



Home Office

Chris Philp MP  
Minister for Immigration Compliance  
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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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11 February 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email correspondence of 2 November 2020 to the Home Secretary on behalf of one of your constituents, [REDACTED] about the use of former military barracks for accommodating destitute asylum seekers. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

The UK has a proud history of welcoming and supporting those in need of our protection. The support provided by the 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 initial 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 two of their sites in Kent and Pembrokeshire. The use of such contingency accommodation continues to be essential as we work to fix the asylum system, given the imperative to ensure that our statutory obligations can always be met and that we treat all asylum seekers humanely and with the dignity they deserve.

Please be assured we take the safety and wellbeing of the asylum seekers we accommodate very seriously. The accommodation we provide is safe, secure, habitable, fit for purpose and correctly equipped in line with existing contractual requirements for asylum accommodation. The Home Office is taking all necessary steps to protect the people in its care. The asylum seekers (all single, adult males) being accommodated at the MOD sites are not being held under detention powers. All asylum seekers on site are free to come and go in line with the health guidelines in place at any particular time.

All asylum seekers are subject to an initial screening process by the Home Office, which includes security and safeguarding checks, and we are taking great care to ensure that those with identified vulnerabilities are not moved to MOD sites. Where new safeguarding issues do emerge, we are also ensuring that action is taken swiftly, including - where appropriate - a re-assessment of the suitability of the site for the individual.

Asylum seekers' basic needs are being met at the MOD sites, including three meals per day provided by an on-site chef. We also have appropriate health care provision at the sites.

Asylum seekers are staying in safe, coronavirus-compliant conditions, in line with the law and social distancing requirements. The MOD 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 of surfaces, availability of hand sanitisers, and a track and trace system. Our service providers have robust plans in place should a coronavirus outbreak occur.

We have established links to the appropriate leads from the local authority, health 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 that concerns are understood, and issues are managed and resolved accordingly.

Like the rest of the country, all asylum seekers are being asked to maintain social distancing to help in the fight against coronavirus. All occupants living in our accommodation have been given guidance in their own language relating to hygiene, washing hands, social distancing, coronavirus symptoms and what to do if they become symptomatic. We have robust measures in place to deal with any cases of coronavirus.

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 defects with the accommodation are reported to the accommodation provider, who will take appropriate action to resolve them.

Following a recent review, it has been decided that people who have been found eligible to receive support under section 95 or 4(2) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and who are accommodated in full board facilities, including the MOD sites, should receive a payment of £8 per week. This sum is intended to provide sufficient funds to cover the cost of buying items to meet clothing needs and pay for non-prescription medicines and any necessary travel. We are paying and backdating payments to those who have been in initial accommodation for a significant period.

I hope this makes clear our commitment to ensure the health and wellbeing of all those asylum seekers in our accommodation. 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 our system.



**Chris Philp MP**  
**Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts**