Home Office

Detention Services Order 07/2013

Welfare Provision in Immigration Removal Centres

September 2025

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Contents

Contents 3

Document Details 4

Contains Mandatory Instructions 4

Instruction 5

Introduction 5

Background 5

Welfare services 6

Services Provided 8

Work of welfare services 12

Revision History 14

Document Details

Process: To outline the minimum requirements for the provision of welfare services in immigration removal centres (IRCs).

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Contains Mandatory Instructions

For Action: All Home Office staff and contracted service providers operating in immigration removal centres (IRCs).

For Information: N/A

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Processes Affected: All Home Office processes relating to the provision of welfare services.

Assumptions: N/A

Notes: N/A

Instruction

Introduction

1. This Detention Services Order (DSO) provides instructions and guidance to all Home Office staff and contracted service providers operating in Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), relative to the minimum requirements expected for the provision of welfare services for detained individuals.

2. This instruction **does not** apply to Residential Holding Rooms (RHRs).

3. Two separate Home Office teams operate in IRCs:

4. Detention Services (DS) Compliance Team (Compliance Team)

    - Detention Engagement Team (DET)

    The **Compliance Team** are responsible for all on-site commercial and contract monitoring work. The **DETs** interact with detained individuals face-to-face within the IRCs, on behalf of responsible officers within the removal centres. They focus on communicating and engaging with people detained at IRCs, serving paperwork on behalf of caseworks and helping them to understand their cases and reasons for detention.

    There are no DETs at RSTHFs, or the Gatwick PDA. Some of the functions which are the responsibility of the DET in IRCs, are instead carried out by the contracted service provider and overseen by the International and Returns Services (IRS) Escorting Operations (Escorting Ops) in residential Short-term Holding Facilities RSTHFs. In the Gatwick PDA, the local Compliance Team covers the role of detained individual engagement.

5. Only principles of this guidance apply at RSTHFs, the facilities of which tend to be more limited than those in IRCs. This DSO should be implemented as far as reasonably practicable.

Background

6. Detention imposes limitations on detained individuals and their ability to conduct activities associated with concluding any personal affairs relating to their stay in the United Kingdom and preparing for their return and re-integration into their country of return. Part of the role of IRCs, in addition to providing a safe and secure environment for detained individuals with as much purposeful activity as possible, is to support detained individuals prior to their removal. In addition, staff working in centres should seek to minimise any unnecessary stress factors and ensure that

detained individuals are given as much support as possible during the transition from detention to removal and through to re-settlement. By doing so, staff will enable detained individuals to feel more prepared, informed and better able to accept their return. In some cases, a period spent in detention may not result in removal but in release and therefore the welfare provision in IRCs additionally seeks to provide detained individuals with support to return to life in the community.

7. The welfare provision in IRCs should, as a minimum:

- Help detained individuals prepare for their removal from the United Kingdom.
- Provide information on the benefits of Voluntary Return.
- Provide information on accessing legal services.
- Assist detained individuals who are released, by signposting them to services and organisations which may be able to offer them support and assistance with any aspect of resettlement into the community.
- Offer detained individuals support and guidance to ease their experience of being in detention.

Welfare services

8. Each centre shall ensure welfare services/assistance are provided to detained individuals 7 days per week (refer to paragraphs 9 and 10 for information on hours of service.

9. A member of the contracted service providers senior management team shall oversee welfare services.

10. Services for detained individuals should be provided for a minimum of 8 hours per day on weekdays.

11. A reduced service may be provided at weekends and on public holidays but on these days for no less than a minimum of 6 hours per day. Both the weekday and weekend services may be performed by trained detainee custody officers (DCOs), whose primary duties are not welfare related but who have received training to manage routine welfare matters on an ad hoc basis as well as by those trained as welfare officers (DSO 02/2018 Detainee Custody Officer and Detainee Custody Officer (Escort) Certification refers).Welfare assistance must be easily accessible to detained individuals, through either of the following:

    - A dedicated office and
    - Scheduled / drop-in surgeries and
    - By nominated personnel.

Additionally, for areas where a detained individual's movement is restricted, the welfare officers will attend this area and provide welfare services. Examples of restricted movement include, but are not limited to:

- The Care and Separation Unit (CSU).
- Inpatient healthcare facilities and/ or
- Areas removed from association including medical isolation (for example detained individuals who are subject to Rule 40 or Rule 42).

12. Welfare services must be publicised widely around each centre on 'Welfare boards' and must form part of the overall induction programme for detained individuals. For detained individuals whose primary language is not English, welfare staff should assist with interpreting and translating where required, in line with the DSO 02/2022 Interpretation services and use of translation devices.

13. The contracted service provider staff at each centre must establish, operate, and share with other centres, a secure generic group email inbox as a central point of contact for other centres, to receive requests for assistance e.g. in locating missing property or for visitors groups and other detained individual advocates to raise a welfare related issue on behalf of detained individuals.

Services Provided

Welfare services will assist detained individuals with:

Service	Description
Financial signposting on how to:	- Receive money and credit their accounts. - The contracted service provider should cash any postal orders and transfer the funds to the detained individual's account, and ensure that detained individuals arriving with existing postal orders, are informed of the requirement (i.e., for the correct named payee for funds to be transferred) upon arrival (DSO 06/2012 Management of Property refers) - Close UK accounts / terminate direct debits or standing orders - Enable transfers via a recognised and secure money movement and payment service provider (online via the welfare office) - Support detained individuals in contacting their bank - Retrieve cash from former residential addresses and/or detention locations i.e., police stations, prisons, other IRCs and holding rooms - Contact former employers or business contacts.
Domestic	- Support detained individuals with contacting utilities and mobile phone companies to cancel accounts / seek refunds of over-payments - Liaise with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) if pets have been left behind at a property to arrange collection and re-homing - Contact employers regarding owed wages (where a detained individual had been working legally) - Establish contact with landlords either directly or by giving welfare staff permission to do so on their behalf.

Service	Description
Education:	- Contacting colleges, or other educational establishments to cancel enrolment for the detained individual - Contacting education establishments for the recovery of documents (e.g., certificates) to take abroad.
Contact with friends and family & general:	- Contacting the Red Cross to obtain Red Cross tracing services - Tracing telephone numbers of friends in the UK - Assisting in contacting and communicating with Consular / Embassy officials, as a priority - Liaising with social services to seek advice on how a detained individual might arrange contact (where allowed) with children in local authority care - Contacting local visitors' schemes if the detained individual is isolated or remote from any UK relatives or friends i.e. Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID) - Signposting detained individuals to additional support services within the IRC (e.g., counselling)
Property:	- Explaining options for the delivery of property to the centre within permitted weight and volumetric restrictions - Providing information about shipping property abroad or assistance in contacting friends and relatives to collect excess property from the IRC - Establishing contact with Immigration Enforcement, prisons or the police, to retrieve property and documents retained by them/that were confiscated on arrest - Helping to contact providers of supported accommodation, local authorities and private landlords to locate and attempt to retrieve property left behind at previous addresses

Service	Description
Legal:	- Provide information to detained individuals about the Detained Duty Advice scheme (DDAS) (which operates in the specific IRC), the timetable of provision and the mechanism for making an appointment. - Where possible, if the detained individual needs assistance to print, sign, scan and/ or email documents to the legal provider, contracted service provider staff must assist the resident to do this. - The contracted service providers must complete and maintain accurate records (Management Information) as directed by the Home Office. This must include showing when a detained individual is offered a DDAS appointment and whether this appointment has been accepted or refused. - Signpost detained individuals to information about how to find an alternative solicitor or other immigration advisors accredited by the Immigration Advice Authority - Provide information about how to make a complaint about a legal advisor/legal advice received through the Immigration Advice Authority or the Legal Ombudsman and referring directly to the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) to highlight any procedural issues e.g., if a legal surgery appointment for a detained individual does not go ahead. Additionally, welfare officers may refer internal complaints to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO). - Accessing application forms (such as applying for release on bail from immigration detention (B1), applying for immigration bail accommodation (Bail 409) and applying for asylum support (AFSI) – in addition to, signposting detained individuals to their solicitors and charities or services for support.
Departures/Voluntary departures:	- Providing informative advice about the benefits of making a voluntary departure using a recognised scheme and signposting to the relevant forms (i.e., IS.101) - Assistance in meeting needs likely to arise at the removal destination such as clothing, mosquito nets.

Service	Description
Preparation for Return:	- Contacting a known relative overseas to make arrangements for reception / collection on arrival. - Identifying public transport options for travelling from the point of arrival to the ultimate destination. - Assist in researching any charitable organisations in the country of return from which the detained individual might seek assistance- - Assist in researching any general enquiries about conditions in the country of return e.g. schools, colleges, employment agencies, housing etc.-
Centre regime:	Providing information to detained individuals about the Centre's regime, including: - Facilities available in the Centre - How to contact a member of the on-site Home Office team (DET) - Requesting a transfer to an alternative IRC (DSO to consider the risk assessment and placement of detained individuals) - Signposting detained individuals to welfare groups / advice surgeries operating in the centre - Signposting detained individuals to the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), the Independent Examiner of Complaints (IEC) and the independent Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) - Providing information on how to make a complaint about any aspect of their experience in an IRC or during escort, and where required (for detained individuals without the appropriate skills) making a transcript of the verbal complaint on the appropriate complaints form (DSO 03/2015 Handling of Complaints refers). - Acting in the best interests of the detained individual, by assisting them with any issues associated with their ability to cope better with detention (for individuals who lack decision making capacity, those with disability arising from mental impairment and those who have a mental health condition; and that, for those with a disability, adjustments are made to support the individual whilst in immigration detention(DSO 04/2020 Mental Vulnerability and immigration detention: non-clinical guidance refers)

Service	Description

Release of detained individuals:	Prior to release, contracted service provider staff may assist the detained individual being released by:
	
	• Providing information on local faith networks
	• Providing assistance with:
	  ○ Contacting previous landlords
	  ○ Planning travel to release addresses (train times etc.)
	  ○ Other reasonable tasks associated with re-establishing life in the community
	  ○ Contact with the Children's Panel (for residents under the age of 18 and for under 21s with responsibility for minor dependents)
	  ○ Travel warrants.
	
	Prior to release to no fixed abode, staff should assist the detained individual being released by providing the information above, supporting any existing housing applications.

Work of welfare services

14. Local procedures should ensure staff keep accurate records of all enquiries from detained individuals and actions completed. Records should include a short**,** formal, welfare needs assessment of each detained individual, which may consist of a simple checklist identifying the specific areas covered by this DSO that a detained individual requires assistance with. This assessment should be completed within 48 hours of receiving the enquiry. Where a detained individual has transferred to an alternative centre, welfare staff will complete an assessment for new admissions, considering previous circumstances. Under Article 5(1)(e) of the UK GDPR, staff must keep records in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than necessary, for the purposes for which the personal data are processed. In centres, this information should be retained for up to 7 years, and be kept in core files/on DMS, which are archived and centrally stored.

15. Records of actions undertaken, or welfare assistance given to detained individuals should remain confidential unless consent is obtained from the detained individual to share that information.

16. Welfare services should establish links with local and national charities/ support services (i.e., local authority housing provision), who may be contacted by the IRC to provide information to detained individuals.

17. The welfare service should include information from NGOs on topics of interest to detained individuals, including:

- How to utilise a recognised scheme to make a voluntary departure/return from the UK
- Red Cross tracing services
- Roles of other support organisations in the IRC such as LGBT charities

18. Staff must not provide any advice to detained individuals on legal or other immigration case working matters. They must not pass comment on the credibility of a detained individual's application or the likelihood of it succeeding. Local procedures should ensure that all actions requiring staff intervention have a written authority from the detained individual to act on their behalf.

19. The contracted service provider staff at IRCs in England must ensure required data in relation to individual Detained Duty Advice Scheme surgeries and appointments is provided, as directed by the Home Office.

Sharing best practice

20. Welfare services must be a standard agenda item at the Centre and Escort Managers meetings where updates, best practice, support, and advice and can be shared.

21. The welfare team must provide internal reports to the relevant Centre Manager monthly, highlighting the services provided to residents and identifying trends in demand for the welfare service. Welfare information should be included in Centre Managers' reports that are shared with the Detention Services' senior management team and the Compliance team within the centre, prior to the Centre and Escort Managers meeting forum. Particular regard should be paid to identifying trends relative to protected characteristics as identified in the Equality Act 2010.

Revision History

Review date	Reviewed by	Review outcome	Next review
Nov 2013	Gillian Foley	General update	Jan 2016
May 2024	Dean Foulkes	Updated to reflect: • Terminology change from 'detainee' to 'detained individual' • The roll out of Home Office teams and individual responsibilities • The minimum period weekday and weekend services are provided for. • How, and the period welfare needs records are retained for in line with UK GDPR • The completion of biodata and emergency travel documents within 24 hours of receiving a request for return • The change to when welfare reports are produced. • Clarify the minimum welfare provision at an IRC and the circumstances welfare services should assist with • Additions regarding the Detained Duty Advice Scheme (DDAS)	May 2026
September 2025	Rosa Lynch	• Factual inaccuracies resolved • Terminology changes (including "Office for the Immigration Services Commissioner," changed to "Immigration Advice Authority")	May 2026