



Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Chair
Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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20 February 2020

Dear Chair,

CONTRACT TO MANAGE THE GATWICK IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRES

I am writing to inform you the Government has appointed Serco Ltd to manage the two Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) at Gatwick (Brook House and Tinsley House), and the pre-departure accommodation for families at Tinsley House, after a full and competitive procurement exercise. The new contract began on 18 February 2020, with service commencement on 21 May 2020, and is for a period of eight years from award, with an option to extend for up to two years. The expected cost of the new contract is £276.6 million over its lifetime.

This is an important further step in modernising the immigration detention estate and responding effectively to Stephen Shaw's findings in his two reviews of vulnerability in detention, lessons from the events at Brook House in 2017, and the National Audit Office's recent review of the previous Gatwick contract with G4S. The new contract will deliver:

- a new staffing model, developed in partnership with the Prison Service, that makes the Gatwick IRCs safer and more secure
- major improvements in staff's professional skills, reducing attrition and strengthening morale
- a two hour reduction in the time detainees are locked in their rooms overnight
- more welfare staff, making more systematic assessments of detainees on arrival
- educational and recreational activities for detainees seven days a week
- assurance on other important safeguarding issues, such as whistleblowing procedures
- a clearer and firmer approach to sanctions for poor performance, addressing the flaws in this respect in the previous contract, which was let in 2007.

The Government is satisfied this represents both a significant improvement in service quality and good value for money for the taxpayer. We are working closely with Serco and G4S to ensure a smooth transition to service commencement on 21 May, and will monitor carefully the ongoing implementation of the new arrangements.

As you know, the Government was grateful for the Committee's review of immigration detention last year, and responded on 23 July. We are clear immigration detention makes an essential but limited contribution to maintaining effective immigration controls and protecting the public. It focuses on those who are persistently non-compliant, likely to abscond, or are Foreign National Offenders who present a risk to the public, with a range of safeguards in place to protect the vulnerable. 95% of those liable to removal are managed in the community; 73% of detainees are held for less than 29 days, and 96% for less than four months, with virtually all those held for more than six months being Foreign National Offenders; and the estate is safer, more secure and almost 40% smaller than it was in 2015.

We continue to make good progress against our strategic priorities for detention reform: minimising the use of immigration detention; strengthening decision-making and safeguards for the vulnerable; improving transparency; and ensuring everyone is treated with dignity in an estate fit for purpose; while continuing to tackle abuse of the immigration system. The new Gatwick contract will make a valuable contribution to these continuing reforms.

I look forward to discussing this and other matters of mutual interest with you and the Committee in due course.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Foster', with a large flourish at the end.

Kevin Foster MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.