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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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9 March 2022

Dear Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP,

Thank you for your email of 9 February to the Home Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents regarding asylum seeker accommodation. Your email has been passed to the Home Office's Direct Communications Unit for a reply.

The UK has a proud history of welcoming and supporting those in need of our protection. The Government is committed to doing everything necessary to protect the rights of asylum seekers and provide them with the safe, secure accommodation they deserve.

Asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute can obtain support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This is a comprehensive support package usually consisting of free, furnished accommodation (with utility bills and council tax paid) and a weekly cash allowance to meet other essential living needs, like food, toiletries and other items. Asylum seekers also have free access to healthcare through the NHS and children under 18 have access to full-time education.

The level of the cash allowance is reviewed annually, using a methodology that has been in place since 2014. This methodology has been judged by the Court of Appeal to be both rational and lawful. The current level of the allowance is set at £40.85 per week for each person in a household. The allowance is reduced if the individual is being provided with full-board accommodation where food and other essential needs are provided in kind. More detail of how the review methodology works is set out in the reports that can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-review-of-cash-allowance-paid-to-asylum-seekers>.

Under the AIRE (Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility) contract, Migrant Help provides guidance and assistance to asylum seekers about their rights and responsibilities and to signpost them to appropriate services.

In regard to provision of cleaning products, for those who are housed in full board accommodation, all cleaning items and laundry services are provided free of charge.

The asylum accommodation estate is under serious strain, which is why other forms of accommodation, including former Ministry of Defence (MoD) sites, have been brought into use to ensure we meet our statutory obligation to provide accommodation to asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. Using hotels to cover shortages in the estate is not a sustainable model.

The current global pandemic and an increased influx of small boat arrivals has presented us with significant challenges when it comes to the provision of asylum accommodation. During these unprecedented times, the Home Office has acted quickly to source contingency accommodation, including several hotels and former MoD sites, to create additional capacity to ensure our obligations can continue to be met in full.

With regards to the housing of asylum seekers in hotels, whilst we recognise that hotels are not ideal, the Home Office has a statutory requirement, as set out in Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, to arrange accommodation for asylum seekers and their dependents who would otherwise be destitute. We are working with our accommodation providers to find appropriate dispersed accommodation across the UK.

The accommodation at Napier was also set up in response to these enormous pressures placed on our asylum system. These pressures remain, and we will continue our use of Napier Barracks as contingency asylum accommodation until March 2025.

All asylum seekers accommodated in Napier are provided with three meals a day and have access to an onsite nurse and a local GP surgery. The support and integration of asylum seekers accommodated in Napier is the same as those accommodated in other types of accommodation. They have access to Migrant Help, a voluntary sector organisation funded by the Home Office, are able to use the NHS free of charge and are provided with other support to cover their essential living needs, in the same way as other asylum seekers accommodated by the Home Office.

All Home Office staff and contractors engaging with asylum seekers are trained to adopt a risk-based approach towards potential indications of vulnerability and to refer relevant cases onto the Safeguarding Hub, a dedicated resource assigned to identifying and safeguarding vulnerable asylum seekers. The Safeguarding Hub works closely with the statutory agencies to signpost vulnerable customers for support with their health and social care needs.

Napier is not a detention centre and residents are free to leave the site. Individuals can choose to cease residing at Napier of their own volition, for example because they have obtained alternative accommodation from friends or family.

The asylum system has been under mounting pressure for several years and increased and sustained intake and growing numbers of people awaiting a decision has led to significant delays in concluding asylum claims.

We are investing in a programme of transformation and business improvement initiatives that will speed up decision making, reduce the time people spend in the asylum system and decrease the number of people who are awaiting an interview or decision. We have extensive recruitment and training plans in place, including career progression options that will aid the retention of staff.

In the New Plan for Immigration, the Government committed to introduce accommodation centres. The aim of the centres is to ensure appropriate support is provided to individual claimants whilst also increasing efficiencies in the wider asylum system – for example by enabling caseworkers to be co-located and thus speed up decision making.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write and I trust this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Stephen Gearing**

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