



Home Office

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick
MP
Minister of State for
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Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
Select Committee Team
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

31 January 2023

Dear Dame Diana,

Thank you for your letter of 17 January on behalf of the Home Affairs Committee about the Short-term Holding Facility (Amendment) Rules 2022, which came into force on 5 January, and provide for the establishment of residential holding rooms (“RHRs”).

Manston provides secure processing of small boat arrivals, including immigration triage and asylum screening. As you are aware, Manston has been operating as a holding room, with a 24-hour detention time limit (subject to extension in exceptional circumstances) under the Short-term Holding Facility Rules 2018 (“the STHF Rules 2018”). As you are also aware, when there are significant numbers of arrivals within a very short time period, it has proved challenging to undertake robust initial reception processes, alongside health and security checks, within this 24-hour timeframe.

Manston is a unique detention facility and it is only right that bespoke rules are developed that recognise this unique status. The new rules set out a 96-hour time limit for RHRs. This time limit bridges the gap between the existing 24-hour time limit that applies to detention in a holding room (also known as a non-residential STHF) and the time limit that applies to detention in a residential STHF (a normal maximum of 5 days, extendable to an absolute maximum of 7 days where removal directions can be set within a further 2 days).

Whilst the majority of the Manston facility will continue to operate as a holding room, the availability of a RHR provides staff with additional time to process people safely, complete initial checks and carry out necessary immigration functions. Processing individuals through Manston as quickly as possible remains the primary objective. I am clear that it is therefore an appropriate, safe and decent response to the unprecedented pressure on our border.

As you say, the Short-term Holding Facility (Amendment) Rules 2022 provide for detention in a RHR to be extended beyond 96 hours in exceptional circumstances. The Home Office does not intend to define what constitutes

“exceptional circumstances” either in the updated guidance referred to above, or elsewhere. This is because it would be impossible to capture all possible eventualities in one single definition. However, it is likely to include, for example, where arrivals have more complex needs that will take more than 24 hours to resolve or days of unexpected and very large numbers of small boat arrivals.

To reflect the fact that a RHR may be used for a longer period of detention than a holding room, the new rules require it to provide more extensive facilities than are available in holding rooms. There is therefore a programme of work ongoing to upgrade the Manston site, utilising the former Officers’ Mess and discrete barrack accommodation. The RHR cannot be operationalised until this is finished. Ongoing works are expected to deliver capacity for around 100 residents by late March and expand to circa 600 beds by the Summer. The accommodation areas compliant with the new rules will be refurbished to meet these standards, including sleeping arrangements, access to showers and toilets; personal storage and access to videolink facilities. The Home Office will publish updated guidance on the Short-term Holding Facility (Amendment) Rules 2022, including the requirements around RHRs, when that work is complete and the RHR is operationalised. This is expected to be around late March in line with the ongoing works outlined above.

I recognise your concern regarding the provision of sleeping accommodation (Rule 14) in RHRs and the welfare of women and children, and I can reassure you that the starting point will always be to provide single sex-accommodation. We strive to prioritise the welfare and processing of vulnerable adults and families from their initial point of arrival. Single adult women and single adult men will continue to be held in their own discrete accommodation, as is the case in residential STHFs. The only time that residents will mix is in family accommodation, which is carefully supervised and relatively lightly occupied, barring exceptional circumstances.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Robert Jenrick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration