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30 September 2014

Detention Inquiry  
Office of Sarah Teather MP  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Ms Teather,

## **Written Evidence for Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention**

### **Detainees on Suicide Watch**

1. I am a visitor with Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group (GDWG). GDWG was found in 1995 and provides emotional and practical support to immigration detainees, in part through organising volunteer visitors. I visit detainees at Brook House at Gatwick on a weekly basis.
2. I would like to draw the inquiry's attention to the treatment of suicidal detainees in Brook House.
3. During the course of 2013 I visited a detainee in Brook House who had attempted suicide. As a result of this attempt, and a doctor's opinion that he remained suicidal, he was placed on suicide watch. This meant that he was removed from his normal room and placed in a segregation unit.
4. Whilst in the segregation unit he was kept under 24 hour surveillance which meant that there was always a light on to some extent, so that he could never have a proper sleep in the dark. The 24 hour surveillance also meant that he was never alone, and this could be quite stressful at times. For example, at times when I visited him he would ask his "minders" if they would sit a little further away from him so that he could have a private conversation with me, because he wanted to talk to me about what was on his mind. Some refused, with bad grace, and insisted on sitting close to us making it impossible for us to have a private conversation. From a mental health perspective I'm sure that it would have been beneficial to this detainee to be able to speak openly about what was on his mind, which he did not feel able to do when there was a minder, with whom he clearly did not have a strong relationship, listening in. From the rudeness of some of the minders it was clear that they had no training in dealing with vulnerable individuals (or if they had they were not putting what they had learnt into practice). When I raised our inability

to have a private conversation with the duty officer I was told that it was the individual minder's responsibility to decide where he sat in order fulfil his remit, and there was nothing I could do to challenge it. The detainee told me that he found the lack of privacy stressful, in particular he mentioned not being able to go to the bathroom without being watched.

5. A second consequence of being in the segregation unit, and under surveillance was that the detainee in question found that he was separated both from his friends, and also, for much of the time, from many of the facilities of Brook House, such as the computers with internet access, because he was only allowed out of the segregation unit when there was a minder available to accompany him. Therefore, just at the time when he needed support and something to occupy his mind most, he was isolated from his friends, and spent many a bored hour by himself in the separation unit, with plenty of time for the worries which had driven him to attempt suicide in the first place to prey on his mind. As previously mentioned, his relationships with some of his minders were such that he definitely did not feel he could talk to them. (For completeness, it should be noted that other of his minders did their best to be gentle and sympathetic).
6. A third consequence of the separation unit was that at times he shared this unit with distressed detainees spending their last night in the UK before being deported, and so he spent many a night listening to the anguished cries of deportees saying, amongst other things, that they were going to kill themselves. This clearly was also unhelpful for someone on suicide watch.
7. In short, in 2013 Brook House's method of dealing with detainees on suicide watch was to separate them from their support network of friends, and place them in an environment which was isolating, stress inducing and in which they were unable to get proper rest. This cannot be the best method of assisting someone in such a fragile state. When I raised this at the time, I was told that G4S, who run Brook House, had to treat suicidal detainees in this manner because this is what their contract with the government stipulated. Is the inquiry in a position to probe whether this is the case, and if so to consider whether recommendations to alter the contractual obligations with which G4S have to comply when dealing with suicidal detainees would be appropriate?

Thank you for inquiring into this important issue.

Yours sincerely

Ann Moseley