Report on an unannounced full inspection of the short-term holding facility at:

Luton Airport

18 October 2010
by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
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Overview

Luton airport short-term holding facility

More than 10 million passengers pass through Luton airport each year, the majority from Europe but also from South Africa, India, China and Thailand. The airport operates 24 hours a day.

The short-term holding facility (STHF) is run on behalf of the UK Border Agency by G4S. The facility remained largely unchanged since the previous inspection, comprising a single room in which men, women and children are held together. There are plans to build a new facility with two holding rooms. During the inspection, three detainee custody officers (two men and a woman) were on duty. Only one detainee was held in the facility during the inspection. During the three months prior to the inspection, 132 people had passed through the facility.

Inspected: 18 October 2010
Last inspected: 20 February 2008

Inspectors

Colin Carroll
Martin Kettle
The healthy custodial establishment

HE.1 The concept of a healthy prison was introduced in our thematic review *Suicide is Everyone’s Concern* (1999). The healthy prison criteria have been modified to fit the inspection of short-term holding facilities, both residential and non-residential. The criteria for short-term holding facilities are:

**Safety** – detainees are held in safety and with due regard to the insecurity of their position

**Respect** – detainees are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention

**Activities** – detainees are able to be occupied while they are in detention

**Preparation for release** – detainees are able to keep in contact with the outside world and are prepared for their release, transfer or removal.

HE.2 Inspectors kept fully in mind that although these were custodial facilities, detainees were not held because they had been charged with a criminal offence and had not been detained through normal judicial processes.

Safety

HE.3 Use of force was rare and the most recent case had been 10 months before the inspection. Staff put anxious detainees at ease by talking to them and addressing their needs. Staff had not received refresher training in bullying, suicide or self-harm. Detainee custody officers (DCOs) had a good view of the holding room. Incidents of bullying and self-harm were rare. Staff did not routinely carry ligature knives. Staff helped detainees to contact their legal representatives.

HE.4 During the three months before the inspection, eight children had been held in the facility, the longest for over 17 hours. Care plans were completed and faxed to the G4S children’s champion. Local authority age assessments for unaccompanied minors could be slow. DCOs had not received refresher training on children’s issues but UKBA staff had all received at least tier one of the three-tier Keeping Children Safe training.

Respect

HE.5 The facility comprised a single holding room which made the separation of men, women and children difficult. The holding room walls were in a poor state and covered by a lot of disorganised information. There were no showers or sleeping accommodation, although detainees regularly stayed for long periods and overnight.

HE.6 DCOs showed concern for the needs of the detainee held during the inspection. Microwaveable meals were available and staff could buy sandwiches from the airport terminal. Detainees were able to practise their religion and there was support from the
airport chaplaincy team. There was some offensive graffiti in the DCOs’ office. The complaints box was insecure and complaints forms were not easily accessible.

Activities

**HE.7** Detainees had access to a television and a range of books and magazines in different languages. There were hand-held electronic games and a DVD player for children, together with age-appropriate books, toys and activity packs. Detainees were not allowed to smoke and did not have access to fresh air.

Preparation for release

**HE.8** Detainees were able to keep their mobile telephones as long as they did not have a camera or recording equipment. If detainees did not have cash or a credit card to use with the payphone in the holding room, they were allowed to use the telephone in the DCOs’ office. Most detainees were returned to their country of origin while some were granted temporary admission or transferred to another place of detention.
Section 1

Escorts, vans and transfers

Expected outcomes:
Detainees under escort are treated courteously, provided with refreshment and comfort breaks, and transported safely.

1.1 During the inspection a van arrived at the facility carrying two detainees. One was in transit to a prison. The van pulled up to the door of the facility and the detainee was offered a comfort break, which he declined, and was given a hot drink in the van. The escorts resumed their journey as quickly as possible.

1.2 The second detainee disembarked to the holding room. He had travelled from Colnbrook immigration removal centre (IRC), a journey of one hour 15 minutes. He said that he had been treated well by escorting staff. He had been offered food and drink on the van. The escort staff reported that the detainee had initially refused to leave Colnbrook and it emerged from staff and his own account that he had been reluctant to leave because he wanted to call his solicitor. According to the escort staff, this had not been permitted because time was short before a noon flight (see section on legal rights). The detainee had not been handcuffed when taken to the van the previous day, but was handcuffed from the van into the holding room. Staff explained that this was due to his reluctance to leave Colnbrook. Force had not been used at Colnbrook and the detainee was fully compliant in the van and on disembarkation, so that the need for handcuffs was unclear.

1.3 Escort staff were first-aid trained and were familiar with the procedures in case of specific medical need. The van was shabby and the caged passenger compartment was in poor condition, although kept as clean as possible. Staff reported that caged vans were used routinely for adult detainees, irrespective of risk.

1.4 We observed holding room staff escorting a detainee to a flight. One of them talked to the detainee continuously in a relaxed and encouraging way throughout the long walk. All three escorts wore high visibility jackets in the public areas of the airport terminal. While this was necessary on the tarmac, it made them very conspicuous in the terminal and drew the attention of fellow passengers to the detainee.

1.5 Departures during the night were not uncommon. A few days before the inspection a man had arrived from Colnbrook IRC for an interview at 11.25am and left the holding room for the return journey at 2.30am the following morning. These timings seemed to be logistically convenient but at the expense of the detainee’s wellbeing.

Recommendations

1.6 Escort journeys should be planned to allow time for the detainee to seek legal advice if necessary.

1.7 Caged vans should only be used if justified by an individual risk assessment.

1.8 Mechanical restraints should be used during escorts only if there is a clearly assessed risk of violent or recalcitrant behaviour, or of escape.
1.9 **Staff should not draw attention to detainees while escorting them through public areas, and should only wear high-visibility jackets in areas where airport rules require them.**

1.10 **Detainees should not be transferred at night unless unavoidable.**

**Arrival and accommodation**

*Expected outcomes:*

*Detainees taken into custody are treated with respect, have the correct documentation, and are held in safe and decent conditions. Family accommodation is suitable.*

1.11 Staff were welcoming to the detainee, who had been initially detained and held in the same holding room the previous day. They searched him appropriately, talking to him throughout. It was evident from their accounts that they were adept at establishing communication and a rapport with detainees, using interpretation when needed.

1.12 The holding room was in a fair condition, although only equipped with rows of rigid fixed seating. The walls were in a very poor state, although most of the damage was covered by posters and laminated notices. Staff had put on the walls a variety of drawings, paintings and messages after checking the meaning of the different languages. These had been made by adults and children during their detention. There was a considerable amount of information on the walls and in folders, often in 15 languages, but it was disorganised and overwhelming.

1.13 There was no separate facility for women or children. There was no sleeping accommodation, although protracted overnight stays were not uncommon. Detainees had to sleep on the rigid plastic chairs, with blankets and pillows provided. Staff took the blankets home to wash them. There were no showers. The toilets were clean and appropriately equipped with consumables. The handwashing facilities were in good order and baby-changing equipment was available. The surfaces in the toilets were in very poor condition, with a makeshift covering of a wallpaper-like adhesive vinyl, which was coming loose and was unhygienic. We were told that refurbishment was difficult to arrange because the fabric was owned by a private property company, and not in the control of the commissioner or provider of the holding room service.

1.14 The main room was lit by four bright double fluorescent tubes. Staff said that detainees often complained that it was harsh when they wished to rest. Temperatures in the office and in the holding room were controlled separately from the office which enabled staff to adjust the temperature in the holding room at detainees’ request. One-way glass prevented detainees from seeing into the staff office. On balance, staff felt this was a disadvantage because they could not maintain non-verbal contact with detainees, and it put some detainees on edge because they did not know when they were being closely observed.

1.15 One female and two male members of staff were on duty at the time of the inspection. If one person was needed elsewhere, the female officer remained in case of the unforeseen arrival of a female detainee. Four of the 12 staff on the roll were women so that one female member of staff was on duty for each day and night shift under normal circumstances. When one woman was absent from work, the day shifts were usually covered by a female member of staff leaving two males on the night shift. If a woman was detained in the absence of a female member of staff, a female member of airport security staff was called in to search the detainee. These arrangements represented an improvement and were acceptable.

1.16 The telephone in the holding room accepted incoming calls and staff helped detainees by buying £10 phone cards in the airport terminal for them on request. The telephone also
accepted credit cards. All detainees were offered a free telephone call on arrival and staff went
to some lengths to facilitate this (see section on legal rights).

1.17 On several occasions staff had called 999 for medical emergencies. They used the
contractor’s own Forensic and Medical Services helpline to seek advice on issues of
medication and this arrangement appeared to work well. Detainees had been taken to hospital
on two occasions during 2010.

1.18 Telephone interpretation had been used and logs showed that staff ensured that all detainees
understood what was happening and what would happen next. A fire safety inspection had
taken place shortly before our inspection with satisfactory results, and all small electrical
equipment had been PAT tested. Daily safety and security checks were carried out by staff
and fully documented.

Recommendations

1.19 Suitable furniture should be provided to enable a detainee to sleep in reasonable
comfort and sheets and pillows should be provided.

1.20 Given that detainees could stay for significant periods after long journeys, they should
have access to showers.

1.21 The walls of the holding room should be redecorated and the surfaces in the toilets
refurbished.

1.22 The lighting in the holding room should be controllable, so that it can be dimmed on
request.

1.23 The one-way glass should be replaced to enable vision both ways.

1.24 The information in the holding room should be properly organised, with key information
clearly marked.

Positive relationships

Expected outcomes:
Those detained are treated respectfully by all staff, who have proper regard for the uncertainty
of their situation and their personal circumstances.

1.25 Staff showed a consistently mature and confident approach towards the detainee. Apart from
graffiti on the office furniture (see section on diversity), they maintained a professional attitude
both in and away from the presence of detainees. They took pride in describing occasions
when they had been able to help detainees. They shared information accurately and
sensitively with each other and with escorting staff and UK Border Agency (UKBA) personnel.
They had established good working relationships with UKBA and airport staff, who clearly had
confidence in the holding room staff. They interacted frequently with the detainee during the
inspection, and he spoke positively of their attitude and behaviour on both the days that he had
been held at Luton. Staff wore name badges.
Legal rights

Expected outcomes:
Detainees are able to obtain expert legal advice and representation from within the facility. They can understand and retain legal documents. They can communicate with legal representatives without difficulty to progress their cases efficiently.

1.26 A notice in the holding room gave contact numbers for the Immigration Advisory Service and the now defunct Refugee and Migrant Justice. Detainees in transit to immigration removal centres (IRCs) were not given information about bail or bail application forms. As the facility was air-side, it was not possible for legal advisers to visit and interview detainees.

1.27 Detainees were able to contact their legal representatives by telephone and fax. Detainees were allowed to retain their mobile phones if they did not have recording equipment or cameras. A mobile phone was available for detainees without suitable phones to use with their own SIM card. There was a payphone which accepted cash and credit cards in the holding room. At the start of the inspection, there was a fault preventing outgoing calls, but the phone was repaired before the end of the inspection.

1.28 DCOs made good efforts to help the detainee held during the inspection to contact his solicitor. He had been refused entry to the UK the day before and was being returned to his country of origin. He had spent the night at Colnbrook IRC. On arrival at the facility, the detainee had appeared anxious and the DCO quickly ascertained that he wished to call his solicitor but did not know the telephone number. The DCO found the number online in the UKBA offices and allowed the detainee to call the solicitor from the office telephone. The solicitor called him back on the payphone in the holding room so that the detainee could finish the consultation in private. After speaking to his solicitor, the detainee was calm and his removal proceeded without incident.

1.29 DCOs said that they had no objection to a detainee using their fax machine, but they had never received such a request. Detainees did not have access to the internet or email.

Recommendations

1.30 Notices on display about contacting free legal advisers should be kept up to date.

1.31 Notices should be displayed advising detainees that they can use a fax machine.

1.32 Detainees should have access to the internet and email.

Casework

Expected outcomes:
Detention is carried out on the basis of individual reasons that are clearly communicated. Detention is for the minimum period necessary.

1.33 Most detainees held in the holding room had just arrived in the UK, had been refused entry and were being returned on a later flight. A minority of detainees were being removed after spending time in the community or in an IRC.

1.34 During the three months before the inspection, four detainees had been held for more than 24 hours. A Sri Lankan man had been detained in the holding room for 26 hours 10 minutes,
arriving at 11.30pm and leaving at 1.40am two days later. His detention beyond 24 hours had been authorised by a UKBA manager, although detention staff had noted in the log that although the relevant authorisation had been signed, the manager doing it seemed ‘uninterested’ in the welfare of the detainee. The average length of stay during July, August and September 2010 had been 8 hours 23 minutes.

1.35 The UKBA team comprised 59.5 full-time equivalent staff. A shift was typically staffed by a chief immigration officer and five immigration officers. Immigration officers sought authorisation from the chief immigration officer before placing a detainee in the holding room. DCOs confirmed that they never accepted anybody into detention without written authority (IS91).

1.36 DCOs reported that detainees were not given copies of their authority to detain (IS91) while in the holding room, although they were given copies of the reasons to detain, the IS91R. The original IS91 was held on a clipboard on the wall of the DCOs’ office. The IS91R was not translated into different languages, although immigration staff used interpreters to explain the reasons for detention to those who could not read English.

Recommendations

1.37 Detainees should not be held for more than 24 hours in the holding room.

1.38 Reasons for detention forms should be provided in detainees’ own languages.

Duty of care

Expected outcomes:
The centre exercises a duty of care to protect detainees from risk of harm

Bullying

1.39 There were no recent recorded bullying incidents. Male and female detainees were held in the same holding room. Detainee custody staff had a clear view of the room. G4S had a national anti-bullying policy, but staff reported that they had received no specific training on bullying or victimisation (see recommendation 1.42).

Recommendation

1.40 Male and female detainees should not be held together in the same holding room unless related.

Suicide and self-harm

1.41 DCOs received training in suicide and self-harm prevention during their initial four-week induction but did not receive refresher training. Two of the three DCOs present during the inspection were familiar with care planning documentation (assessment, care in detention and teamwork) used in the detention estate. DCOs did not carry ligature knives but instead had to detach the knife kept with the first aid box in the office, which could have caused unnecessary delay in an emergency. Staff reported that incidents of self-harm were rare and were recorded in the incidents log. We reviewed one incident where a detainee had split open a Qu’ran and attempted to make a weapon from the spine. Staff had intervened before the detainee could...
harm himself. Incident records were monitored by G4S head office and minutes of the G4S detainee welfare working group indicated that issues were taken forward.

Recommendations

1.42 DCOs should receive refresher training in bullying and suicide and self-harm prevention.

1.43 DCOs should routinely carry anti-ligature knives.

Childcare and child protection

Expected outcomes:
Children are detained only in exceptional circumstances and for the minimum time. Children’s rights and needs for care and protection are respected and met in full.

1.44 The UKBA children’s and young persons’ team comprised an assistant director, a chief immigration officer and six immigration officers, most of whom had received tier two of UKBA’s three-tier Keeping Children Safe training. Rostering and capacity constraints prevented a member of the team being on duty during every shift. All other UKBA staff had undertaken tier one training.

1.45 Airport chaplaincy staff acted as appropriate adults for unaccompanied children. A memorandum of understanding had been agreed in March 2008 between the chaplaincy and UKBA. It had been due for review in September 2008, but this had not happened. We spoke to a member of the chaplaincy who said that she often acted as an appropriate adult, but it was not always possible to provide a member of the chaplaincy for every unaccompanied minor. She also confirmed that she did not attend interviews between immigration officers and children.

1.46 Since the previous inspection, UKBA had established links with the local safeguarding children board (LSCB). We saw email communication between the children’s and young persons’ team and the Luton LSCB administrator.

1.47 Luton Borough Council was responsible for conducting age assessments of children whose age was disputed by an immigration officer. UKBA staff reported good relationships but the council were sometimes slow to attend the airport to conduct assessments. A few days before the inspection, a 15-year old Afghani boy spent 13 hours 45 minutes in the holding room before being accepted into care.

1.48 From July to September 2010, eight children had been held in the facility, four with families and four unaccompanied. The longest time a child, in a family, was detained was 17 hours and 25 minutes. The unaccompanied minors had been held in the holding room for an average of 7 hours 24 minutes, the longest for 10 hours 25 minutes. Care plans were completed for unaccompanied minors entering the STHF. The care plan identified the primary carer and details of the care provided to the child. The final section of the form documented the date and time G4S handed custody of the child to another agency. However, this section was not always completed and it was unclear into whose care the child had been transferred. The completed care plans were faxed to the G4S children’s champion.

1.49 While there was no local childcare policy or a named individual acting as a child protection coordinator; the national G4S children’s operational policy dated August 2010 provided for a national safeguarding children manager to be appointed to their senior management team. All
DCOs had undergone enhanced level criminal record bureau checks but had not received refresher training on children’s issues, although the G4S policy provided for all staff working with children to be ‘suitably trained’. Following the inspection, we were advised that all G4S DCOs were to be trained in childcare and child protection.

1.50 Staff appeared to take appropriate steps to safeguard children. We were told that a child had been moved from the holding room to the DCOs’ office after an adult detainee had been brought into the holding room.

1.51 Attempts had been made to make the environment in the holding room more child friendly. There were children’s drawings and posters on the walls and a large box of toys, hand-held electronic games (although the batteries were flat), colouring books, a large soft plastic mat for children to play on, activity packs, children’s DVDs and hand-held DVD players. The ladies’ toilet contained a baby change facility and nappies. Baby food and baby wipes were available on request.

Recommendations

1.52 The memorandum of understanding between UKBA and the airport chaplaincy should be reviewed and updated.

1.53 Appropriate adults should attend substantive UKBA interviews with unaccompanied children.

1.54 Children’s care plans should clearly document to whose care the child is transferred after leaving the STHF.

1.55 All detainee custody officers working with children should have suitable refresher training on safeguarding children.

1.56 The hand-held children’s games should have batteries and be in working order.

1.57 Baby wipes should be freely available in the ladies’ toilet.

Diversity

Expected outcomes:
There is understanding of the diverse backgrounds of detainees and different cultural norms. Detainees are not discriminated against on the basis of their race, nationality, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and there is positive promotion and understanding of diversity.

1.58 Detainees were able to practise their religion. There were bibles in 16 different languages, a Qur’an and prayer mats. A compass was available on request to locate the qibla. Members of the airport chaplaincy team regularly visited the facility to ensure that the faith needs of detainees were met.

1.59 Staff received training in diversity issues during their induction, but were not given refresher training. A DCO who had recently completed her four-week induction described training that included diversity issues and the legislative framework underpinning equal opportunities.

1.60 While there was no locally designated disabilities officer for the facility, there was a national G4S disabilities officer. Disability care plans were completed for detainees held in the STHF. The care plans gave brief details of the detainee and actions staff should take to ensure their
needs were met. Completed forms were forwarded to the G4S national disabilities officer for monitoring. The toilets in the holding room were not adapted for detainees with disabilities and staff said that they would take a detainee to toilets for disabled people in the arrivals hall if necessary.

1.61 Detainees were able to make a racist complaint using the standard UKBA complaint forms (see section on complaints). We saw racist graffiti in the DCOs’ office. The words ‘gypsy Irish squatter’ were clearly legible on the back of an office chair.

**Recommendation**

1.62 Managers and staff should ensure that offensive graffiti is removed and its origin investigated.

**Activities**

*Expected outcomes:*

*The facility encourages activities to preserve and promote the mental and physical well being of detainees.*

1.63 There was a television and staff were responsive to detainees’ requests to alter the volume. Staff had bought at their own expense a Freeview box to provide a wider selection of channels. There was a reasonable selection of books, including some in different languages. Staff had arranged with staff of an airline to contribute the unclaimed books in their lost property collection. There were fairly recent newspapers and magazines, including magazines in Polish, Croatian, German and Italian. There were materials for children (see section on childcare), all of which were in a satisfactory condition. Art materials were available.

1.64 There was no access for detainees to exercise in the fresh air. No smoking was permitted and no nicotine replacement items were available.

**Recommendation**

1.65 Detainees held for several hours should have access to an exercise area in the open air.

**Facility rules**

*Expected outcomes:*

*Detainees are able to feel secure in a predictable and ordered environment*

1.66 Expectations of behaviour were set out in information sheets displayed on the wall in 15 languages. Staff appeared fair and reasonable in their approach to managing the behaviour of detainees. They responded quickly to any request for help. Security was sufficient. Use of force was very rare and the last occasion had been 10 months previously, when a detainee who was drunk and violent had had to be restrained. Use of handcuffs by holding room staff was also very rare and had only occurred once in recent months.
Complaints

Expected outcomes:
There is a published complaints procedure; compliant forms are freely available.

1.67 Detainees were able to make formal complaints using the UKBA complaints system. The small complaints box in the holding room was insecure and could easily be opened without a key. The box was emptied each day by a chief immigration officer. Notices were displayed in a variety of languages explaining that detainees could make a complaint. Complaint forms in different languages were not located beside the complaint box but stored in a folder on the bookshelf in the holding room. There were no notices advising detainees of the location of complaint forms. Some staff did not know where the forms were kept and advised detainees to use blank pieces of paper.

Recommendations

1.68 The complaints box should be secure.
1.69 Detainees should be made aware of the location of complaint forms.

Services

Expected outcomes:
Services available to detainees allow them to live in a decent environment in which their normal everyday needs are met freely and without discrimination.

1.70 There was an adequate selection of microwaveable meals which were used frequently. Menu cards were available, in print and pictorial form. A supply of sandwiches had been constantly available until shortly before the inspection, but this had been withdrawn. Staff bought sandwiches from the terminal food outlets on request which was time-consuming. There was no dedicated food preparation area: the microwave was on an office shelf among files and the food was stored in a cupboard in the reception area.

1.71 Hot and cold drinks and drinking water were available from a free vending machine in the staff office. Detainees were able to keep their own money and valuables with them.

Recommendations

1.72 Managers should monitor the provision of sandwiches for detainees and ensure that the new system of ad hoc purchase is not creating disadvantage.
1.73 There should be a dedicated food preparation area.

Preparation for release

Expected outcomes:
Detainees are able to maintain contact with family, friends, support groups, legal representatives and advisers, are given adequate notice of their release, transfer or removal, and are able to recover property. Families with children and others with special needs are not detained without items essential to their welfare.
Visitors were not allowed access to detainees in the air-side facility. Detainees were able to use mobile phones or the holding room pay phone to contact family and friends before leaving the facility. Detainees without an appropriate mobile phone or cash were able to use the DCOs’ office telephone. The STHF stocked clear plastic bags for detainees to carry their property. On occasion, ex-foreign national prisoners being deported passed through the STHF and there was no opportunity for them to transfer their property into a canvas bag. Detainees transferring to an IRC were given a small card with a map and contact details of the IRC.

**Recommendation**

1.75 **Suitable bags should be available for detainees’ property.**
Section 2: Recommendations and good practice

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Recommendations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal rights</th>
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<th>Casework</th>
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<th>Duty of care</th>
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<th>Childcare and child protection</th>
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All detainee custody officers working with children should have suitable refresher training on safeguarding children. (1.55)

The hand-held children's games should have batteries and be in working order. (1.56)

Baby wipes should be freely available in the ladies’ toilet. (1.57)

Managers and staff should ensure that offensive graffiti is removed and its origin investigated. (1.62)

Detainees held for several hours should have access to an exercise area in the open air. (1.65)

The complaints box should be secure. (1.68)

Detainees should be made aware of the location of complaint forms. (1.69)

Managers should monitor the provision of sandwiches for detainees and ensure that the new system of ad hoc purchase is not creating disadvantage. (1.72)

There should be a dedicated food preparation area. (1.73)

Suitable bags should be available for detainees’ property. (1.75)