

[Inspection Report Published: Second Annual Inspection of 'Adults at risk in immigration detention'](#)

News story

Following Stephen Shaw's 2016 and 2018 reviews of the welfare in detention of vulnerable persons, the then Home Secretary commissioned the Chief Inspector to report on "whether and how the Adults at Risk policy is making a difference". This is the second of those reports.



Upon the publication by the Home Office of ICIBI's report on its Second Annual Inspection of 'Adults at risk in immigration detention', Independent Chief Inspector [David Neal](#) said:

I welcome the publication of the Second Annual Inspection of 'Adults at Risk in immigration detention'. Following on from [ICIBI's first report](#) on the functioning of the Home Office's Adults at Risk policy, published in April 2020, this inspection explored the efficacy of the mechanisms in place to identify and safeguard vulnerable people in detention.

The challenge of operating an effective 'Adults at risk in immigration detention' policy was inevitably exacerbated over the past 18 months by the Covid-19 pandemic, which posed a particular threat to vulnerable people. While the Home Office and its suppliers managed this challenge well within the immigration detention estate, the population of time-served Foreign National Offenders held in prisons under immigration powers grew significantly over the period of the pandemic. It remains a concern that these individuals have less access to the safeguards offered under the Adults at Risk policy than their counterparts in Immigration Removal Centres and are therefore less likely to be identified and managed as vulnerable.

This inspection found that work to address shortcomings in the Home Office's policy and procedures for identifying and safeguarding vulnerable detainees was moving at an unacceptably slow pace. Though seven of the eight recommendations made in ICIBI's first annual inspection were accepted in full or in part, none of these had been closed by January 2021. Known flaws with the Adults at Risk policy itself remained unaddressed, with work on these issues on hold while new legislation makes its way through Parliament. Though awareness of vulnerability issues among Home Office staff has grown considerably in recent years, a perception within the department that Adults at Risk safeguards are widely abused engenders suspicion towards claims of vulnerability. Robust evidence to substantiate this perception was lacking, and concerns about abuse of safeguards at times appeared to serve as a justification for slow, poor-quality caseworking. An atmosphere of suspicion towards claimants is particularly dangerous when dealing with some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. This danger is compounded when at the tactical level of the delivery of control measures to protect them is uneven and at the strategic level previously identified gaps are left unaddressed.

This inspection has resulted in eleven recommendations, some of which are timebound. Responding to Home Office feedback, I made the recommendations narrower, more directed and more deliverable than those arising from the first annual inspection. It is therefore disappointing to see the Home Office take a piecemeal approach to engaging with the recommendations, with only two accepted in full, and seven partially accepted, watering down both the spirit and the intended consequences of the recommendations.

I have met many committed staff working in this area who care deeply and understand that the quality of their decision-making impacts directly on the lives of some incredibly vulnerable people. Equally, I have encountered mediocre casework and systemic delays which I will continue to call out.

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