

The HM Chief Inspector of Prisons report on Yarl's Wood

Read our summary of the key concerns cited in the 147-page report on the unannounced inspection of Yarl's Wood IRC

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons published [the report](#) on an unannounced inspection of Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC). Located near Bedford, Yarl's Wood IRC is operated by Serco. At the time of the inspection, 347 people were detained there, 40 of whom were women held in a separate wing.

The Inspector noted that whilst the centre was calm during the inspection there was a *'tangible change in atmosphere from our previous visit'*, with *'more people detained, more protests and more evident frustration, fuelled by longer periods of cumulative detention without enough progress on immigration cases.'*

The inspection assessed outcomes on leadership, safety, respect, activities and preparation for removal and release and found outcomes for people detained were not sufficiently good for safety.

Main Concerns

The inspection identified 15 key concerns, 5 of which should be treated as priorities.

The five priority concerns identified by the inspection were:

1. The inability of the Home Office to provide the centre with accurate data undermines the ability to care for vulnerable people detained.
2. People are illegitimately separated pending charter flight removals - not based on individual risk nor subject to appropriate oversight.
3. Slow case progression and people detained for long periods despite little prospect of removal. One person who had been detained for 14 months said, *"It feels like they kidnapped me, I'm away from my friends and my family. My brain still hasn't processed the fact that I'm in detention."*
4. Patient safety is compromised due to poor health-keeping records, weak incident reporting and ineffective oversight.
5. Women have worse access to services than men, particularly welfare services.

Detained despite bail & unfit for detention

Additional key concerns included the fact that many people who had been granted bail are still held at the centre because of a lack of approved accommodation. One person detained was held for almost eight months after bail was granted.

Moreover, despite suffering from mental health issues and being declared unfit for detention, some people detained were still held for long periods. Lengthy and indefinite detention and the lack of information about immigration case progression were the main causes of distress. In the inspector's survey, 84% of people detained said they had felt depressed while in the centre and 44% said they had felt suicidal.

Vital Rule 35 reports - which provide information about vulnerable people to inform officials to decide on whether detention is appropriate - were found to be of poor quality and did not provide an adequate assessment of the impact of detention on people's health. The inspector noted that:

“Local records provided by health care staff suggested that 234 Rule 35 reports had been submitted to the Home Office during the previous six months, all involving claims of torture. No Rule 35 reports concerning physical illness or suicidal ideation had been submitted during this period, despite the fact that 27 detainees had been subject to constant watch because of an imminent risk of self-harm.”

The report cited several examples of people being detained, despite the Home Office recognising that they were unfit for detention. For example, a man - whom the Home Office recognised to be at the highest level of vulnerability - had been detained for more than a year despite being recognised as a victim of torture. He was released during the inspection.

The Inspector found that people were not able to receive the full range of health services, particularly mental health and psychosocial services, due to the gaps in staffing. There was also the use of inappropriate use of hand-cuffing patients while being escorted to see hospital specialists.

Use of Force & Safety

The Inspector also highlighted that the use of a potentially dangerous control and restraint technique had not been identified on review and health care staff had failed to refer the alleged assault to Serco or the Home Office for investigation.

The Inspector also stated that they were ‘not satisfied’ that all appropriate matters were referred to the Home Office Professional Standards Unit (PSU). For example, the Inspector spoke to a person detained at the centre who said his finger had been broken by immigration arrest officers. He had reported this to health care staff who had documented his injuries but took no further action, failing to report it to the Home Office or Serco for investigation.

In the Inspector’s survey, some people who were detained cited fear for their safety after a fire had started due to a protest. They were locked in the cells whilst smoke was drifting in and could not get staff to respond to the alarm bells.

Centre Conditions

In regards to the premises, the inspector found the quality and variety of food was inadequate. There was ineffective promotion of education services, poor take-up and a lack of congregation spaces in the men’s area has meant people congregate in crowded corridors. The mobile phone signal at the centre was poor, particularly in rooms which limited the ability to make calls despite people being given phones. There were also no private areas for people detained to video call their legal representatives.