

Written evidence submitted by Serco (COR0032)

Dear Ms Cooper,

Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre

Thank you for your letter of 25 March asking us to provide information about the planning that we have undertaken at Yarl's Wood immigration Removal Centre (IRC) for the impacts of the Covid-19 virus and to explain how we are working with the Home Office to ensure the safe and effective operation of the Centre. You will note that we drew up a pandemic Business Continuity Plan for Yarl's Wood in January; this seems an age ago, but I hope you will take it as a sign we were alert to the challenges that this could raise.

I believe that the Serco team at Yarl's Wood, working closely with the Home Office and our NHS healthcare partners, has responded well to this crisis - so far - and I am pleased to attach detailed answers to the questions that the Committee has asked. I hope that these will provide you with the reassurance that we are well prepared for the impact of the Covid-19 virus.

So far, we have only had one lady who has proved positive for the virus and I am pleased to report that she has recovered and left the Centre. However, I can also assure you that we are taking all possible measures to keep our staff, the residents and our partners at the Centre as safe as anyone can in the circumstances.

May I also take this opportunity to draw your attention to a wider point?

There are around 24,000 Serco employees who are supporting the response to this crisis and they represent a critical component of the UK response to Covid-19. Sustaining vital public services puts Serco people on the front line not only at Yarl's Wood, but in hospitals, prisons, trains, refuse lorries, asylum seeker accommodation, tugs, ships, contact centres and sites of national strategic importance.

Their response has been magnificent. They have stepped up to the challenges public services are facing in a way that the country can be very proud of with a level of commitment, energy and engagement which is extraordinary. I do hope that at some stage the Committee will have reason to want to record the extent to which private sector providers such as Serco have stood alongside public sector colleagues in matters pertaining to Home Affairs in responding to this dreadful crisis. If you have any further questions about Serco's work, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Rupert Soames
Chief Executive Serco Group plc
6 April 2020

Background

Serco manages Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) on behalf of the Home Office and it is the only such Centre that the Company manages. Therefore, we have answered accordingly and not attempted to provide answers to questions about the wider IRC estate.

Please note that Serco has been awarded the contract to manage and operate the Gatwick IRCs. The contract will commence on 21 May 2020.

As at 7 April 2020, Yarl's Wood IRC is currently caring for 39 residents against an overall capacity of 410 people and this already provides a high degree of resilience.

Yarl's Wood has one female resident tested positive for Covid19. This individual was isolated for seven days prior to the test and was confirmed positive. The resident has made a full recovery and been released into the community.

There are a further two residents self-isolating as of 7 April 2020

Guidance and planning

• What business continuity plans are in place at IRCs to respond to an outbreak of infectious disease? Does your planning for COVID-19 differ from these plans and if so, how?

The Serco management team at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre has a business continuity plan (BCP). This conforms to the Serco Management System, which requires every Serco contract to have a BCP.

The BCP covers the key considerations that support the management of a pandemic, such as Covid-19. The three sections specifically related to this are:

- Denial of Access
- Loss of utilities
- Unavailability of personnel.

In addition, Serco put in place a specific pandemic contingency plan at Yarl's Wood on 27 January 2020 which has been reviewed by Serco senior management, including the Company's BCP lead and supported by our healthcare partner Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT), using COVID-19 as a base.

A BCP contingency exercise was then also run to test this against COVID-19. As a result, actions plans were drawn up and implemented, including updates to plans, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) purchasing and isolation area identification.

The Covid-19 plans include the management of isolation areas, designed to protect residents and staff and the continuing updates to stay in line with Government and PHE advice.

• Who in your company overall is the senior manager with responsibility for the planning of COVID-19 response across IRCs?

At Yarl's Wood IRC the Assistant Director Head of Security & Operations is responsible for management of contingency response from Serco and is accountable to the Serco Contract Director.

Serco has stood up its UK & Europe (UK&E) Divisional Crisis Management team, led by the UK&E Chief Executive. This is being managed by the UK&E Chief Operations Officer and supported by a dedicated and professional business continuity team. The team is meeting virtually three times per week and reporting daily.

Please note that Home Office Immigration Enforcement has its own hierarchy, with an on-site Service Delivery Manager.

• Who, in each IRC, is ultimately responsible for the delivery of COVID-19 contingency plans?

o To whom do they report?

The Serco Contract Director has ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the plan at Yarl's Wood, reporting to the Business Operations Director who in turn reports to the Managing Director, Justice and Immigration, UK&E. The Managing Director is a member of the UK&E Divisional Crisis Management team.

• What consultation is taking place to ensure your COVID-19 IRC plans are as robust as possible?

Please include in your response information about discussions with:

o The Home Office

o Visiting partners, such as law firms, charities, and medical professionals

o Detainees and their families

o Staff representatives

Representatives from the Home Office were present for the review of the pandemic contingency plan on 27 January 2020 (see above) and provided direct input into the planned management of Covid-19. This including discussion surrounding responses in the event of a confirmed case.

There have been daily multi-disciplinary meetings held between Serco, HOIE, and the healthcare provider Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) to discuss plans and how best to ensure continuity of service delivery whilst maintaining safety.

Outcomes from this contingency planning have been shared with numerous stakeholders:

- Processes have been put in place to ensure Legal Aid provision continues, with their services taking place via phone daily which residents are aware of.
- Charity partners Yarl's Wood Befrienders, Hibiscus and Kaleidoscope continue to work remotely, with services being advertised so all residents can access the provision via phone sessions.
- Medical care at Yarl's Wood is provided on behalf of the NHS by Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) who are responsible for all communications with their own staff and any other medical professionals.
- Residents have been kept informed about all aspects of guidance on PPE, washing hands, information about access to legal advice, regime update and when significant changes have been made regarding their on-going management. One example of this has been the current offer of single rooms to all residents to allow for self-isolation should any feel that this is required.
- Information has been placed onto Yarl's Wood.co.uk to keep residents' families informed. They have also been informed regarding visits restrictions through the booking telephone line.

All staff and their representatives at the Centre have been kept informed and consulted as the intention has been to be as open and transparent as possible.

• In the worst-case scenario, were substantial numbers of detainees and/or staff unwell, how confident are you that an IRC would be able to operate safely, and humanely?

o What additional support might you require to ensure that it could, and from whom?

o If additional resource was required, would this fall under the terms of your contract with Government? If not, how would this additional resource be provided?

Serco is as confident as we can be at this stage, and with our current population profile, that we have taken all measures to mitigate the effects of Covid-19.

We do not see any scenarios where we will require external assistance other than that which would be routinely available. Some departments at the Centre already have a naturally reduced workload and with additional closures of some non-critical areas of the Centre we are confident that we can continue to manage our Centre in a safe, decent and humane manner.

• What facilities within the IRC might have to be scaled back as a result of a possible outbreak? For example, would communal kitchens and computer access still be available to detainees?

As part of Serco's contingency planning the management at Yarl's Wood has established a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system that allows managers to assess daily the ability to deliver the normal regime in the Centre if there is a significant loss of personnel due to Covid-19.

The system includes minimum staffing numbers required to be able to maintain a safe and secure establishment while continuing to meet the core resident requirements. This rating system has been shared with HOIE.

The rationale behind the planning is that items considered to be 'extra', or non-essential to the immediate welfare of residents would be the first to cease. This would be followed by activities which have significant benefit; however, which are not deemed to be critical services.

Using this system allows us to adopt measures to mitigate any closures. For example, if the library closes, we will still ensure that books, recreational material, and DVDs are all provided via unit officers.

Serco will ensure that at no point will a resident be left without the ability to communicate with their Legal Representative or family and friends.

The residents' weekly phone allowance for purchasing phone credits has already been increased to £10 pw to enable this. This increased allowance is being paid for by the Home Office and is added to residents' accounts weekly. Officers on the units are ensuring that all resident needs are catered for. An example of this is that our staff are working to ensure that Skype sessions are being used and promoted.

Activities rated 'Green' and considered to have a limited impact on the running of the Centre include:

- Arts and Crafts activities
- Cultural Kitchen
- Complementary visitors' bus service
- Social visits
- Education
- Hair Salon
- Welfare
- Hearing Centre

Activities rated 'Amber' and considered to have a Moderate to High impact on the Centre include:

- Gym
- Library
- Communications hub
- Information Technology room
- Shop

Items noted as 'Red' would have to be maintained to deliver a minimum level of service ensuring immediate safety, security and safeguarding levels are not removed. Activities rated 'Red' and considered to have a critical impact on the Centre include:

- Control Room

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- Catering
 - Facilities management
 - House keeping
 - Isolation area
 - Bunting, Dove, Hummingbird units

• What arrangements are being made to increase transportation to and from hospitals, if required?

Yarl's Wood has three vehicles that can all be used to provide transport to and from hospital should it be required. Serco also has agreed procedures with the Bedfordshire Ambulance Service through NHFT/ PHE on collection of residents who may be suffering Covid19 symptoms.

• What plans do you have to ensure that advice to detainees on COVID-19 measures, both from Public Health authorities and from you, is available in languages other than English?

Serco has taken measures to ensure residents receive and understand the advice:

- Posters have been put up in multiple languages advising residents on how to apply PPE.
- Officers are using [the Big Word](#), a specialist translation facility, which operates in every language spoken in the Centre, to talk to residents on the units where required and through admissions and inductions.
- NHFT is laying a key role in this delivery of advice, ensuring all residents are spoken with regularly and appropriate medical observations carried out.

Protecting detainees

• What advice is being given to detainees about protecting themselves against the virus?

• What additional medical services, if any, are being made available to detainees to ensure that any displaying symptoms can be quickly, securely and safely tested?

The IRC population (staff and residents) are being seen every day by a nurse. They have their temperature checked and are being asked if they have developed any new symptoms such as a persistent cough. This information is then documented on each person's medical records.

All residents within the Centre have been advised to self-isolate and everyone has been given the option of a single room to enable them to achieve this more effectively. PPE, including gloves and face masks, has been made available for all residents.

Our healthcare partner NHFT undertook a healthcare forum with residents on 5 March 2020 where Covid-19 was discussed and general advice given to residents.

The residents identified as being at risk due to any comorbidities have been reviewed by an NHFT GP and further actions taken to protect and advise them.

Links to Public Health England's posters have been given to Serco to display around the centre. Note that Public Health England guidelines currently do not advise to test.

Residents are given a Covid-19 advice leaflet on departure.

The NHFT team in Yarl's Wood are advising Residents to self-report however to ensure a more robust check is in place all

• If required, how will detainees be safely isolated while preserving their dignity and access to vital services including medical, pastoral and legal advice?

When available healthcare inpatient beds are being used and there is also a secondary isolation area of supported living facility and pre-departure accommodation.

Phone access is still available to residents in these areas along with fresh air provision.

Pastoral visits take place on request as normal for any isolation but with the addition of PPE application.

• Have you assessed whether cleaning usually undertaken by detainees should instead be transferred to a professional service until the rate of transmission has reduced?

All cleaning is currently undertaken by our Housekeeping team, who are trained in professional deep cleans and use of specialist chemicals to ensure all areas are disinfected.

All Cleaning continues to be managed to an appropriate standard, with increased levels of cleaning throughout. Deep cleans are being done regularly, with all staff having the correct PPE and equipment to maintain satisfactory levels of service.

Residents are supplied cleaning materials daily, if they wish to conduct additional cleaning above & beyond cleaning that is required.

If residents choose to be employed as cleaners they do so, as well as carrying out other jobs in the centre. Residents are not asked to carry out any specialist cleaning.

• The nature of accommodation in IRCs increases the proximity of detainees to each other. Are you considering any changes to accommodation to allow more effective distancing between people?

Yes, there have been changes to help to support this. We are fortunate to have low occupancy (39 residents) enabling us to provide every resident with a single room which allows natural social distancing.

In addition, residents have been given the option to eat in their own room and activity areas now have a limit on numbers at any one time like retail shops in the community.

• 300 detainees have been released from IRCs in recent days. Are they being tested on departure to ensure any who might be infected can be transferred straight to medical care or isolation?

This process is managed by our healthcare partner NHFT and Serco is not involved.. We have been advised that testing of Covid-19 will not take place unless upon hospital admission. Residents are issued a leaflet on discharge which covers key symptoms to be aware of and the instructions if they develop.

Vulnerable detainees

• What information do you hold about vulnerable detainees, and how is this being used to develop plans to protect them from COVID-19?

The healthcare partner NHFT has created and run reports in order to identify the Centre's 'at risk' population due to any comorbidities and they are also discussed within individual needs. Anyone who is registered on this list is placed on a Supported Living Plan (SLP) to support their needs.

However, specific medical information about residents is not shared with Serco as it is Medical in Confidence

The NHFT GP and nurse have reviewed these patients and everyone had an appointment with a nurse on Friday 20 March 2020 when they were given individual information and advice. This information is recorded in their medical records.

Measures to allow these patients to self-isolate have been put in place, which includes single occupancy rooms and meals within rooms etc.

A short report (known as a Part C) is sent to the Home Office to inform them of who these residents are.

• What assessment have you made of the possible additional risk to vulnerable detainees (including but not limited to those who are older, immunocompromised or pregnant)?

As above, all residents are individually assessed daily by NHFT. To our knowledge there are no pregnant women in the Centre. Any resident with a confirmed pregnancy would be referred to the Home Office for release as per the policy.

• What measures are being taken to protect vulnerable detainees, while preserving their dignity and rights?

Healthcare provider NHFT currently holds medical information and manage the risk assessment process. However, as above, specific medical information about residents is not shared with Serco as it is Medical in Confidence. However, NHFT has provided Serco with a list of those residents who are at increased risk from COVID-19. All these people have been placed onto a specific care plan which includes the following actions:

- Key appointment times such as medication, allowed to attend before other.
- PPE issued
- Single occupancy given
- Advice on self-isolation and social distancing re-iterated by custodial and healthcare staff.

The above has been communicated to all residents individually by NHFT to ensure that each resident is aware of their risks and how to manage these.

o What consultation is being undertaken on an individual level with those detainees, to ensure they have the correct treatment and protections?

As above, NHFT clinical staff have reviewed all vulnerable patients and everyone had an appointment with a nurse on Friday 20 March 2020 when they were given individual information and advice. This information is recorded in their medical records.

The ability for these patients to self-isolate has been put in place which includes single occupancy rooms and meals within rooms etc.

A short report (known as a Part C) is sent to the Home Office to inform them of who these residents are and SLPs are also opened for them.

Protecting staff

• What additional hygiene measures have been put in place to ensure the wellbeing of detainees and staff?

o How is the effectiveness of these measures being monitored?

Serco has put in place extensive additional cleaning provision and this is now taking place in the Centre.

- Sanitising door handles, and flat surfaces;
 - Bedrooms routine cleaning includes being sanitised rather than just wiped;
 - Floors are being sanitised with Chlorine tablets;
 - Keys are now being disinfected on return to cabinets;
 - Hand sanitiser available across the Centre;
 - Staff/detainees equipped with additional sanitising products to clean their own areas;
 - Cleaning staff use sanitiser rather than standard products;
 - Bedrooms are now being deep cleaned post occupancy;
 - Hand sanitiser stations are located at key points across the Centre; and
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- Gloves and masks are available for all working people within the establishment.

Serco is ensuring that these additional cleaning measures are being carried out thoroughly and regularly. However, the effectiveness of these measures in relation to virus control is very hard to measure.

• What advice is given to staff to assist them in safeguarding their health both at work, and outside work?

Serco staff at Yarl's Wood are defined as Key Workers by the Government. They are advised to follow government and PHE advice on management of travel, social distancing and hand hygiene outside of work. Within Yarl's Wood PPE is made available and all staff are aware they may wear this equipment should they feel it is required. Anyone working in an isolation area must wear mandatory PPE and contact is limited with any possible COVID-19 cases.

• What staff functions of IRCs are being prioritised in the event of widespread infection? What action is being taken to ensure these priorities can be met?

**Please refer above to the question about 'What facilities within the IRC might have to be scaled back as a result of a possible outbreak'.*

Serco believes that the actions the management at Yarl's Wood have taken as part of contingency planning will allow the Centre to continue to deliver the regime in the Centre if there is a significant loss of personnel due to COVID-19.

The level of regime activities delivered is being kept under constant review. However, when measured against current national levels of sickness and infections it is highly unlikely that the Centre will be in a position where the most basic humane and safe regime cannot be run.. DCOs are able to be cross-deployed between activities in order to ensure the safety, security and decency of the Centre are maintained.

• Some staff will find it difficult to work remotely owing to the nature of their job. What action is being taken, if any, to more readily allow them to do so if they are required to self-isolate?

All those staff who can work from home have been permitted to do so, in line with Government guidelines. Serco is also working to supply more IT equipment where required, so they can continue their duties whilst self-isolating.

• What facilities are available to isolate staff on site at IRCs, should that be necessary?

This scenario has been assessed during our contingency review planning.

At our present occupancy level, the Centre will have enough bed spaces in a separate location to accommodate any staff who need to be isolated.

Additional food stock is being held in the kitchen stores to cover this eventuality to ensure no negative impact on resident meals.

The Centre has also stocked up on beds, bedding and temporary sleeping materials to house staff decently if the need arises in worst case situation.

• What PPE is being provided as standard to staff?

o What assessment have you made of how much PPE you will need in total to protect your staff from infection?

PPE being provided to staff as standard is: face masks, hand sanitiser and gloves with the addition of aprons in the event that someone is managing a resident who is Covid19 symptomatic.

The levels of PPE required is not easy to forecast, given the continuing changes in the pandemic dynamic and the resident numbers. This task is made harder given the unpredictability of the Midland Intake Unit acceptance of mass entrants from boats attempting to cross the English Channel.

However, the Centre's housekeeping manager is monitoring stock and ordering as required to ensure levels are maintained high enough to ensure all functions can be managed appropriately.

The Centre has enough stock to carry out service delivery safely at present, with stock levels reviewed daily.

• Are staff being instructed to change any of their usual working practices in order to keep themselves and others safe? If so, how?

The following are the key points on how staff have been advised to amend their work in order to maintain safety and risk infection being passed.

- PPE available with heightened PPE being mandatory for anyone working with a symptomatic Resident;
- Frequent cleaning of own work areas advised;
- Social distancing advised and encouraged;
- Non-essential staff and Resident meetings have been cancelled to support social distancing;
- Training suspended;
- Management of locations in regimes limited on numbers allowed to attend at any one time;
- Non essential staff are not currently on site such as current training course to reduce unnecessary risk;
- Numerous people working from home to limit unnecessary contact; and
- Vulnerability register has been pushed out to all to ensure our staff at higher risk will not be asked to work with symptomatic Residents.

April 2020