



UK Visas
& Immigration

Contingency Asylum Accommodation

Stakeholder briefing pack

December 2020

This pack provides key information about our use of contingency asylum accommodation.

Why are we using contingency accommodation?

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to provide support including accommodation to destitute asylum seekers whilst their claims are being considered.

In recent months, the asylum system has faced significant pressures and it has become necessary to source, and use, additional temporary accommodation, such as hotels and more recently Ministry of Defence (MoD) sites to ensure the Home Office can continue to meet its statutory obligations towards destitute asylum seekers.

In 2019, the asylum accommodated population remained broadly static at around 47,000. As of December 2020, we are currently accommodating 61,327 people under the asylum support provisions.

As part of Government measures to fight coronavirus, at the end of March 2020 we made the decision that asylum seekers who would normally no longer be eligible for accommodation because their claim has been resolved will continue to receive support. This was to ensure that people were not made homeless and able to follow social distancing. Whilst some cessations of support have since resumed, we continue to see more people enter than leave our supported accommodation.

Temporary accommodation currently in use or being mobilised includes:

MoD sites in Kent and Pembrokeshire

- Following a review of available government property, the MoD permitted the Home Office temporary use of Napier Barracks in Kent and the Penally Training Camp in Pembrokeshire.
- Previously both of these sites accommodated serving armed forces personnel.
- Asylum seekers have been arriving at the sites since 21 September 2020.
- Napier can accommodate a Covid safe capacity of 431.
- Penally can accommodate a Covid safe capacity of 234.

Barton Stacey

- We are looking at using a site on MoD land in Barton Stacey, Hampshire.
- The plans have not yet been finalised and if we go ahead, we will continue to work with local partners to progress in a way which addresses the impact of the local community.

Yarl's Wood

- To ensure we have sufficient accommodation available to meet our statutory obligations we are planning to use a vacant site adjacent to the existing Immigration Removal Centre to accommodate asylum seekers while their claim is being fully processed.
- Our plan is for temporary accommodation to be erected on the site for up to 187 asylum seekers.
- Asylum seekers on this adjacent site would be separate from the Immigration Removal Centre and are free to come and go as they please.

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It is important to remember that all the asylum seekers we are accommodating are seeking protection in the United Kingdom and are awaiting the outcome of their asylum claims. They are not being detained, are free to come and go and are subject to the same laws and protections as any other member of society.

You can find useful information on the asylum-seeking process on gov.uk:

- <https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum>
- <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/07/03/factsheet-asylum-accommodation-and-applications/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-asylum-accommodation>

Who will be using the contingency accommodation?

This contingency accommodation is being used to accommodate single, adult male asylum seekers. These are people who have claimed asylum in the United Kingdom, and whose asylum claims are under consideration. They are not being detained and so are free to come and go but are expected to be on site overnight.

Checks are made to confirm suitability for transfer to the contingency accommodation, before individuals are moved to the sites. This process helps ensure that anyone with indicators of vulnerability, modern slavery or exploitation, or significant health issues are not transferred to the sites. All asylum seekers are fully briefed by our accommodation providers in advance of any move.

We are not using the sites to accommodate women or children. All those being moved to the sites will have already completed any required period of self-isolation in other accommodation since their arrival in the United Kingdom, and we will not be moving anyone onto the sites who is showing Covid-19 symptoms.

Is the accommodation suitable?

All our accommodation is safe, habitable, fit for purpose and correctly equipped in line with existing asylum accommodation standards, contractual requirements and is Covid-19 secure.

Accommodation numbers and configuration of the sites take account of the need for Covid-security and are in line with guidance from the relevant health authorities.

How long will the sites be used for?

This is temporary, contingency accommodation whilst we work to get the system back in balance and we will discontinue it as soon as we are able.

What is being provided for asylum seekers at the sites?

All the basic needs of asylum seekers are met in this accommodation including their welfare needs will be met.

The sites are catered (three meals per day) and options are provided which cater for special dietary, cultural or religious requirements; additional meals are provided as required. There is power, heating, water and support items such as toiletries are provided, along with access to laundry facilities.

Televisions are available at the sites and wi-fi is also provided allowing for internet access. Mobile telephones are provided if asylum seekers do not have one to ensure that contact can be made.

All asylum seekers have access to a 24/7 Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service provided for the Home Office by Migrant Help where they can raise any concerns regarding accommodation or support services.

Our accommodation providers and Migrant Help also work with a range of stakeholders which include national non-governmental and charitable organisations to provide support to asylum seekers, for example, English lessons or volunteering opportunities.

What information is provided to the asylum seekers on arrival?

Information about what asylum seekers can expect from asylum accommodation is primarily given through a comprehensive induction process. This includes information relating to adherence to local social distancing and Covid-19 regulations. Home Office information on rights and entitlements is also provided.

The induction process is supplemented by the information provided online by the Home Office:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-asylum-accommodation>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-support-uk-rights-and-expectations>

and Migrant Help:

- <https://www.migranthehelpuk.org/about-asylum-services>.

Induction material is provided in the language of the country of origin or language of choice. Interpreters are available 24/7 when speaking with Migrant Help.

What healthcare is being provided?

Healthcare arrangements in place at the sites are agreed between the Home Office and the relevant Clinical Commissioning Group. Our accommodation provider will transport

people to medical appointments when needed.

What safeguarding measures are in place?

Using information from Home Office's screening processes and safeguarding teams, asylum seekers' cases are pre-checked and only allocated accommodation at the sites if there are no indicators of vulnerability, modern slavery or exploitation in their case history.

Asylum seekers may contact Migrant Help 24 hours a day, 365 days a year if they need help, advice or guidance, that includes raising issues relating to safeguarding.

Our accommodation providers are on site 24/7 to deal with any issues raised by the residents and to ensure that their safeguarding requirements are met.

If our accommodation providers have reasonable grounds to suspect that the safety and wellbeing of asylum seekers, staff, or members of the community are at risk, they are obliged to take appropriate action including contacting the police, ambulance or local authority services or making an onward referral to the Home Office safeguarding team.

What Covid-19 guidance and measures are in place?

Measures are kept under review to ensure compliance with the law and all public health advice in England. These measures include:

- Written guidance in respect of self-hygiene, social distancing and self-isolation is issued to all asylum seekers;
- Hand sanitisation stations are in place around the sites with pictorial guidance on Covid-19 and social distancing requirements;
- Mealtimes are staggered to enable social distancing at meal times;
- A test and trace system is in place at the sites. Asylum seekers are reminded of the current local restrictions and social distancing requirements in place when they leave the sites;
- Any asylum seeker user who develops symptoms of Covid-19 will be instructed to self-isolate and provided with suitable accommodation to enable them to do so.
- Daily welfare checks will be made on individuals isolating;
- Asylum seekers will have the same access to testing as the general population.

What security arrangements are in place?

At all these sites security risk assessments are conducted, and local authorities and police forces are consulted on matters relating to security, safety and community cohesion, to minimise the risk to any individuals that are accommodated on the sites as well as members of the community.

The sites will have a security presence 24/7. The Home Office and its accommodation provider keep security under review.

All incidents are reported to the Home Office immediately by its accommodation provider. The Home Office then work with them to put additional measures in place, if required.

What legal advice will asylum seekers have access to?

All asylum seekers have access to a 24/7 Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service provided for the Home Office by Migrant Help where they can request assistance or guidance regarding legal advice on a freephone number.

What about the impacts on the local community?

The Home Office recognises that there will be concerns raised by local communities regarding the sites and are committed to detailed engagement with local authorities and stakeholders to understand and mitigate risks and concerns of the wider community.

This includes working closely with the police and other agencies in matters relating to the operation of the sites, safety and security and the handling of any protests.

The safety and security of the local community, asylum seekers, staff and visitors to the sites is of paramount importance.

Our accommodation providers are experienced and have all the required policies and procedures in place around security, safeguarding, critical incident management and health and safety.

The Home Office continue to work with the police, local authorities and other partners who are involved in managing community relations to ensure that any issues that may arise are handled appropriately and concerns addressed.

How is this being funded, including unexpected pressures on local services?

The Home Office is funding the operation of the sites, which are designed to meet the basic needs of asylum seekers. In addition, the Home Office will pay full local taxation costs in terms of council tax and business rates where appropriate.

Beyond this, the Home Office does not provide additional funding to meet any residual costs incurred by local authorities in connection with the presence of supported asylum seekers in their areas.

The Home Office and Local Government Chief Executive Group, which meets quarterly, provides a forum for the discussion of matters of strategic interest, and this includes discussions about funding and the asylum system.

Yarl's Wood Stakeholder Update [December 2020]

What is planned for Yarl's Wood?

It is intended to use contingency accommodation at Yarl's Wood for three months to accommodate a maximum of 187 asylum seekers.

The site will accommodate people that are seeking asylum, are destitute, and need accommodation whilst their claims are considered. This is part of our initial accommodation, which is intended for asylum seekers whilst we arrange for their move into longer-term, dispersal accommodation.

We plan to only accommodate single adult males at Yarl's Wood. By doing this we free up capacity in the traditional Initial Accommodation estate for families, single women and vulnerable men. The religion and country of origin will vary as with all newly arrived asylum seekers we need to accommodate.

This site has been assessed against basic requirements for the Home Office; that the site is capable of housing, safely and securely, on a temporary basis, large numbers of single adult male asylum seekers, that the site is either available (or could be vacated at short notice), and that the accommodation provider could operate the sites safely and securely, providing for asylum seeker needs.

Yarl's Wood will be run by a dedicated team from Serco, an accommodation provider that has considerable experience managing asylum seeker accommodation under the Asylum Accommodation and Support contract.

The site, whilst adjacent to the Immigration Removal Centre, will be run entirely separately, with asylum seekers free to come and go but expected to be on site overnight.

When will the site be ready?

We are working at pace to have the site ready as soon as possible given the urgent need to create additional capacity. This includes not just the physical construction, but also that the accommodation provider has arrangements in place to commence operations safely and provide for asylum seekers' needs.

Stakeholders will be informed in advance of any asylum seekers arriving on site, this is expected to be in early January.

What will the accommodation consist of?

Asylum seekers will be accommodated separately, in single rooms; each will contain a bed, en suite shower and toilet, and be heated. They will be provided with essentials, including toiletries.

There will be separate, hard sided temporary structures for communal areas such as for dining, and for a faith room and a recreational room. These areas will be configured to allow for social distancing to be maintained.

There will be recreational facilities and activities, recognising the need to keep asylum seekers occupied and able to exercise. Our accommodation provider, Serco, will ensure these activities are set up once the site is operational, taking account of asylum seekers' needs, practicalities of the site and Covid restrictions to ensure people are able to effectively social distance and infection control is able to be managed.

What else is happening to ensure the site is ready?

Work continues to provide the physical infrastructure. Our accommodation provider, Serco, is also responsible for a range of activities including:

- furnishing offices and communal areas
- inventory of consumables
- provision of on site security
- provision of catering services, housing officers and cleaners
- reactive maintenance
- transport shuttles

What are you doing to minimise Covid-19 risks?

Accommodation numbers and configuration of the site will ensure it is Covid-safe and follow guidance from the relevant health authorities, including Public Health England.

Covid-safe measures include, but are not limited to:

- Written guidance in respect of self-hygiene, social distancing and self-isolation will be issued to all asylum seekers;
- Hand sanitisation stations around the sites with pictorial guidance on Covid-19 and social distancing requirements;
- Mealtimes are staggered to enable social distancing at meal times;
- Asylum seekers will have the same access to testing as the general population.

Asylum seekers at Yarl's Wood will have already been in the UK for some time and have completed the necessary period of self-isolation in existing Initial Accommodation facilities before their transfer.

The provision of accommodation for asylum seekers is an essential government service but in line with guidance and regulations, movements of asylum seekers between locations will be kept to a minimum. It is likely that at the present time with Yarl's Wood in an area in Tier 4 that movements will be from adjacent areas in the South East of England also in Tier 4.

What healthcare provision will be in place?

At our other sites, healthcare arrangements are linked to local NHS provision and we are working on the same for Yarl's Wood. Discussions are already underway with relevant health care stakeholders.

At our other sites if healthcare assistance is needed Monday to Friday, 5pm to 9am, or at weekends, then asylum seekers will contact NHS 111 or ask for assistance from provider staff to do so. In an emergency 999 will be called. Asylum seekers will also be provided with a taxi to attend any scheduled weekend appointment.

Separately all dental concerns or requirement for appointments are referred to a central point who will arrange for the necessary treatment.

What are you doing about the welfare of asylum seekers?

We take the wellbeing of asylum seekers in our care extremely seriously and all the basic needs of residents will be met with this contingency accommodation.

Our accommodation provider, Serco, will ensure there are further facilities and activities on site. These are likely to include televisions, reading material and sporting equipment, recognising the need to keep people entertained and able to exercise. Once the site is mobilised and the appropriate health care facilities are in place we intend to work with a range of stakeholders to arrange activities, which may include English for Speakers of other Language (ESOL) classes and co-ordinate volunteering and donations. Again, taking account of asylum seekers' needs, practicalities of the site and Covid restrictions in line with Public Health guidance.

Whilst we will be ensuring that those known to have specific vulnerabilities are not accommodated at the site, we do also recognise that many asylum seekers will have had difficult journeys to the United Kingdom and everyone needs to be treated humanely and with dignity and provided with the support they need. We will work with our accommodation provider, Migrant Help and our stakeholder community to ensure that remains our strong focus throughout.

What service does Migrant Help provide?

Migrant Help provide, through the AIRE contract, free independent advice, guidance and information on asylum related matters, including finding legal representation. This is a national helpline that is free and accessible to all asylum seekers in the UK. Migrant Help are contracted to provide information on the availability of legal advice and representation and signposting of asylum seekers to the Legal Aid Agency, where appropriate upon induction into temporary accommodation.

Migrant Help are currently engaging with the Legal Aid Agency about support with identifying legal firms in the Bedfordshire area with capacity to take on more clients and that would be willing to visit and support clients at this facility. This information would then be put into a poster format to be displayed on site.

Space will be made available on site for private appointments between the asylum seekers and their legal representative (subject to Covid restrictions) as well as telephone connectivity to make contact with their legal representative as frequently as they require. It would not be appropriate to invite legal firms to site to run surgeries as that could be seen as favouring certain legal firms, which we would always want to avoid and ensure people understand they have a choice.

What about the local community?

We recognise that there will be both a considerable amount of support for the asylum seekers from within the local community, but also legitimate concerns about both their wellbeing, and also the potential for wider community impacts.

The asylum seekers being accommodated are seeking protection; they are being supported as they would otherwise be destitute, and their basic needs will be met on site. They will be provided with orientation material on induction, including in relation to Covid, and will be expected to adhere to rules and conduct themselves in the same manner as any other member of society.

The Home Office is working closely with its accommodation provider, Serco, and with statutory bodies including the police, to ensure the site operates securely and safely, and that the wellbeing of all those on site and in the wider community is maintained.

