdrawal of support.

10. The detained person must be told promptly of any decision to change their visitor, end visits or withdraw support, and the reason for such a decision. Advocacy staff should make a joint decision on this, involving the director. They will need to agree what reason is given to the detained person for the decision. The decision should be clearly recorded on their database entry with ‘Serious Incident’ in the subject line. It may be appropriate for the incident to be recorded as a “near miss” in line with the Health & Safety policy.

**Related policies:**

* Adults safeguarding policy and procedures
* Health & Safety policy