



Home Office

Detention Services Order 06/2012

Management of property

August 2026



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Document Details

Process: To provide instructions and operational guidance to Contracted Service Providers (CSPs), Escorting 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.

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Contains Mandatory Instructions

For Action: Home Office, CSPs and Escorting staff 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 information 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 Services 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 this instruction, references to "centre" include IRCs, RSTHFs and Gatwick PDA.
3. This DSO **does not** apply to Residential Holding Rooms (RHRs).
4. Two different Home Office teams operate in IRCs:
 - Detention Services (DS) 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 on behalf of responsible officers within the IRCs. They focus on communicating and engaging with people detained at IRCs, serving paperwork on behalf of responsible 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 (IRS) Escorting Operations (Escorting Ops) in RSTHFs. In the Gatwick PDA 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 will be removed by air at the end of their detention.
6. Detained individuals have a 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. Contracted service providers (CSPs) must ensure all detained individuals are aware of the 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, CSP staff must complete a IS91RA Part C: Supplementary Information, advising the total property weight and the agreed action which the individual has signed. Annex A must be explained in the Detainee Transferable Document (DTD) (see DSO 01/2019 [Detainee escort records](#)). This document must be explained by CSP staff, ensuring that all processes are fully understood. Professional translation services may be required where English is not the individuals first language (see DSO 02/2022 [Interpretation services and use of translation devices](#)).
9. The Home Office recognises that airline 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. Individual property allowances do not include food items which should be consumed or discarded by the individual in the IRC 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 allowance 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 CSP 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, CSP staff must complete a form IS91RA Part C: Supplementary Information with the details of the excess property. This form must be sent to the International Returns Services Command (IRSC), and the local DET by email. Acceptance of excess property must be authorised as detailed in paragraphs 34-37.

Searching of property

13. The CSP must ensure that property is properly searched when it is accepted in accordance with [DSO 09/2012 'Searching Policy'](#). The only exception is if it has already been searched by an accredited CSP of the Home Office and has been sealed. However, the CSP 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. 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 by DET, on IRC records and Atlas.
15. Under section 51 of the Immigration Act 2016, a Home Office official (Home Office responsible 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 document will be found in the individual's possession. This includes the individual 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 CSP must record this on 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 CSP should action this within 48 hours of the direction being received.
16. When a document is seized by the CSP they must immediately inform the DET who must update the notes field on Atlas with details of the item and ensure that appropriate storage and handling procedures are followed. Where a passport is found, the DET should determine whether removal is likely within the next six weeks. If removal is imminent, the passport should be held securely on-site in the individual's property in accordance with DET standard operating procedures. If removal is not

likely within six weeks, the passport must be transferred to an approved off-site secure location, consistent with the [retention of valuable documents](#) guidance. In all cases, DET must send a copy of the passport to the responsible casework team by email and record the document's location on Atlas; the physical passport does not ordinarily need to be sent to the caseworker. For any other documents seized, the DET should notify the responsible caseworker, provide copies, and update Atlas. The original documents should be placed in the person's property or transferred to secure off-site storage.

17. Rule 6 of [The Detention Centre Rules 2001](#) and Rule 9 of [The Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018](#) makes clear that detained individuals are entitled to retain individual property - other than cash - unless retention is contrary to the interests of safety or security or incompatible with the storage facilities provided at the centre. The powers [in paragraph 15] do not therefore ordinarily extend to financial documents such as bank debit cards, credit cards, cheque books, and building society passbooks. These documents must not be confiscated or photocopied, nor can individuals be prevented from retaining them in their possession, except where justified under Rule 6. In accordance with Rule 6(1), where any such documents are removed, the removal must be based on sufficient evidence of risk, and detained individuals must be informed of the reason for removal and given access to their financial documents when needed.
18. Detained individuals should be offered the option to voluntarily place financial documents into the custody of the IRC for safekeeping.
19. In line 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 Detention Services Security Team (DSST). These documents may be seized under Section 52 of the Immigration Act 2016. All seized documents must be stored properly in a secure location, with auditable controls in place to prevent loss, misuse, or unauthorised access. The seizure must be recorded on the detained individual's property log and Home Office systems. The detained individual must be informed of the reason for the removal of the documents.
20. The CSP must inform detained individuals of all prohibited items they are not permitted to possess in the centre. This notification must occur at the time of admission to the centre as part of the induction process, and, where practicable, at the point of detention. The information should be provided in a clear and accessible format, both verbally and in writing, to ensure the individual fully understands the restrictions. Professional translation services may be required where English is not the individual's first language (see DSO 02/2022).
21. 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 CSPs on behalf of the individual is the responsibility of the

CSP who must take steps to secure property when out of the individuals' control to do so. These steps must, as a minimum, include auditable processes 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 as part of an ACDT review, or if in hospital then these items should be returned to the centre as stored property and will become the responsibility of the CSP. These items must be accurately recorded and logged prior to storage.

22. 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 5-11. For example, if an individual is moved from Colnbrook IRC to Brook House IRC prior to their removal flight, Colnbrook IRC are responsible for ensuring the individual's luggage is DSO compliant.

Recording of property

23. The CSP must keep accurate records and have a robust system for managing and recording stored property in the event of any dispute or allegation of loss, particularly of valuables.
24. Rule 6(3) of the Detention Centre Rules and Rule 9(6) of the Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 require that an itemised inventory must be kept of a detained person's property which the individual must be requested to sign after they have been given the opportunity to confirm it is correct. Individuals should be asked whether there are items of sentimental value and where this is the case, this should be noted on the inventory against the relevant item. CSP 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 refuses to sign 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.
25. Valuable items may include the following:
- Jewellery
 - Laptops/tablets/personal computers
 - Mobile phones / cameras
 - Games consoles
 - Home stereo systems/powerful portable stereo systems

- Identity documents
- Credit/debit cards / cheque books

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.

26. 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.
27. All postal orders must be made payable to the CSP/centre that the detained individual is being held. The CSP should cash the postal order and transfer the funds to the detained individual's account. Where an individual or other establishment/CSP is named as the payee, CSPs 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 CSP.
28. The CSP should ensure detained individuals arriving with existing postal orders, are informed of this requirement upon arrival.
29. When a detained individual is discharged and returns to the same centre on the same day, CSPs may decide that a fast-track reception option can be followed (see [DSO 06/2013 'Reception, Induction and Discharge'](#)).

Property from Immigration Compliance and Engagement (ICE) teams

30. 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.
31. Where an individual enters detention without any accompanying property, CSP reception staff must refer the individual's details to the welfare office to enable them to consult with the individual and for enquiries to be made to unite the individual with their belongings.

Property from prisons/National Distribution Centre

32. 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. Prisons are not permitted to send property to the National Distribution Centre (NDC) Branston if it will result in a prisoner having more than three boxes stored there in total. An outsize item will be regarded as the equivalent of one

box. This limit should only ever be exceeded where staff have very thoroughly explored all other options with the prisoner and consider that the circumstances are so exceptional as to require additional boxes to be sent for storage. Responsible case-working teams should notify the prison once removal directions have been served on an FNO. The prison should request FNOs' property 28 days prior to removal. If, exceptionally, urgent delivery is required, the establishment must contact the Logistics Office Team at NDC Branston to arrange delivery, using carriers where necessary. Requests are made by prison establishments (FNOs cannot request property themselves). Once removal directions have been set, the prisoner should be advised of the airline's luggage weight limit and encouraged to dispose of any excess baggage. Any property which remains unclaimed after 12 months may be disposed of.

33. If insufficient time is provided to retrieve property from Branston when FNOs transfer to the IRC estate, NDC Branston will only send the property to the FNOs last establishment for collection and will not deliver directly to any private address. 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 detained individual. Under the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, prison establishments must forward any property within four weeks unless exceptional circumstances prevent this.
34. If a FNO is bailed, then the last prison establishment should request the property where they resided. Arrangements will then be made by that prison establishment for the items to be collected by the individual.
35. CSPs 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 CSP 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-working team and/or Escorting Ops, to exercise discretion if they believe there are exceptional circumstances where an individual is being removed by an airline whose weight allowance is higher than 23kg.
36. Confirmation of the detained individual's travel allowance can be obtained through the airline or via the confirmation of booking. Should an individual make their own travel arrangements, the local DET team must notify the responsible case-working team and IRSC that the individual is travelling with authorised additional property.
37. The CSP must keep detailed records of property which is accepted and takes the individual over and above the personal allowance.
38. 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. CSPs 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

39. CSPs must keep accurate records of all detained individual property accepted and taken out of the property store.
40. CSPs must undertake and record daily spot checks of detained individuals stored property seal numbers to assist with the identification of mislaid property. CSPs must also undertake and record monthly property management audits which should include comparing the property recorded on local systems with that held in the store for an individual.
41. In instances of an 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'](#).
42. The CSP must allow detained individuals to hand out possessions to relatives and friends at visiting times.
43. The CSP 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.
44. Detained individuals should be allowed access to their property, upon request within 24 hours, if possible. 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 on the Centre's property log. Detained individuals who require daily living aids or mobility aids, must always have unhindered access to these items while detained. Such essential items must never be restricted due to luggage allowances or limitations on storage space.
45. Detained individuals with removal directions in place who wish to sort their property should be allowed to do so. CSPs must ask detained individuals if they wish to do so and direct them to 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

46. The CSP must inform all individuals on induction to the centre of the personal allowance permitted for removal as set out in paragraphs 5-11 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 can choose their airline.

47. The CSP 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 who will liaise with the responsible case-working 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 more than 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

48. The CSP 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 items of no more than 23kg per item.
49. Detained individuals' luggage must not include dangerous or restricted items prohibited by airlines. CSPs 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. Where hand luggage is not permitted, essential medication required during the journey must be handed to escorting staff to ensure it remains accessible during the flight.
50. 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 in case of any 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 more than the personal allowance – scheduled flights

51. 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 CSP 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 CSP that they are willing and have the means to pay for excess luggage which incurs a charge.
 - d) Leave the property behind and plan for its subsequent shipment.
 - e) Leave the property behind for collection by a friend or family member or for disposal by the CSP.
52. Individuals should be encouraged to pay to ship excess property because it is often cheaper than paying excess weight allowance charges at the airport.
53. For individuals who choose options b) or c) at paragraph 50, CSP 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 Escorting Operations and the local DET team a minimum of 48 hours in advance of collection. If an individual arrives within 48 hours of removal, the CSP must complete form IS91 RA Part C as soon as possible. Escorting Operations will then notify the escorting supplier so that special arrangements can be made for collection of the excess luggage for removal with the individual.
54. In voluntary departure cases, where the individual has made their 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 Escorting Ops of the agreed excess weight allowance.

Property more than the personal allowance – charter flights

55. 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 plan for its subsequent shipment.
 - c) Leave the property behind for collection by a friend or family member or for disposal by the CSP.
56. 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

57. CSPs 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 CSP Manager and the onsite Compliance team.
58. All other property items kept in the centre property store are subject to a property audit every week with any identified missing items reported immediately to the relevant CSP Manager and the onsite Compliance team.
59. 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 CSP/Home Office records (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 CSP for a period of 6 years after an individual leaves detention.

Disposal of property

60. Any remaining property must be retained for 12 months by the CSP, 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 detained individual welfare fund for the benefit of other detained individuals at the centre, in a similar way that shop profits are managed (see DSO 05/2013 [Use of shop profits](#)). This process must be managed by the CSP and documented with a clear, auditable trail. For Short-Term Holding Facilities (STHFs), unclaimed property may be disposed of after 28 days, in line with rule 9(10) of the STHF Rules.
61. 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

62. CSPs require an annual self-audit of this DSO 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 CSPs 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
April 2026	Sunil Patel	Updated to reflect: • Removal of annual self-audit line relative to the DET • Terminology changes from 'centre supplier' to 'Contracted Service Provider (CSP)' • Searching of property section updated	April 2028
August 2026	K. Ward	Amendment to DET process for seized documents.	April 2028