



Home Office

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By email to:
Anne Hubbard, WSMP
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Date 27 September

Dear Anne,

Thank you for sharing the outcomes from the lessons learned exercise the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) led in May 2021, about the use of the Penally Training Camp as contingency asylum accommodation for adult male asylum seekers. The Home Office participated in the lessons learned exercise and I am writing following our commitment to respond to your report and its recommendations

Before addressing the points raised, I would first like to acknowledge the commitment and collective, collaborative effort of a wide range of partners involved in setting up and running the Penally site. This was done in particularly challenging circumstances, as is reflected in your report.

We seek to continuously improve the quality of our engagement and operations using feedback from our partners. You will note that many of the recommendations in your report have already been implemented and have been informed by partner feedback and operational experience from both Penally and our other contingency accommodation site, Napier Barracks in Kent.

Co-ordination, Communication and Future Planning

As you are aware during the height of the pandemic, to ensure asylum seekers were not left destitute and to meet our legal obligations, we were required to set up additional accommodation at extremely short notice at both Penally and Napier sites.

Under normal circumstances it is acknowledged that engaging as early as possible, with both statutory and non-statutory partners, is essential to the successful implementation of any new large scale site. Learning lessons from Penally and Napier, and the feedback we have received from partners involved in the sites, we have developed a comprehensive engagement strategy for use in deployment of future large scale accommodation sites.

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This strategy enables us to develop bespoke engagement plans for each newly identified site and includes early, in confidence engagement, with key partners. The plan is underpinned by bespoke communication products for each site and the local community; and is supported by a Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) led Multi-Agency Forum (MAF).

The MAF brings together key statutory partners from local, central, and devolved governments along with NGOs to ensure that appropriate services are in place for the residents. This forum also enables partners to consider all impacts, (including financial impacts), on residents, local service provision and communities at an early stage in the planning process. Early feedback about this strategy from partners has been very positive. We will continue to review and develop the strategy as we learn from experience.

We welcome your suggestion of adding a playbook to this strategy that sets out key contacts for all partners and will build this into our strategy. To support this strategy we have developed a Standard Operating Procedures for SMPs which set out the engagement process, this is attached at Annex A.

We are also keen to capture the feedback of the asylum seekers we support. We are expanding our Customer Insight survey to capture feedback about Initial Accommodation (IA) and contingency accommodation. This will allow us to capture data on satisfaction rates for those in IA which will be shared with providers to address any shortcomings. The survey covers transfers and appropriateness of accommodation.

We are launching a NAPP (New Arrivals Pathway Pilot) in the North East of England this provides new arrivals with additional localised information relating to their accommodation. We will provide further information about this pilot as it develops.

Our Governance teams continue to work hard to ensure that all contractual provisions including those relating to inductions and debriefs and notice of moves are being met.

Public Health, Safeguarding and Well Being

We take the mental health of asylum seekers very seriously and that is why on 4 August we advertised a six-month £1m Asylum Seeker Mental Health and Wellbeing Grant that directly targets adult asylum seekers running from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The grant is available to all local authorities, SMPs and charities and delivers on 3 specific aims which align with the Home Office goals to protect vulnerable people and communities:

- to deliver training to support improved trauma-informed and culturally competent understanding amongst front-line staff of the needs of vulnerable adult asylum seekers.
- to deliver tailored therapeutic mental health service pilots for vulnerable adult asylum seekers.
- to map existing good practice to provide an evidence base that will enable the targeting of future funding to facilitate the upscaling of successful mental health schemes for asylum seekers to a national level.

We are in the process of evaluating those bids having had considerable interest from potential bidders. We intend to share outcomes on 27 September.

In May 2021 NHS England colleagues published a report entitled 'The Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding Needs of Individuals Seeking Asylum'. The recommendations from this report relate to:

- System leadership
- Access to healthcare
- Covid-19
- Mental health
- Maternal health
- Children, young people, and family health
- UASC
- Disability
- Safeguarding and
- Workforce

With a view to actioning these recommendations, on 25 June, we and Department of Health and Social Care set up a National Asylum Seeker Steering Group (NASHSG) and associated subgroups (relating to access to healthcare, mental health, data-sharing and maternal health).

All parts of the UK are represented at the NASHSG by experts from across the health and immigration sectors (including representatives from devolved administrations) to consider the specific health and wellbeing needs, barriers and solutions for people seeking asylum status in the UK.

In addition, the HOLTCEX National Safeguarding Forum was established in 2020, this brings together social care experts from local authorities across the UK. The group focusses on asylum seekers safeguarding need and aims to share and develop safeguarding good practice. The group was consulted about the new Home Office safeguarding strategy, which will be published in the coming months. Their feedback and that of the NASF Equalities group has helped to shape the new HO strategy.

Site Operation

Processes in relation to the operation of large scale sites are subject to continuous review. Whilst Penally has closed, the Napier site continues to provide support and shelter to destitute asylum seekers. I have outlined below some of the enhancements we have made to our processes and operations which may provide reassurance about our continued commitment to seek and act on feedback from our partners:

- COVID 19 planning and safeguarding processes have been updated. Additional coronavirus tests have been introduced and the site operates at a reduced capacity to mitigate the risk of COVID 19 outbreaks.
- The wellbeing of asylum seekers is taken extremely seriously, and all necessary and legal steps are taken to protect people in our care. Individuals are screened for vulnerabilities before being placed on site and are advised that they will be resident for up to 90 days in total. All residents receive comprehensive induction shortly after arriving onsite.
- All onsite staff receive safeguarding training and all Home Office staff encountering

asylum seekers are trained to adopt a risk-based approach towards potential

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indicators of vulnerability and to refer relevant cases to the dedicated Safeguarding Hub. Further details about allocation of accommodation can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/990240/allocation-of-accommodation-v6.0-gov-uk.pdf

- We work closely with our partners in health to ensure that asylum seekers have access to health care including dentistry; consideration of the most appropriate delivery model forms a key part of early engagement. The efficiency of the process to transfer medical records between health care providers is outside of our control however the MAF process will enable us to bring partners together to resolve delays where they are identified.
- Home Office have weekly calls with the residents at Napier. These are undertaken on a block by block basis using interpreters. Migrant Help (MH) who are on site to resolve individual issues and residents are encouraged to use their services. Where a query is specific, the Home Office will arrange separate call with the resident to allow for more space and time to discuss matters that are not suitable to be addressed within a wider forum.
- All communications and letters are provided in the residents language of choice.
- Any common issues affecting the site, or a number of service users are taken away by the Home Office who will seek a resolution.
- The accommodation provider has introduced a weekly block forum meeting to engage and discuss with the residents through nominated reps about the issues that they are experiencing within the site management. Residents have acknowledged that this process has improved mutual respect between staff and users. Block meeting reports are passed to Home Office colleagues for further insight and awareness of site specific issues.
- In line with the general population COVID 19 and its associated lockdowns severely limited social interaction for asylum seekers. As national restrictions have eased our providers have re-introduced recreational and outdoor activities, NGOs are able to visit the sites once again to provide advice and support .
- A nurse is available on site on weekdays and all residents have access to out of hours care should they need it.
- Wi-Fi is available to residents

Our accommodation providers and sub-contractors have made significant improvements to the Napier site, to improve governance Senior leaders have been appointed by us and Clearsprings to oversee the operation at Napier and drive forward improvements to the site, supported by a dedicated Home Office team.

A joint general risk register and issues log along with a business continuity plan and evacuation plan have been developed, which has improved the operation of the site and confidence of the onsite teams

In addition we have invested £500,000 improve the site including upgraded accommodation.

Funding

We are aware that funding is a key concern at this time, whilst Local Authorities do not

receive central funding for services for asylum seekers dispersed into their area, we have

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been working with a number of Local Authorities, including Cardiff, to establish the costs to Local Authorities associated with supporting dispersed asylum seekers. Data has been provided to the Home Office and our economists have reviewed this data and have arrived at an average cost to Local Authorities. We will continue to engage with Local authorities, Local Government Associations and the Devolved Administrations to understand these costs further.

In addition, the engagement process set out above will ensure that any local or central funding issues for services such as Health, Education or Policing will be identified at an early stage in the process and will enable key partners to work together to resolve any issues in their areas of responsibility.

It is worth noting that should SMPs require additional funding at any time it is open to them to apply for increased funding via a structured business case that sets out their additional resource requirements as per paragraph 19.4 of the Home Office Grant Terms and Conditions.

Finally I would like to reiterate that we take the wellbeing of all asylum seekers extremely seriously and reassure you that all of the learning and feedback we receive from our partners is recorded and is used to inform ongoing improvements to the asylum dispersal process. We have recently appointed a senior official to lead transformational work in this space.

We look forward to continuing, productive engagement in relation to our joint ambition to open up new dispersal areas in Wales, a nation of sanctuary, to reduce reliance on hotel and contingency accommodation in the future. Finally, I would like to thank the WSMP and partners for taking the time to provide us with this valuable feedback.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Rymer', written over a large, light grey watermark that says 'CONFIDENTIAL'.

Tim Rymer
Deputy Director
Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate