

Bulletin 19 April 2009

SDV News and events

SDV Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 21 April, 6pm

The next AGM will be held on the above date at the Boiler House at the Hidden Gardens. It's important that all SDV members attend.

A new committee will be elected at the AGM so think about putting yourself forward as a committee member.

Nice refreshments will be provided.

<http://www.sdv.org.uk/id15.htm>

Immigration, asylum and detention news

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board for Harmondsworth IRC

The 2008 Annual report of the Harmondsworth IRC is available at the link below:

http://www.imb.gov.uk/annual-reports/08-annual-reports/HaRmondsworth_2008_1_.doc.pdf

Appalling treatment of Heathrow detainees laid bare in damning report

Thousands of foreign visitors and refugees who are detained at Heathrow airport each year are forced to endure degrading living conditions and "deep-seated" negative attitudes about their welfare, an independent report concludes today.

The findings will add to growing concerns about the treatment of foreign people held in detention in the UK before they are granted entry clearance or sent home. The report by the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) makes note of cockroaches in Terminal 4 kitchens and the absence of proper washing facilities for detainees held overnight.

The monitors were so angered by one case, the comprehensive failure to care for the needs of a disabled visitor who was travelling to the UK with her young son, that they sought personal apologies from the staff concerned. Some of the visitors held at Heathrow are incoming passengers detained for questioning or refused entry to the UK. Others are brought to Heathrow from immigration removal centres, prisons or police stations to be deported.

The authors said: "The generic term 'detainee' casts no light on the humanity of the men, women and children to whom it is applied. The IMB perceives a deep-seated negative attitude towards their wellbeing while in detention at the airport, at both

policy and operational levels." Other language which the report said reflected these views included the use of the phrase "these people" to describe visitors held in what staff inappropriately referred to as "pens".

Between 2008 and 2009, 33,100 people were detained at the airport, of whom 22,000 were detained in holding rooms and 11,100 in Queen's Buildings, which is mostly used for holding failed asylum-seekers before they are returned to their own countries.

The UK Border Agency has hired G4 Securicor to staff the short-term detention facilities but the report makes it clear that the IBM thought the Government had "failed repeatedly to supervise its staff in key areas, all impacting on detainees' welfare."

The IMB called on G4 Securicor to address these issues urgently. It said: "We urge the [UK Border Agency] to take necessary steps, whether in terms of their own processes, or the performance of G4S as escort contractor, to drive down the length of time many are detained. Action is overdue."

But the monitors reserved their severest criticism for the Terminal 5 lavatories. "We first visited T5 two weeks before it opened and were shocked to see that the lavatory doors had large gaps at the top and bottom. Whatever went on within would be detectable outside in the holding room."

The IMB has recommended that the Home Office require the UK Border Agency to set up an urgently-needed residential short-term holding facility at Heathrow.

A UK Border Agency spokesperson said: "We are determined all removals from the UK are undertaken in a humane and compassionate way. The majority of people stopped at Heathrow airport for immigration questioning are on a plane home within eight hours. To keep the UK's border secure, we rigorously test all entry cases with fairness and impartiality."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/appalling-treatment-of-heathrow-detainees-laid-bare-in-damning-report-1668853>

Follow this link to read the whole report

http://www.imb.gov.uk/annual-reports/09-annual-reports/Heathrow_2008-2009.pdf

Other news and events

Saturday 18th April Benefit Ceilidh For The Unity Centre

Climate Change Rally, Scottish Parliament 22 April

Please come along to the Scottish Parliament next Weds (22nd April) from 12-2pm and let our MSPs know that we want a strong Scottish Climate bill. The bill will be at a crucial stage, with all MSPs voting on its contents the following week. So it's really important that they hear our voices.

There will be a rally outside the Parliament, with speakers and entertainment as well as the chance to lobby your MSP in person. We'll also be creating a sea of paper cut-out people to show the strength of feeling across Scotland. So if you can't make it yourself, please send a cut-out with your message and we'll make sure you're there! For more information, including a template, go to:

<http://www.stopclimatechaos.org/scottish-climate-change-rally>

Young Scotland Programme: a free place for someone from SDV?

If anyone who fits the criteria is interested in this, please let Kate know and she will apply for a free place

If you have a young person between the ages of 18 and 32 on your staff or working for your organisation as a volunteer, he or she may be interested in a free place on the forthcoming Young Scotland Programme organised by the Institute of Contemporary Scotland.

The summer course of the Young Scotland Programme will be held at the four-star North West Castle Hotel, Stranraer, arriving Tuesday 2 June, departing Saturday 6 June. All hotel expenses, including food and accommodation for four nights, will be met by the Institute of Contemporary Scotland through our Young Scotland Fund. Only travel to and from the venue is not included in this offer.

For information about the Young Scotland Programme, please click on the link below:

http://www.youngprogramme.org/ysp_brochureJUNE09.pdf

Charity Bike Rides and Walks for the Charity of Your Choice (that would be SDV!)

Just bike and Just Walk are events organised by Across the Divide who specialise in charity challenges. Find more details at:

<http://www.just-bike.co.uk/charity-bike-ride/>