



Home Office

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and
Immigration

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Catherine West MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Your Reference: ZA10286

6 April 2021

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of 5 March 2021 to the Home Secretary regarding the continued use of Napier barracks in Kent as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. I am replying as the Minister for Future Borders and Immigration.

The UK has a proud history of welcoming and supporting those in need of our protection. The support provided by the UK Government includes the provision of accommodation and subsistence to those who would otherwise be destitute whilst their asylum claims are considered.

Asylum seekers are ordinarily placed in initial accommodation for a short period before moving into dispersed accommodation once their claim for support has been assessed.

The current global pandemic has presented significant challenges when it comes to the provision of asylum accommodation and has necessitated the need to source sufficient contingency accommodation to meet demand. This has included the use of hotels and more recently, following a review of available government property, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) agreed to temporarily hand over a site in Kent.

The use of contingency accommodation continues to be essential as we work to fix the broken asylum system. We must ensure our statutory obligations can always be met and ensuring we treat all asylum seekers humanely and with the dignity they deserve.

The asylum seekers (single, adult males) being accommodated at the site are not being held under detention powers. All resident on site are free to come and go in line with the wider public health guidelines in place at any particular time.

All asylum seekers are subject to an initial screening process by UK Visas and Immigration, which includes security and safeguarding checks. We are taking great care to ensure those with known vulnerabilities are not moved to this type of accommodation. Where new safeguarding issues do emerge, we are ensuring action is taken swiftly, including - where appropriate - a re-assessment of the person's suitability to be accommodated at the site.

The accommodation we provide is safe, habitable and fit for purpose. Asylum seekers' basic needs are being met on site, including the provision of three meals per day. We also have appropriate health care provision available.

Asylum seekers are staying in safe, coronavirus (COVID-19) compliant conditions, in line with the law and Public Health England (PHE) guidance on social distancing requirements, including recommendations when using dormitories. The accommodation has been adapted to ensure social distancing can be maintained and occupancy in dormitories is limited to ensure a minimum distance between beds of at least two metres. This is complemented by a range of additional safety measures including increased cleaning, availability of hand sanitisers, and a track and trace system. Our service providers have robust plans in place should a COVID-19 outbreak occur.

We have established links to the appropriate leads from the local authority, PHE and statutory bodies and are committed to work with them to support the people who we accommodate and the communities where they live. Regular Multi-Agency Forums are held to ensure concerns are understood, so issues are managed and resolved accordingly.

All asylum seekers have access to the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility service provided by Migrant Help, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days week, through which they can raise any concerns regarding their asylum support accommodation or support services. Any reported maintenance issues in accommodation will be logged with the accommodation provider, who will take appropriate action to resolve them.

The Home Office is clear, the use of contingency accommodation will only continue for as long as absolutely necessary whilst we work to reform the broken asylum system to make it firm and fairer - compassionate to those fleeing oppression, persecution and tyranny but tough on those who abuse it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Foster', followed by a period. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and Immigration