



Immigration
Enforcement

Detention and Escorting Services
3rd Floor Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon CR9 3RR
www.gov.uk/home-office

25 August 2020

Dear interested party,

As an interested party in regard to immigration detention, I am writing to inform you of a temporary change to the way in which we are operating Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) and clarify future plans for the centre. I must be clear at the outset that these changes are temporary and do not represent a change in existing policy on the detention of women.

Our detention estate has adapted to the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that health guidelines can be followed and the safety of those detained in immigration removal centres, staff and visitors is, as always, prioritised.

As you will be aware, the High Court ruled that the Home Office are taking sensible, precautionary measures in relation to COVID-19 and immigration detention. We consider the outcome to be a strong endorsement of the steps we have taken so far and which we will continue to take.

Following action taken by the Home Office, both at the start and throughout the current health pandemic, the number of women in detention and who were accommodated at Yarl's Wood has reached a historic low. It is no longer appropriate to hold such a small number of women in an IRC certified for around 400 and, as such, we are currently accommodating them elsewhere within the immigration removal estate, where dedicated facilities to hold women already exist. These women are not serious, violent or persistent offenders but are in the UK illegally, and we continue to seek to resolve their cases and enforce their removal.


This has enabled Yarl's Wood to be temporarily utilised to accommodate people illegally arriving in the UK by small boat and other clandestine means, where a short period of detention is required as a preliminary to resolving their position. Yarl's Wood has long accommodated a unit, operated as a Short-Term Holding Facility (STHF), in which clandestine entrants may be held by UK Visas and Immigration for processing before being dispersed through appropriate routes. Those being held for processing spend very short periods of time at this STHF and can only be held for a maximum of seven days. This pre-existing facility has been temporarily

expanded to incorporate the whole Yarl's Wood site which we are now operating in accordance with the Short-Term Holding Facility Rules (STHF) 2018.

The STHF Rules cover issues such as admission and discharge; accommodation; hygiene; healthcare; security and safety; and independent monitoring. These Rules can be viewed online at [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). Information about the principles for managing COVID-19 in places of detention, including STHFs, was published on 5 June and can be viewed online at [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

As I have said above, this does not represent a change in government policy on the detention of women. Yarl's Wood remains an IRC and may be used for the detention of women at short notice. There are currently no plans to change our approach to immigration detention and this includes our current IRC footprint, pending the return of Morton Hall IRC to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Riley', is written on a light blue background.

Phil Riley
Director, Detention and Escorting Services