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## Brook House: A national disgrace



Covert footage was filmed inside Brook House, near Gatwick Airport  
(BBC)

The recent, heightened scrutiny on Brook House immigration removal centre is long overdue. The problems that exist reflect a deeply ingrained culture of inhumane treatment; a culture of which the Home Office has been aware and has blithely chosen to ignore. Routine practices such as locking detainees in their rooms for over 13 hours a day in inhumane conditions, breaching their human rights, continue to exist with no lawful basis. The Home Office must be held accountable for the suffering of detainees under their watch.

- Five asylum seekers last week launched a legal challenge calling for an immediate suspension of 'lock in' procedures and an overhaul of unsanitary toilets and poor ventilation inside the cells at Brook House – see [here](#).

When the Panorama exposé on Brook House was released we were given a rare glimpse into the G4S-run detention centre (see [here](#)). We witnessed the routine abuse of detainees by detention centre staff, widespread drug use, high rates of self-harming and detainees in utter despair. The documentary shed light on this dark place, providing, in turn, an opportunity both for the voices of detainees to be heard, and for the Home Office to be challenged.

As a law firm which holds a contract with detention centres, we speak to detainees on a daily basis. Following the documentary we started digging deeper to find out what was really going on in Brook

House. Concerns immediately flooded out: our clients confirmed what we had seen in the documentary, then told us that there was more: long lock-ins, un-hygienic cell conditions, overcrowding and the routine use of segregation. Most noticeable was the shocking consistency of their accounts, uncovering what is a living nightmare for Brook House detainees.

According to the Detention Centre Rules 2001, the purpose of detention centres is 'to provide for the secure but humane accommodation of detained person in a relaxed regime with as much freedom of movement and association as possible'. In reality, they lock detainees up for an unjustifiably long time, in horrendous conditions. Concerns about these conditions raised in regular reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) have simply been ignored, and the practices have continued unchallenged.

Long periods locked in a cell have an adverse effect on mental health. Detainees report feelings of isolation, frustration and anxiety. Coupled with the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the cells, where toilets are unscreened and filthy and there is no ventilation, detainees are forced to live, as many of them put it, 'like animals in a zoo'.

We expect our institutions to protect human dignity, but what is so chilling is that the Home Office have allowed conditions to exist for years in the name of an efficient immigration policy. In the light of the anxious scrutiny on Brook House, one has to ask: what has been done by the Home Office? An internal review was suggested for the private contractor G4S, signifying a pathetic and ignoble shift in blame and a clear failure by the Home Office to accept its non-delegable duty of care towards the detainees.

The power dynamic that exists between detainees and the Home Office has always been a barrier to justice. An individual raising a concern in Brook House is unlikely to be listened to. But there is weight in their collective voices. Detainees have lodged a High Court challenge to the lock-in regimes and the appalling living conditions. The Home Office has no choice but to listen.

**About Lottie Hume**

Lottie is a public law caseworker at Duncan Lewis Solicitors specialising in asylum claims and challenging unlawful detention



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