

Statement to Parliament: Home Secretary statement on immigration detention and Shaw report

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on immigration detention.

As the House knows, our immigration system is made up of many different and interconnected parts. Immigration detention is an important part of that system. It encourages compliance with our immigration rules, protects the public from the consequences of illegal migration and ensures that people who are here illegally or are foreign criminals can be removed from this country when all else fails.

Detention is not a decision that is taken lightly. And when we do make the decision to detain someone, their welfare is an absolute priority.

The Windrush revelations have shown that our immigration system as a whole is not perfect and that there are some elements that need much closer attention, and that there are lessons we must learn.

That's why I welcome the [second independent review by Stephen Shaw into immigration detention](#), commissioned by this government, which I am laying before the House today. Copies are available from the Vote Office and on GOV.UK.

I am very grateful to Mr Shaw for his comprehensive and thoughtful report. It recognises the progress this government has made in reforming immigration detention since his last report in 2016. But it also challenges us to go even further.

As the review notes, we have made significant changes to detention in the UK in recent years:

Over the past 3 years, we have reduced the number of places in removal centres by a quarter.

We detained 8% fewer people last year than the year before.

Last year, 64% of those detained left detention within a month, and 91% left within 4.

And 95% of people liable for removal at any one time are not in detention at all, but carefully risk assessed and managed in the community instead.

In his report, Stephen Shaw commends the "energetic way" in which his 2016 recommendations have been taken forward. He notes that conditions across immigration removal centres have "improved" since his last review 3 years ago.

We now have in place the adults at risk in immigration detention policy to identify vulnerable adults more effectively and make better balanced decisions about the appropriateness of their detention.

We've also strengthened the checks and balances in the system. Setting up a team of special detention gatekeepers to ensure decisions to detain are reviewed. We've also created panels to challenge the progress on detainees' cases and their continuing detention. We've taken steps to improve mental health care in immigration removal centres.

And we've also changed the rules on bail hearings. Anyone can apply for bail at any time during detention. And in January, we further changed the rules, so that detainees are also automatically referred for a bail hearing once they've been detained for 4 months.

All of this Mr Speaker is good work.

However, I do agree with Stephen Shaw that these reforms are still bedding in, and that there have been cases and processes that we haven't always got right.

Now I want to pick up the pace of reform and commit today to four priorities going forward.

First, let me be absolutely clear that the government's starting point, as always, is that immigration detention is only for those whom we are confident that other approaches to removal will not work.

Encouraging and supporting people to leave voluntarily is of course preferable. I have asked the Home Office to do more to explore alternatives to detention with faith groups, NGOs and within communities.

As a first step, I can announce today that we intend to pilot a scheme to manage vulnerable women in the community who would otherwise be detained at Yarl's Wood.

My officials have been working with the UNHCR to develop this pilot which will mean that rather than receiving support and care in an immigration removal centre the women will get a programme of support and care in the community instead.

Second, Mr Speaker, the Shaw Review recommends how this government can improve the support available for vulnerable detainees. Mr Shaw describes the adults at risk policy as "work in progress". We will continue that progress, ensuring that the most vulnerable and the complex cases get the attention they need.

We will look again at how we can improve the consideration of Rule 35 reports on possible cases of torture, while avoiding abuse of these processes. And we will pilot an additional bail referral at the 2-month point. Halving the time in detention before a first bail referral.

We will also look at staff training and support to make sure that people

working in our immigration system are well equipped to work with vulnerable detainees. And we will increase the number of Home Office staff in immigration removal centres. Third, in his report, Stephen Shaw also rightly focuses on the need for greater transparency around immigration detention. I will publish more data on immigration detention. And, today I have commissioned the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to report each year on whether and how the Adults at Risk policy is making a difference.

Fourth and finally, I also want to see a new drive on dignity in detention.

I want to see an improvement to the basic provision available to detainees. The practice in some immigration removal centres of having three detainees in rooms designed for two will stop immediately.

I have also commissioned an urgent action plan for modernising toilet facilities. We will also pilot the use of Skype so that detainees can contact their families overseas.

Mr Speaker, I am aware of the arguments made on time limits for immigration detention. However, as Mr Shaw's review finds, the debate on this issue currently rests more on slogans than on evidence. That's why I have asked my officials to review how time limits work in other countries. How they relate to any other protections within their detention systems. So that we can all have a better informed debate. And ensure our detention policy is based on what works to tackle illegal migration, but is also one that is humane for those who are detained.

Once this review is complete, I will further consider the issue of time limits on immigration detention.

Mr Speaker, the Shaw Review confirms that we are on the right track with our reforms to immigration detention and that we should maintain a steady course. But Stephen Shaw also identifies areas where we could and should do better.

My goal is to ensure that our immigration system, including our approach to immigration detention, is fair and is humane. This is rightly what the public rightly expects. They want rules which are firmly enforced. But in a way which treats people with the dignity that they deserve.

The changes I have announced today will help make sure this is the case. I commend this statement to the House.