

NIPS Response - Roe House Assessors Stocktake Report

(i.) All parties to the Agreement should reaffirm their support for the fundamental principles and undertakings that it established.

Accepted. NIPS fully reaffirms its support for the fundamental principles of the agreement.

(ii.) NIPS should continue to review the issue of full-body searching, taking into account any advances in technology systems or policy which might obviate or diminish the requirement for such searches such as the use of a Multi-Mode Threat Detector.

Accepted. NIPS continues to review the issue of full-body searching, including the examination of any advances in technology systems or policy. NIPS will specifically investigate the potential of a Multi-Mode Threat Detector in this respect.

(iii.) The current policy for searching prisoners exiting and entering the prison should be examined to see if there may be circumstances in which a prisoner leaving the prison for either home leave or because of a serious medical condition will not automatically be subjected to a full-body search. Any prisoner discharged on acquittal or completion of their sentence should not have to undergo a full-body search on the day of their release from prison.

Accepted. There is discretion in requiring a full body search for prisoners leaving the prison in the case of a serious medical condition. There are a number of examples of this discretion being applied. Medical advice will always be sought where a medical condition is relevant. Prisoners are now no longer routinely subject to a full body search when leaving the prison on home leave or on final discharge from custody.

(iv.) Consideration should be given to incremental increased access to landings, up to a maximum of six prisoners, to facilitate a more progressive and less restrictive free-flow movement system as outlined in the Agreement, especially now that all prisoners within Roe House have agreed to share all the facilities and physical space.

(v.) Any relaxation of the present restrictions would depend on the prisoners acting in good faith and refraining from actions that might prevent staff carrying out their work professionally and free from harm, intimidation or threat.

Accepted. NIPS is committed to incrementally increasing the number of prisoners on the landings, up to a maximum of six. This commitment is dependent on the prisoners acting in good faith and refraining from actions that might prevent staff carrying out their work professionally and free from harm, intimidation and threat, but NIPS would be willing to move initially to 4 per landing to show their commitment to the process.

(vi.) NIPS should continue to ensure that meetings of the Prisoners' Forums are properly planned, scheduled and minuted and that all action points are followed up and reported back. Forum meetings should be held every two months, or more often should a particular need arise, with issues for inclusion on the agenda submitted a week in advance of each meeting. In this way, by addressing issues of mutual concern, the Forums should enhance relationships and develop greater trust between the prisoners and NIPS.

(vii.) Forum meetings should be chaired - for a six month trial period, at least - by an independent body such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The recommendations regarding the Prisoners' Forum are accepted. Forums will be held every two months with an agenda agreed one week in advance. The specific arrangements for the Forum to be chaired by an independent person should be the subject of further discussion. The Chair would not have executive authority.

(ix.) Family visits must be facilitated in a manner that is more family-friendly, and which allows for more privacy and greater personal contact for partners, mothers and children. In the event of a death in a family, there should be appropriate facilities for helping a prisoner to deal with the trauma of bereavement.

Partially accepted. Proposals for a refurbishment of the separated visiting room were not acceptable to prisoners and as a result this will not be progressed further at this time. Refurbishment and family visits will remain as an agenda item for the Prisoners' Forum.

(ix.) There should be a review of education provision, including skills training, with the objective of improving the prisoners' overall level of education and wellbeing.

Accepted. This will be included as part of a wider review of education provision taking place with the Head of Offender Rehabilitation and Learning and Skills providers.

(x.) The NIO policy must clarify eligibility criteria for access to Roe House for separated paramilitary prisoners. There should also be an independent assessment of the rationale for the ongoing isolation of prisoners held within the CSU, and an appropriate appeal process.

This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.