

Refugee Children's Consortium

Statement on decision to award G4S contract to run new family detention unit 22 February 2017

Security company G4S has announced that they are to be awarded the contract to run the welfare services at the new family detention unit at Tinsley House by the Home Office. The new unit replaces Cedars pre-departure accommodation, where welfare services had been provided by the children's charity Barnardo's.

The members of the Detention Sub-Group of the Refugee Children's Consortium are deeply concerned that, by placing G4S in charge of welfare at the new facility, the government has shown a complete disregard for the wellbeing of families and young people in detention. We find it unacceptable enough that, six years after the announcement that the government would end the detention of children, almost 100 children are still detained every year. That the wellbeing of those children will now be the responsibility of G4S is deeply troubling.

G4S has a terrible record in running youth detention centres and other facilities. In 2015, an Ofsted report found that G4S staff at Rainsbrook youth prison behaved "extremely inappropriately, causing distress and humiliation". It found that "poor staff behaviour has led to some young people being subject to degrading treatment and racist comments.

G4S has also faced serious allegations of abuse taking place in its Medway Secure Training Centre, with seven staff members reportedly suspended in January 2016 after allegations surfaced that they were physically and emotionally abusing children. A G4S-run youth detention facility in Brinsford attracted the "worst overall findings" of any single prison inspected by former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick. He recorded disproportionate use of force by staff, and some cells so unclean as to be unfit for occupation by detainees, all of whom were 21-years-old or under.

Detention is always harmful to the best interests of a child. The closure of Cedars, and the opening of a new unit within the grounds of Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre have widely been seen as retrograde steps. Where families are held prior to removal from the UK, the wellbeing of children should be paramount. Considering G4S's deplorable track record in caring vulnerable children and young people, even allowing G4S to bid for the contract to provide welfare services at the new unit demonstrates that the government does not consider the wellbeing of children to be its priority or concern.

The proposed operating standards for the new unit are lacking in oversight measures. Members of the RCC individually raised concerns during the consultation on those standards that have not, so far, been addressed. With G4S now taking on the contract for the new unit, it is vital that measures are taken to independently ensure the wellbeing of any child who is detained in the facility.

It is deeply inappropriate that G4S have been awarded the management of the facility, given their record of mismanagement and abuse.

We therefore call upon the Government, as a matter of urgency, to strengthen the oversight that G4S will be subject to in their role at the new facility. Clear auditable standards must be well defined, and independent monitoring and guidance must be put in place to ensure that G4S are held to account in maintaining these standards.

The Refugee Children's Consortium (RCC) is a group of NGOs working collaboratively to ensure that the rights and needs of refugee children are promoted, respected and met in accordance with the relevant domestic, regional and international human rights and welfare standards.