

Refugee & Migrant's Forum and Border and Immigration Agency
Meeting held on 26 July 2007
at MRSN, St James Centre, Manchester

Present :

Elinah Mugwagwah	Chair, RMF
Azeldin El Sharif	Vice Chair, RMF
Elzein Mohamed	RMF
Hazel Healy	Associate member, RMF
Sophie King	Development Worker, RMF (Chair)
Chris Brammer	HMI, Enforcement & Compliance
Mo Williams	SEO, Reporting Centre Operations
Mark Eckersley	Detention & Escorting Services, G4S
Jenny Lazarus	Associate member, RMF (Minutes)

1. Action points and matters arising – 31/5/07

Attendees: It was noted that Kashif Ali was a member of the Refugee & Migrant's Forum, not BIA.

Shelter at Dallas Court : Mo Williams reported that this was still ongoing.

Leaflet : A draft leaflet would be produced in two months and circulated for comments. Maps are now being issued showing the location and giving details of the transport services to Dallas Court.

Travel :

- **Tram :** Mo Williams reported that day tickets to include the tram system would cost double.
- **Buses :** RMF had contacted the Transport Network and it seemed that the frequency of 33 bus had been increased to every 15 mins.
- **Vouchers :** BIA would check to see if travel vouchers were sent out by post if someone had to miss a reporting date.

Waiting times : According to Mo Williams, any waiting and queuing outside is usually caused by people turning up early for their agreed time slots. She agreed that it would be better if there was an indoor waiting area.

Interpreters: The minutes should state that Sarah Williams took some of the issues from the report to staff members and discovered that staff were not aware they should use the telephone interpretation system as much as was necessary. Staff were then told to use it whenever someone seemed to need interpretation assistance (see also training below).

Staff Training : Sophie King pointed out that what she had suggested had been refugee awareness training, rather than communication skills, for BIA staff. (See training below)

Action:

- RMF to amend the minutes from 31/5/07 where necessary

2. Section 2 of the Consultation Report : Detention and Removal

- The summary of recommendations from 2007 HMPI report on Dallas Court and HMPI's expectations regarding escort vehicles and transportation, which included

holding rooms at the reporting centres, was distributed and referred to throughout the below discussions

- Mark Eckersley was not familiar with these guidelines but had only been in post for a short time
- Mark Eckersley's responsibilities covered such vehicles and the holding room at Dallas Court but not the security staff in the reporting centre or electronic tagging. These two functions are run by different departments of the company.
- G4S are issued with action plans following Inspectorate reports.

During the meeting various questions were put to Mark Eckersley and Chris Brammer concerning procedures for transport and holding detainees:

Complaints had been voiced about participants' experiences of the transport between centres, including a journey undertaken in a police van with no stops allowed, despite one of the passengers being sick.

- Chris Brammer emphasised that in order for these to be properly investigated it would be necessary to have all the specific details.
- Azeldin gave specific details of his own experiences of this issue and Chris Brammer stated that as we've discussed in previous meetings this highlights the need for a better complaints procedure and work to ensure clients understand their right to make a formal complaint and how to go about this

What is the procedure for complaints to G4S?

Guidelines and procedures are in place for G4S staff, which are similar to those of the Prison Inspectorate. However, Section 1.12 and 1.13 of the HMIP Dallas Court report indicated that not all G4S staff were familiar with these. The RMF would be interested to see policy guidance issued to G4S staff.

Action :

- Complaints procedures for both Dallas Court and transportation experience, together with information on rights, should be clearly available in the holding room in different languages
- G4S to send 'operational and policy guidance' referred to in HMIP report to RMF

What provision was made for the medical condition of detainees? How was timed medication overseen, e.g. for HIV treatment?

G4S should receive a form detailing any medical conditions or needs of the detainee. Any medication was taken from the detainee and administered at detention centres by a trained nurse. There were no trained medical staff at the Dallas Court holding room – the only source of medical aid was police officers with paramedic training – an ambulance would be called in a medical emergency.

Action :

- Chris Brammer agreed to look into this question
- Mark Eckersley would investigate the medical facilities at holding centres.

Who assesses that an individual or family is fit to travel?

Before transport a risk assessment was prepared, including for families, use of information from the GP. During transit the officer in charge, plus police with paramedic training would decide what action to take if the detainee(s) became unwell - if necessary they would be taken to a casualty department.

What about experience of torture, mental health issues relating to detainees?

A high number of people claim mental health problems of some kind e.g. depression. Everything relevant would be on the individual's record which is considered in the risk assessment.

The use of vehicles with cells and cages causes detainees a great deal of distress as they are clearly designed for criminals. Asylum seekers have committed no crime. Who decides the type of transport used?

There were various types of vehicle – caged vans, and a minibus type. The caged ones were used for those perceived to be an escape risk. The type of vehicle to be used was decided nationally rather than locally.

Action :

- Mark would investigate whether the 'cell' type of vehicle was used in transport between centres or for deportation.

Who decided on use of force/restraint?

This was down to the escorting officer – if circumstances permitted, he would ring the G4S control centre and ask for authorisation to restrain a detainee. However, Mark emphasised that it was in G4S's interests to keep relationships calm, with the use of force as a last option.

What training do G4S staff receive?

Staff undergo a five week training course, part of which was concerned with control and restraint, emphasising the need to avoid agitation etc. Staff attend refresher courses every 12 months.

Action:

- Sophie King had spoken to Refugee Action, who could provide refugee awareness training for staff at Dallas Court and G4S. She also had information about providers of training in working with interpreters.
- Chris Brammer added they may be able to combine this with Discrimination Training for Dallas Court staff on 15 August.
- Sophie to send contact details to BIA as soon as possible.

Lay observers at detention / arrest

- Chris Brammer was happy to discuss a representative of the Forum being present at an enforcement visit or an illegal working raid but the Forum felt that there was a conflict of interest here.

Action:

- RMF to discuss this and feedback at next meeting

Movement between Centres

- The Consultation Report had included reports of frequent moves between detention centres, resulting in contact being lost with families, legal representatives etc. Often little or no notice was given, resulting in anxiety and feelings of powerlessness on the part of the detainees. The HMIP expectations state that 'Detainees are not subject to excessive movements around the detention estate'

- Mark and Chris reported that the use of various centres was decided by London, and was governed by the most efficient use of the space available. They recognised the unsatisfactory nature of this but there was no answer within their local remit.

What happens when someone is deported/held following reporting at Dallas Court?

- They are handed over to G4S and the holding room, where they would be told where they were going and helped to make contact with family etc using the payphones in the room. They are in the holding room for 1-2 hours before being taken away.
- AboBeker gave an example of members of his community who have been detained and then moved straight away without having time for a phone call so no one knows where they have gone
- Chris Brammer stated that people do have access to a phonecall and are given coins to use if needed and that it was very unlikely that people would be moved that quickly
- Sophie asked if it was possible for staff to proactively offer people the use of a phone so that people who were moved through quickly and might not know their rights could be told about having a phonecall

Action:

- Chris Brammer agreed to look into this suggestion

Procedure for planning a deportation visit

- Chris Brammer circulated an example of an “operational order” detailing the planning involved prior to conducting an operational visit. Each visit is authorised by a Chief Immigration Officer and is generally conducted using a court warrant. Areas covered in the visit planning process include:

Information: Background of the persons sought including photographs if available, reporting history, asylum claims, travel documents. Details of the property are also included.

Intention : i.e as far as is reasonably practicable to gain entry, identify and arrest individual concerned, identify others present, pack belongings. Individual taken to a police station, families to Dallas Court.

Method : Route, roles of individuals involved, numbers of staff would depend on the risk assessment but generally around 6 in all, including a scribe to record actions taken and rear cover to prevent escape from the rear of the property.

Admin : Details of the warrant, the authority of the visit, any checks made with police, information on any community tensions. List of kit to be taken – vehicles, cameras, fingerprint scanner, First Aid kit, etc. All officers would wear personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including stab vest, handcuffs and asp (small metal truncheon).

Communications : Detail how communications within team and to the police and command and control team would operate.

Risk Assessment : This would include information from the police national computer, medical information including medicines to be packed together with a community impact assessment.

- Staff are trained in Conflict Management and will seek to minimise tensions by seeking cooperation when effecting an arrest. Use of force would be avoided wherever possible and used only where necessary to conduct a safe arrest.

3. Reporting diaries

- The Forum enquired whether it was possible for people reporting to keep a diary of their visits, or someone to attend and observe what goes on.
- It would not be possible for someone to enter the main area unless they were reporting; someone could observe outside but the security staff would be aware that they were being observed.

Action:

- Mo Williams to investigate whether notebooks and pens would be allowed.

4. Future Meetings

- There was not time at the meeting to discuss all the implications of these procedures, and it was suggested that an officer from the Family Removal Team attend a meeting in the future.
- It was agreed that either Peter Dicken (professional standards, complaints procedure and investigations) or someone from Contact Management would attend the next meeting depending on their availability.
- It was also agreed that too much time had been taken up with action points and report backs from previous meetings, and some of these could be done between meetings.
- Mo Williams had agreed at the previous meeting to go through the consultation report and identify which areas could be acted on locally and who had responsibility for other issues raised in the report. This was also to be circulated to NW Operational Stakeholder Group as some issues would need to be discussed at this forum. Mo had begun this process and would carry it forward to the next meeting.

Action :

- Sophie to draw up an action point register similar to that used for NW Operational Stakeholder Forum
- Chris/Mo to notify RMF who will be attending the next meeting.
- Mo to bring a document outlining responsibilities for different areas of the report to the next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting :

Friday 7 September from 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon at Dallas Court