



Home Office

Detention Services Order 08/2025

Managing escape or abscond risk within
Immigration Detention

July 2026



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Document Details

Process: To provide instructions and guidance to all staff operating in immigration removal centres (IRC), pre-departure accommodation (PDA) and residential short-term holding facilities (RSTHF) and escorts on the procedures of managing detained individuals who have been assessed as posing a risk of escaping or absconding from detention.

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Contains Mandatory Instructions

For Action: Home Office staff and contracted service provider (CSP) staff operating in immigration removal centres, residential short-term holding facilities and Gatwick pre-departure accommodation, and during in country and overseas escorts.

For Information: N/A

Author and Unit: Detention Services Security Team

Owner: Michelle Smith, Head of Detention Operations

Contact Point: [Detention Services Orders Team](#).

Processes Affected: All processes within the immigration removal estate relating to detained individuals who pose a risk of escape.

Assumptions: Detainee Custody Officers (DCOs) are aware of their duties under section 155 and 156 of the [Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#) and have received the appropriate training (Control and Restraint/ Home Office Manual of Escorting Safely first aid and Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint) as required for their role.

Introduction and purpose

1. This DSO is designed to ensure that appropriate security measures are put in place for detained individuals who are identified as presenting a risk of escape. It will ensure security measures are applied lawfully, safely, fairly, proportionately, and with decency, in line with the [Detention Centre Rules 2001](#) and the [Short Term Holding Facility Rules 2018](#).

2. For this guidance:

Any reference to “centre” covers immigration removal centres, pre departure accommodation and residential short term hold facilities. This guidance does not apply to residential holding rooms.

Escape: Is when a detained individual overcomes a physical barrier/s to unlawfully gain freedom from detention.

Attempted Escape: when a detained individual has not breached the secure perimeter, but their actions demonstrate a deliberate and purposeful attempt to do so.

Abscond: Is when a detained individual is outside of a centre/facility for legitimate reasons (i.e. an escorted move) and unlawfully gains freedom from escorting staff.

Attempted Abscond: Is when a detained individual is outside of a centre/facility for legitimate reasons and attempts to pass beyond the control of the escorting staff but is prevented from doing so.

Escape Risk Plan: The procedures and additional measures put in place when a detained individual is identified as posing an escape risk following completion of an escape/abscond risk assessment.

Escape/abscond paraphernalia: Includes but not limited to tools for breaching restraints, makeshift cutting or digging tools, materials for creating ropes/ladders, communication devices, navigation aids, disguise materials, items for distraction or incapacitation.

3. Two different Home Office teams operate in IRCs:

- Detention Services 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 on behalf of responsible officers within the IRCs. They focus on communicating and engaging with

people detained at IRCs, serving paperwork on behalf of caseworkers and helping them to understand their cases and 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 Command (IRSC) escorting operations (Escorting Ops) in RSTHFs. In the Gatwick PDA, the role of detained individual engagement is covered by the local compliance team.

Mandatory action

4. CSPs must ensure they have processes in place to identify detained individuals who pose a potential risk of escape or abscond, which shall be clearly laid out in the local security strategy (LSS). This must ensure that an individual assessment of risk is completed using Escape Risk Assessment Form (Annex A) within four hours of a concern being identified.
5. Centres are required to maintain a register of detained individuals assessed as being a risk of escape, which shall be made available to the Home Office upon request. Centres must ensure that a security handover is provided before a detained individual is transferred to another centre.
6. Detained individuals in immigration detention or under escort should only be classified as an escape risk when enhanced security measures are required to effectively manage a risk of escape or absconding. The process should not be used as a punishment or to manage behaviours where there is not a substantiated risk of escape or absconding.

Risk Assessment

7. When a detained individual is identified as a potential risk of escape or abscond, the CSP must assess the risk and undertake an individual risk assessment documenting findings and decision making on the Initial Escape Risk Assessment Form (Annex A).
8. Circumstances that must trigger an assessment include but are not limited to:
 - Incident of an escape or abscond or an attempt to do so.
 - Finding of any escape/abscond related paraphernalia.
 - Indication of increased risk e.g. intelligence.
 - History of escape or attempted escape.
 - Relevant information included within the person escort record (PER),
 - IS91 warning marker for escape.

9. Everyday items that the detained individual possesses for legitimate uses should not be considered escape/abscond paraphernalia unless there is corroborating evidence to support an increased risk of escape/abscond.
10. The decision to identify a detained individual as an escape risk must be proportionate to the nature of the risk and consider all available information and based on an individual risk assessment. If the risk of escape posed by a detained individual can be effectively managed without implementing additional mitigation measures, then no such measures should be applied. Any decision to apply, not apply, or remove security measures must be fully documented, including justification for assessing the individual as not being an escape risk. Once completed the risk assessment (Annex A) must be approved by a member of the CSP's senior management team. In the absence of a member of the CSP SMT i.e. in a matter of urgency/out of hours (DC Rule 65 or Rule 56 for RSTHF); a duty manager may approve. However, the approval must then be endorsed by a senior manager at the earliest opportunity and no longer than 24 hours after the initial urgent approval.
11. When a detained individual is considered an escape or abscond risk or is removed from an escape risk plan, an IS91 RA Part C must be completed and issued to DEPMU and the local Detention Services compliance team in accordance with. [DSO 10/2024 Risk assessment and placement of individuals in detention](#)

Notifying the detained individual

12. When a decision is made to manage a detained individual as an escape risk the CSP must notify the detained individual of the decision using the 'Notification to Resident Form (Annex B)' within 2 hours of the assessment being completed. This must include the reasons for being considered an escape/abscond risk. The notification must be explained in a language the detained individual understands and complies with. [DSO 02/2022 Interpretation services and use of translation devices](#)
13. Detained individuals must be given an appeal form (Annex C) when they are notified. The appeal process must be explained in a language the individual understands and comply with DSO 02/2022. CSP staff must take reasonable steps to assist the detained individual in understanding the decision and the opportunity to appeal.

Appeals

14. Detained individuals have the right to appeal the decision at any point using the appeal form (Annex C). The appeal must be considered by the local Detention Services Compliance Team (DSCT) member of at least SEO grade, and response provided within 5 working days. A member of the Compliance Team at SEO or

above will, within five days of receipt of Annex C, assess the risk assessment, the supporting justification, and Annex C. Following this review, they will either uphold the decision to manage the resident as an escape risk or instruct the contracted service provider to remove the restrictions and enhanced monitoring.

15. The detained individual will be provided with written notification of the decision using Annex C. [DSO - 03-2015 Handling complaints](#)

Managing detained individuals

16. There must be local processes in place to ensure that all staff, including Healthcare and Home Office staff working in the Centre are aware of the detained individuals who are on escape risk plans.
17. Photographs of a detained individual on an escape risk plan must be displayed by the CSPs (out of sight of other detained individuals or visitors) in the Gate, Control Room, Reception and Security Department and other locations as identified by the CSP.
18. The Security Department for each IRC or senior manager for RSTHF must be notified immediately of any change in appearance and a new photograph taken and disseminated within 24 hours. Photographs should be reviewed for changes at least every 28 days.
19. Mail to or from a detained individual must not be opened, read or stopped unless there is reasonable cause to believe that its contents may endanger the security of the centre, the safety of others, or that it is of a criminal or potentially criminal nature. The decision to monitor mail must be considered on a case-by-case basis and approved by the centre manager and the Detention Services compliance team or escorting services in a RSTHF must be notified. Monitoring must take place in accordance with the Detention Centre Operating standard manual 2001 and have due regard for RIPA [Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000](#). Any monitoring must be reviewed as part of the escape risk review process to ensure it is proportionate to the risk. A local record must be maintained of all monitored mail and must be made available to the Home Office upon request. The record must provide an audit trail for each mail item opened, read or stopped and documented justification.
20. Provision of a mobile phone may be denied following appropriate assessment where this is in accordance with [DSO 05/2018 Mobile phones, internet enabled devises and cameras](#).
21. Detained individuals assessed as presenting a risk of escape should be accommodated in the most secure accommodation available within residential units. Their movement should not be more restricted than that of other detained

individuals unless individual circumstances require an alternative approach, for example due to vulnerabilities or medical needs.

22. Where the level of risk is such that normal residential accommodation is not considered suitable, the use of Detention Centre Rules 40 or 42, or STHF Rules 35 or 37, in line with [DSO 02/2017 Removal from association and temporary confinement](#), should be assessed as mitigation to the risk. Use of these rules should be based on a clear, evidenced and individual risk assessment, for example where behaviour, intelligence, or risks identified indicate the need to manage safety or security. Where the threshold for Rule 40 or 42 is not met, alternative mitigations should be considered, such as enhanced supervision, targeted management plans, or other proportionate risk management measures.

For example, risk management measures could include housing individuals who present an escape risk in rooms that face internal court yards rather than external perimeter fences, or areas where they cannot observe staff security processes or see them coming to or going from work. In addition, consideration should be made to housing individuals in areas where doors being unlocked, or perimeter checks cannot be seen from their bedroom.

23. As a minimum, detained individuals and their rooms will be searched upon assessment as an escape or abscond risk.

24. A detained individual who represents an escape or abscond risk shall be moved to a different bedroom at least every 28 days, to a room not facing the centre's perimeter. Property held in possession of the detained individual must be in line with local policies and reviewed during each room move. Detained individuals who are identified as an escape risk while held in a RSTHF must be transferred to a more secure location, specifically an IRC, at the earliest opportunity. The whereabouts of an individual on an escape risk plan must be confirmed during all roll calls.

Escort

25. When a detained individual is on an escape risk plan, it should be considered if an escort to a location outside the centre is necessary or if the objective can be achieved without the detained individual leaving the centre. The detained individual's welfare and medical needs and the professional opinion of healthcare staff involved should be objectively assessed against the risk of escape, when assessing the need to undertake an external escort.

26. An escort risk assessment should take into consideration the additional risk(s). It should ensure the use of any restraint is necessary, reasonable and proportionate, in line with [DSO 07/2016 Use of Restraints](#).

27. The risk assessment must consider:

- Level of restraint.
- The nature of the escort – when the purpose of the escort is to enable the detained individual to attend a medical appointment, advice must be taken from a healthcare professional (in advance) regarding the likelihood of a physical examination or treatment which will require restraints to be removed.
- The nature of the escape risk posed.
- The route and destination of the escorted transfer/removal.
- Prior knowledge of the escort date and time.
- Any other detained individuals on the same escorted transfer/removal.
- Informing the police of a high-risk escort.

28. When a detained individual may have knowledge of the escort, for example because of receiving a notice of departure details, the risk assessment should specify any action to be taken to ensure the risk has been reviewed and any mitigating actions taken.

29. An escape pack must be prepared as soon as possible once a detained individual has been placed on an escape risk plan. This shall include the detained individual's current description, including details of marks, scars, and tattoos; and four up-to-date photographs (preferably colour), endorsed on the back with: IRC details, the detained individual's name and description of clothing worn on the escort. This shall be produced by the IRC's CSP when the detained individual is leaving the centre on transfer or removal.

30. The escape pack must be stored in a location where it can be readily accessed at any time, including during the night state. In the exceptional circumstances where an escort must take place before the escape pack can be completed, e.g. an emergency escort, the escape pack must be taken to the escort at the first opportunity.

Reviewing the Escape Risk

31. For IRCs all detained individuals must be reviewed as soon as new information becomes available and within 28 days of the initial decision to manage the detained individual as an escape risk. The review must be undertaken by a member of the CSP's senior management team. Those who remain an escape risk, must be subject to regular reviews, taking place at intervals not exceeding 28 days. A review

must be undertaken prior to any removal directions or escorted move. For RSTHF a review must be undertaken within 48 hours of the initial decision and before departure from the centre.

32. The detained individual must be informed of the outcome of the review, including the reasons for the outcome, using Annex B as soon as possible. If the detained individual does not speak English, Annex B must be explained in a language that they understand, in accordance with [DSO 02 2022 Interpretation Services](#). Centre staff must take reasonable steps to assist the detained individual in understanding the decision and be given the opportunity to appeal, using Annex C.

33. Once a detained individual is removed from an escape risk plan, an IS91 RA Part C must be completed and detention services or escorting compliance team notified.

Actions to take in the event of an escape or abscond

34. Staff must immediately initiate local contingency plans. This can include using radios to send an "urgent message," or calling 999 if the incident occurs outside the secure perimeter.

35. For escapes, immediate measures must be undertaken to secure the centre to prevent further incidents.

36. [DSO 05/2015 Reporting and communicating incidents in the Immigration Removal Estate](#) must be followed. A report shall be made available as soon as possible, detailing the circumstances of the escape or abscond.

Self-Audit

37. Contracted service providers require an annual self-audit of this DSO to ensure that the processes are followed. This audit should be made available to the Home Office on request.

Revision History

Review date	Reviewed by	Review outcome	Next review
July 2026	Andrew Sims	New DSO	July 2028

ANNEX A

INITIAL ESCAPE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Centre	
Detained Individual Name	
Compliance and Enforcement Reference (CEPR) No	
Nationality	
Index Offence if TFSNO	YES / NO
Reason for consideration	<i>Summary of incident/ intelligence</i>
Additional Information	<i>Any further submissions</i>
Decision Log	<i>Assessment of credibility and summary</i>
Outcome	
Communication monitoring	YES / NO (<i>if yes, detail rationale.</i>)
Review Date	

Form completed by & date	
Head of Security & date	
Home Office & date	

Action Check List (Minimum Requirement)

- ☐ Check for planned escorts/RDs
- ☐ Place photograph in Gate, Control Room, Reception, Security Department and Daily Briefing sheet
- ☐ Escape Pack partially prepared
- ☐ Inform resident in a language they understand (Annex B)
- ☐ Submit IS91 RA Part C

ANNEX B

NOTIFICATION TO DETAINED INDIVIDUAL OF ESCAPE RISK PROCEDURES

IRC/ PDA/ RSTHF	
Detained Individual Name	
CEPR No	

A decision has been made today to place you on the escape risk register. A summary of the reason for this decision is below.

Should you wish to appeal this decision, please complete Annex C - Resident Appeal Against Escape Risk Procedures

<i>Your communications (mail) will / will not be monitored for the following reason(s)</i>	
<i>You will/ will not be permitted a mobile phone for the following reason(s)</i>	
Latest date for review	Max 28 days
Date	
Name	
Position	

ANNEX C

RESIDENT APPEAL AGAINST ESCAPE RISK PROCEDURES

IRC/ PDA/ RSTHF	
Resident Name	
CEPR No	
<i>Please describe the reasons why you wish to appeal the decision to be placed on an Escape Risk Plan</i>	
Signed	
Date	

TO BE COMPLETED BY H Detention Services Compliance Team WITHIN 5 WORKING DAYS

Appeal Outcome	
The reason for this outcome is as follows:	
Name	
Signed	
Date	

ANNEX D

ESCAPE RISK REVIEW FORM

IRC/ PDA / RSTHF	
Resident Name	
CEPR No	
Nationality	
Date placed on an Escape Risk Plan	
Reason for Review	Routine / Change in Circumstances
Immigration Update	<i>Has there been any change in circumstances? Bail, RDs etc</i>
Are there any planned escorts?	
Unit Report	
Local Intelligence report	
Additional Information	<i>Any further submissions</i>
Decision Log	<i>Assessment of credibility and summary</i>
Outcome	
Communication monitoring	YES / NO

Review Date	
Form completed by & date	
Head of Security & date	
Home Office & date	

Action Check List if removed (as minimum).

☐ Remove photograph in Gate, Control Room, Reception, Security Department and Daily Briefing sheet.

☐ Inform resident in a language they understand - Annex B

☐ Submit amended IS91 RA Part C