



Home Office

# **Detention Services Order 06/2012**

## **Management of Property**

December 2025



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# Document Details

**Process:** To provide instructions and operational guidance to contracted service providers and Home Office staff operating in Immigration Removal Centres, Gatwick Pre-departure Accommodation and Residential Short-term Holding Facilities on the management of detained individuals property in preparation for removal.

**Publication Date:** December 2025

**Implementation Date:** March 2012 (reissued December 2025)

**Review Date:** January 2026

**Version:** 6.0

## Contains Mandatory Instructions

**For Action:** Home Office and contracted service providers operating in Immigration Removal Centres, Gatwick Pre-departure Accommodation and Residential Short-term Holding Facilities.

**For Information:** N/A (Whilst this DSO contains mandatory actions for responsible caseworkers, this guidance is for informational purposes only).

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**Processes Affected:** Acceptance of property delivered by third parties, searching and storage of detained individuals property, and preparation of property for removal.

**Assumptions:** All Immigration Removal Centres, Residential Short-term Holding Facilities and Gatwick Pre-departure Accommodation must be equipped with weighing scales.

**Notes:** N/A

# Instruction

## Introduction

1. This Detention Service Order (DSO) provides operational guidance for all staff in Home Office Immigration Removal Centres (IRC), Gatwick Pre-departure Accommodation (PDA) and Residential Short-term Holding Facilities (RSTHF) and Escorting staff in relation to the management of detained individuals property including preparation for removal from the United Kingdom.
2. For the purpose of this instruction, references to “centre” include IRCs, RSTHFs and Gatwick PDA.
3. This DSO **does not** apply to Residential Holding Rooms (RHRs).
4. Two separate Home Office teams operate in IRCs:
  - Immigration Enforcement Compliance team (Compliance team)
  - Immigration Enforcement 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, helping them to understand their cases and reasons for detention.

There are no DETs at RSTHFs, functions which are the responsibility of the DET in RSTHFs are carried out by the supplier and overseen by the Escorting Contract Monitoring Team (ECMT). In the Gatwick PDA the role of engagement with detained individuals is covered by the local Compliance Team.

## Principles for managing property

5. Detained individuals' property must be managed by centres with an assumption that the individual(s) will be removed by air at the end of their detention.
6. Detained individuals have a personal property allowance, when travelling on scheduled flights, charter flights or other special operations arranged by the Home Office, of one piece of luggage weighing no more than 23kg or as permitted by the airline.
7. Additionally, detained individuals travelling on scheduled flights may be allowed (depending on risk assessment) one piece of hand luggage for the flight up to a maximum of 5kg. The weight of this hand luggage is in addition to the 23kg allowance.

Individuals who are travelling on charter flights or other special operations arranged by the Home Office are not permitted any hand luggage.

8. Centres must ensure all individuals in detention are aware of luggage restrictions. Signage setting out weight allowances as set out in this DSO must be clearly displayed in reception areas. All individuals must be provided with the property allowance information and disclaimer (Annex A). On arrival to the centre, and upon completion of Annex A, supplier staff must complete a IS91RA Part C: Supplementary Information, advising the total property weight amount and the agreed action the individual has signed. Annex A must be explained in the Detainee Transferable Document (DTD). This document must be explained by supplier staff, ensuring that all processes are fully understood. Professional translation services may be required where English is not the individuals first language.
9. The Home Office recognises that airlines' policies on hand luggage and checked luggage vary. However, 23kg is the maximum weight allowance of many airlines used by the Home Office and therefore this is the standard personal allowance for all individuals.
10. Personal property allowances do not include food items which can reasonably be consumed by the individual in the centre in advance of removal.
11. Special property allowance arrangements apply to families with younger children. So long as a child is sitting in their own seat, i.e. is over two years old, they have the same luggage allowances as an adult. Car seats and pushchairs may be taken on the flight with the family and are excluded from the personal allowance.

# Procedures

## Management of stored property in centres

12. The contracted service provider must accept all property which is delivered by the escort supplier or local DET) at the same time as the detained individual. If the weight of the property exceeds the personal allowance, supplier staff must complete a form IS91RA Part C: Supplementary Information with the details of the excess property. This form must be sent to the ECMT and the local DET. Acceptance of excess property must be authorised as detailed in paragraphs 31 – 34.

## Searching of property

13. The contracted service provider must ensure that property is properly searched when it is accepted by the centre in accordance with [DSO 09/2012 'Searching Policy'](#). The only exception is if it has already been searched by an accredited supplier of the Home Office and has been sealed. However, the contracted service provider may choose to re-search the property if they feel it is necessary.
14. Under section 52 of the Immigration Act 2016 Detainee Custody Officers (DCOs) have the power to seize any document(s) discovered during a routine search which may, establish a person's identity, nationality or citizenship or indicate the place from which a person has travelled to the United Kingdom or to which a person is proposing to go. If any document is discovered during a routine search, the DCO must seek verbal consent from the local DET to retain the document (see paragraph 15). A record of this including who provided consent should be made and keep a record on CID/Atlas.
15. Under section 51 of the Immigration Act 2016, as amended by section 44 of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025, a Home Office official (Home Office caseworker, DET Officer, Immigration Officer or local Compliance Team Manager/Deputy Manager) can direct a DCO to search a detained individual for nationality documents if there are reasonable grounds to believe a nationality document will be found in the individual's possession. This includes the individual themselves and anything on their person, the individual's residential room and any stored property. The individual must be given the opportunity to attend any search of their room or property, and the contracted service provider must record this on CID/Atlas/IRC records and any refusal to attend. Any direction to search an individual, their room and/or their property must be given in writing by the Home Office official, and the contracted service provider should action this within 48 hours of the direction being received.
16. In both cases, the seized document must be provided to the onsite DET as soon as possible, who will then update the notes field on CID/Atlas with details of the seized

document. The onsite DET should send the document by secure means to the Home Office caseworker and follow this up with an email confirming postage. The caseworker will then decide if the document is relevant and whether it should be retained, returned to the person who previously possessed it or to the location where it was found, or otherwise disposed of, and update the notes field and/or the documents submitted screen on CID/Atlas.

17. These powers do not extend to financial documents such as bank debit cards, credit cards, cheque books and building society passbooks. These documents cannot be confiscated or photocopied nor can individuals be prevented from having them in their possession.
18. In accordance with [DSO 11/2014 'Security Information Reports' \(SIR\)](#), if a DCO comes across financial documents that are not under the detained individual's name and suspects they may be using a false identity for immigration or criminal purposes, this must be detailed in an SIR and a notification must be sent to the Detention and Escorting Security Team.
19. The contracted service provider must inform individuals in detention which prohibited items they are not allowed to have in their possession in the centre.
20. Detained individuals must be informed that property held in their possession is held at their own risk. Staff must ensure the property disclaimer is signed and explained to the individual. Property held by the supplier on behalf of the individual is the responsibility of the contracted service provider who must take steps to secure property when out of the individuals' control to do so. These steps must as a minimum include auditable process for each time the stored property is accessed. In the event the property is no longer in the individual's control e.g. after being removed from association or to temporary confinement under rules 40 or 42 of the Detention Centre Rules 2001, or if in hospital then these items should be returned to the centre as stored property and will become the responsibility of the contracted service provider. These items must be accurately recorded and logged prior to storage.
21. When detained individuals are moved from one centre to another for example to position them for their imminent removal flight, responsibility lies with the discharging centre to ensure the individual's luggage is compliant with the luggage allowance requirements as detailed in paragraphs 5 - 6. For example, if an individual is moved from Colnbrook IRC to Brook House IRC prior to his/her removal flight, Colnbrook IRC are responsible for ensuring the individual's luggage is DSO compliant.

## Recording of property

22. Contracted service providers must keep accurate records and have a robust system for managing and recording stored property in case of any dispute or allegation of loss, particularly of valuables.



23. Rule 6(3) of the Detention Centre Rules and Rule 9(6) of the Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 require that an inventory must be kept of a detained person's property which the individual must be requested to sign after he/she has been given the opportunity to confirm it is correct. Contracted service provider reception staff must record items of property held in store on the detained individual's property record cards, which individuals sign in accordance with Detention Centre Rules 2001 or Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 (as applicable). All property must be recorded. Damage to items on receipt should be noted and the individual should be asked to sign the property record to confirm they were aware of the damage. If an individual refuse to sign in order to acknowledge damage this should be recorded. One copy of the record should be given to the individual and a copy held in their reception file.

24. Valuable items may include the following:

- Jewellery
- Laptops/personal computers
- Tablet computers
- Mobile phones / cameras
- Games consoles
- Home stereo systems/powerful portable stereo systems
- MP3/MP4 players
- Identity documents
- Credit/debit cards / cheque books / postal order

This list is not exhaustive and any item which the reception officer or detained individual deems to be of value (including sentimental value) should be treated as detailed in this section.

25. All property and cash including postal orders must be placed in a sealed bag (or bags) and the corresponding seal number(s) recorded on the detained individuals' property record cards. The individual must then be asked to sign the forms to confirm that the records are correct. A refusal by the individual to confirm if the records are correct should be noted.

26. All postal orders must be made payable to the supplier/centre that the detained individual is being held. The contracted service provider should cash the postal order and transfer the funds to the detained individual's account. Where an individual or other establishment/supplier is named as the payee, suppliers must inform the detained individual of the correct named payee that is required for the funds to be

transferred to the IRC at the earliest opportunity. A record of this must be kept by the contracted service provider.

27. The contracted service provider should ensure detained individuals arriving with existing postal orders, are informed of this requirement upon arrival.
28. When a detained individual is discharged and returns to the same centre on the same day, contracted service providers may decide that a fast track reception option can be followed ([DSO 06/2013 'Reception, Induction and Discharge refers'](#)).

## **Property from Immigration Compliance and Engagement (ICE) teams**

29. ICE teams must refer to the Search and Seizure policy, which outlines the non-statutory handling of property and baggage. Detained individuals are encouraged to pack only one bag to meet the personal allowance, before entering detention, and are advised to make arrangements with a family member or friend regarding any remaining belongings.
30. Where an individual enters detention without any accompanying property, contracted service provider reception staff must refer the individual's details to the welfare office to enable them to liaise with the individual and for enquiries to be made to reunite the individual with their belongings.

## **Property from prisons/National Distribution Centre**

31. Any property belonging to foreign national offenders (FNOs) that is not held in their possession or stored locally at the prison is stored at the National Distribution Centre (NDC) at Branston. There is no weight limit on property held in prison. Caseworkers should notify the prison once removal directions have been served on a FNO. The prison should request FNOs' property 28 days prior to removal. Requests are made by prison establishments (FNOs cannot request property themselves). Three days is the absolute minimum notice required to retrieve property. Property not collected within 12 months of release from prison will be disposed of.
32. If insufficient time is provided to collect property when FNOs transfer to the IRC estate, the NDC will send the property to the prison establishment that ordered it. The NDC do not track the movements of the detained individual so if the property arrives after the individual has moved on, then it is up to the prison establishment to forward it. This can mean that property may take some time to reach a individual in detention.
33. If a FNO is bailed, then the property should be requested by the last prison establishment where they resided. Arrangements will then be made by that prison establishment for the items to be sent on, or to be collected by the FNO.

## Acceptance of additional property

34. The contracted service provider must refuse to accept additional property for detained individuals who reach their allowance and have not made a commitment to pay for excess luggage, unless the contracted service provider has first agreed with the onsite DET Manager that it may be accepted. This provision allows the onsite DET Manager, in consultation with the responsible case worker and/or ECMT, to exercise discretion if he or she believes there are exceptional circumstances or for cases where an individual is being removed by an airline whose weight allowance is higher than 23kg.
35. Confirmation of the detained individual's travel allowance can be obtained through the airline or via the confirmation of booking. In cases where the individual made their own travel arrangements, the local DET team must notify the responsible case worker and ECMT that the individual is travelling with authorised additional property.
36. Contracted service providers must keep detailed records of property which is accepted and takes the individual over and above the personal allowance.
37. Detained individuals who have not reached their allowance may be allowed to accept additional property which is delivered by post or hand delivered by third parties (for example, friends or relatives). IRCs are only required to accept property during visiting hours, and only up to 48 hours before an individual is due to be removed. Contracted service providers may choose to accept property outside of these times in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the duty manager. Gatwick PDA will only accept property up to 24 hours before a family is due to be removed. These restrictions must be widely publicised amongst individuals, visitors and local interested partners.

## Access to property

38. Contracted service providers must keep accurate records of all detained individual property accepted and taken out of the property store.
39. Contracted service providers must undertake and record daily spot checks of detained individual stored property seal numbers to assist with the identification of mislaid property. Contracted service providers must also undertake and record monthly property management audits which should include comparing the property recorded on local systems with that actually held in the store for an individual.
40. In instances of allegation regarding the loss or damage to property, detained individuals should be made aware of the complaints process as set out in [DSO 03/2015 'Handling of Complaints'](#).
41. Contracted service providers must allow detained individuals to hand out possessions to relatives and friends at visiting times.

42. Contracted service providers are not required to manage any form of property swapping system between individuals or services for individuals whose property is in storage at the centre.
43. Detained individuals should be allowed access to their property, upon request within a reasonable timeframe. If an individual wants to remove an item from storage, this should be signed out by a DCO and the individual and signed back in by both if returned.
44. Detained individuals with removal directions in place who wish to sort their property should be allowed to do so, upon request. Detained individuals should be pointed towards the welfare office for help and advice on management of their property. If individuals decline the opportunity to sort their property, the centre should decide on behalf of the individual what luggage is taken (up to 23kg).

## **Management of stored property for removal**

45. The contracted service provider must inform all individuals on induction to the centre of the personal allowance permitted for removal as set out in paragraph 4 and 5 and the implications of exceeding the allowance. Detained individuals can only take additional luggage to the airport which takes them above the 23kg limit if either: a) the airline's limit is higher and the individual's luggage weight is within this limit, or b) the individual is willing and has the means to pay for excess luggage which incurs a charge. Without this proof the individual will still be discharged for their flight but with luggage limited to 23kg. The Home Office selects the airline and funds the return of individual's being removed at public expense. Detained individuals who choose to purchase their own ticket have the opportunity to choose their airline.
46. The contracted service provider must establish and record if an individual is willing to and has the means to pay for excess luggage. This information must be made available to the onsite DET team. Once removal directions are set, the onus is on the individual to prove they have the means to pay for excess luggage charges. Without this proof, the individual should not be discharged for their flight with luggage in excess of 23kg. Alternatively, the individual must be given the opportunity to choose and select which property they wish to take with them within the 23kg limit or as permitted by the airline.

## **Preparation of property for removal**

47. The contracted service provider should prepare property at least 24 hours in advance of a detained individual's collection for removal. The contracted service provider must ensure that property is presented in single lots of no more than 23kg per lot.
48. Detained individuals' luggage must not include dangerous or restricted items prohibited by airlines. Contracted service providers should remove any such items

from their property, in their presence, and give them the opportunity to arrange collection by a friend or family member. Medication should be stored in hold luggage.

49. Prior to leaving the centre individuals should sign a document to confirm that they have all property in their possession. A record should be kept of this in case of dispute. If an individual claims that property is missing or damaged they should be advised on how to lodge a complaint as per the guidance set out in DSO 03/2015.

### **Property in excess of the personal allowance – scheduled flights**

50. Detained individuals being removed by scheduled flights (both escorted and unescorted) with property which exceeds the 23kg personal allowance have the following options:
- a) Pay to ship excess property to their destination in advance of removal
  - b) When purchasing their own ticket:
    - Provide proof to the contracted service provider that the airline's luggage limit is higher and the individual's luggage weight is within this limit.
    - Paying in advance for excess luggage – subject to agreement by the airline.
  - c) Provide proof to the contracted service provider that they are willing and have the means to pay for excess luggage which incurs a charge.
  - d) Leave the property behind and make arrangements for its subsequent shipment.
  - e) Leave the property behind for collection by a friend or family member or for disposal by the contracted service provider.
51. Individuals should be encouraged to pay to ship excess property because it is often cheaper than paying excess weight allowance charges at the airport.
52. For individuals who choose options b) or c) at paragraph 7, the contracted service provider staff must complete a form IS91 RA Part C with the individual's details (including the weight of the excess luggage), confirmation that the individual has funds in their centre account to cover any excess weight allowance charges (where this is required) and the details of the ticket purchased. This form must be sent to the DEPMU and the local DET team a minimum of 48 hours in advance of collection. In the case of an individual who arrives within 48 hours of removal, the contracted service provider must complete form IS91 RA Part C as soon as possible. DEPMU will then notify the escorting supplier so that special arrangements can be made for collection of the excess luggage for removal with the individual.
53. In voluntary departure cases, where the individual has made his or her own travel arrangements, it is the individual's responsibility to provide proof that their airline carrier has a higher excess luggage limit and what that limit is. In all other cases, the contracted service provider staff or local DET will confirm the airline luggage allowance before notifying ECMT of the agreed excess weight allowance.

## Property in excess of the personal allowance – charter flights

54. Detained individuals being removed by Home Office charter flights with property which exceeds the personal allowance have the following options:
- a) Pay to ship excess property to their destination in advance of removal.
  - b) Leave the property behind and make arrangements for its subsequent shipment.
  - c) Leave the property behind for collection by a friend or family member or for disposal by the contracted service provider.
55. If exceptional circumstances so require, the local DET team can request from Returns Logistics the consideration of special arrangements for the removal of the excess luggage with the individual. However, there is no guarantee that charter flights will be able to accommodate excess luggage so every effort should be made to encourage detained individuals to ship luggage home.

## Property audit

56. Contracted service providers must ensure as a minimum that items deemed as valuable (this could also include sentimental items) are subject to a property audit at least once per day, with any identified missing items reported immediately to the relevant Supplier Manager and the onsite Compliance team.
57. All other property items kept in the centre property store are subject to a property audit every week/month with any identified missing items reported immediately to the relevant Supplier Manager and the onsite Compliance team.
58. Any lost property identified must be returned to the owner, with all reasonable efforts made to ensure the return of the property such as reviewing supplier/Home Office records (CID/Atlas) for contact information. The property must be kept in possessions for a period of 12 months. After 12 months the property must be disposed of following the disposal of property process. A log of all missing items and outcomes i.e. destroyed or returned to owner must be kept by the supplier for a period of 6 years after an individual leaves detention.

## Disposal of property

59. Any remaining property must be retained for 12 months by the Contracted service provider, following the detained individual's discharge. Unless the individual has made alternative arrangements, any remaining property may then be sold, destroyed or otherwise disposed of. If sold, the money must be added to the detainee welfare fund for the benefit of other detained individuals at the centre, in a similar way that shop profits are managed (Reference DSO 05/2013 Use of Shop Profits). This process must be managed by the Contracted service provider and documented with a clear, auditable trail.

60. Detained individuals may waive the retention period as set out above at any time by signing the appropriate section of the property allowance information and disclaimer form (Annex A). This form must be held on the detained individual's record by the contracted service provider.

## **Annual self-audit**

61. An annual self-audit of this DSO is required by contracted service providers to ensure that the processes are being followed. This audit should be made available to the Home Office on request.

## Revision History

Review date	Reviewed by	Review outcome	Next review
February 2016	Emily Jarvis	Increase to personal weight allowance and general update	February 2018
July 2016	Emily Jarvis	Addition of searching and seizure powers (sections 51-52 of IA2016)	July 2018
July 2018	Jose Domingos	Reformat. Addition of self audit rules for suppliers and Annex A – Property Allowance Information and Disclaimer	July 2020
November 2019	Shadia Ali	Amended to include the roll out of DET teams and individual responsibilities	November 2020
January 2023	Shadia Ali	Annex A luggage allowance amended. Self-audit lines included.  Postal order lines updated.  Disposal of property section updated.	January 2025
September 2023	Rizwana Ali	Updated to reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removal of annual self-audit line relative to the DET</li> <li>Terminology change from 'centre supplier' to 'contracted service provider'</li> </ul>	September 2025
December 2025	J.Hayson	Updated reference to Section 51 of the Immigration Act 2016, as amended by section 44 of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025.	2026