

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick
Minister of State for Immigration
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

28 March 2023

Dear Chair,

Thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee on 25 January. Please see below answers to a number of follow up questions.

1. What is the fastest time in which a migrant can be processed through Manston?

We aim to process everyone who arrives at Manston as expeditiously as possible. This should be within the 24 hours stipulated in the short-term holding rules, other than in exceptional circumstances.

From the Spring there will also be the capability to detain arrivals for up to 96 hours following the Statutory Instrument legislation that has recently been passed.

During processing at Manston, all national security checks and wherever possible an asylum screening interview are completed before arrivals are dispersed.

The length of time this takes is governed by many variables including the volume of arrivals, the time of their arrival and the complexity of the checks that are required.

2. What % increase are you planning in detention estate capacity?

The Government is committed to a fair and humane immigration policy that welcomes those who arrive legally, but tackles abuse of our border and protects the public. Immigration detention is crucial to delivering this.

The immigration removal estate is kept under review to ensure sufficient resilience and capacity for the men and women it is necessary to detain for the purposes of removal.

In April 2022 the Government announced a package of measures to tackle illegal migration, further strengthen safe and legal routes and break the business model of people smuggling gangs. As part of wider work to support this package, it was confirmed that the removals estate would be expanded and the Government has announced its intention to open two new immigration removal centres on the sites of the former Campsfield House immigration removal centre at Kidlington in Oxfordshire, and the former Haslar immigration removal centre in Gosport, Hampshire.

The two sites will comprise a mix of refurbished and new build accommodation and will provide decent, safe and secure accommodation for up to 1000 men in detention. The new IRCs will not be operational until at least late 2023. The opening of Haslar and Campsfield IRCs will increase our detention capacity by 45% from 2200 to 3200 beds.

3. Data on the gender and diversity mix of staff at Derwentside IRC

We remain focused on the specific needs for women in our care. Derwentside is operated in line with the Detention Centre Rules 2001, published operating standards for IRCs and Detention Services Orders; a strong framework which includes specific guidance on women in detention.

All staff working with women receive appropriate gender specific training, in addition to any generic training they receive when they undergo initial training, and undertake appropriate refresher training, including equality and diversity, human trafficking and modern slavery. Detention Service Order 06/2016 Women in the Detention Estate sets out the minimum provision of services for women and can be found on gov.uk here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-in-detention>.

The workforce requirements for Derwentside IRC reflects the lessons learned from detaining women at Yarl's Wood IRC and includes a ratio of female to male custodial staff that is appropriate for the specific needs of women in detention. It is our aim that around 60% of uniformed staff will be women. In relation to Detainee Custody Officers (DCOs) employed at Derwentside, the below table shows the total and proportion of female DCOs broken down by month for 2022.

<i>Month</i>	<i>Total Female DCOs</i>
Jan 2022	78 (67%)
Feb 2022	75 (69%)

March 2022	76 (67%)
April 2022	73 (68%)
May 2022	71 (68%)
June 2022	64 (66%)
July 2022	61 (68%)
Aug 2022	66 (65%)
Sept 2022	63 (65%)
Oct 2022	64 (62%)
Nov 2022	64 (65%)
Dec 2022	60 (61%)

As referenced in Frances Hardy's letter of 25 January to the Chair of the committee, diversity data on DCOs at Derwentside is held and has been provided by staff on a voluntary basis. However the General Data Protection Regulation Purpose limitation Principle ([Article 5.1.b](#)) applies, which states that any personal data arising from staff surveys or recruitment can only be shared if it was made clear at the point of collection how that data would be used, or if all individuals involved gave their consent. As this information has been provided voluntarily and anonymously, we are unable to facilitate consent and share this information.

4. Data on occurrences of female detainees being under constant supervision of male staff

There were no occurrences of male staff undertaking constant supervision of detained women in 2022. Detention Service Order 06/2016 Women in the Detention Estate sets out the minimum provision of services for women and can be found on gov.uk here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-in-detention>

5. Details of information provided to detainees about accessing legal advice, including face-to-face advice, at Derwentside and the procedures in place for detainees to access it

Detained individuals are advised of their right to legal representation, and how they can obtain such representation, within 24 hours of their arrival at an IRC. All individuals detained in an IRC are provided with a list of the Detained Duty Advice (DDA) scheme duty solicitors and are made aware that they are eligible for a free 30-minute consultation, regardless of financial eligibility or the merits of their case. This signposting occurs on a minimum of two occasions; during the induction (within 24 hours of arrival) provided by the supplier, and again during the Home Office Detention Engagement Team induction within 48 hours of arrival.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) operates free legal advice surgeries in IRCs in England. Individuals who are detained are entitled to receive up to 30 minutes of advice regardless of financial eligibility or the merits of their case. There is no restriction on the number of surgeries an individual may attend. Individuals detained in IRCs can also access privately commissioned legal advice, including legally aided advice provided through other means.

At Derwentside, DDA scheme appointments are available twice a week and are facilitated face to face upon request. Legal advice from non DDA representatives can also be facilitated either face to face, by telephone or video conferencing (skype) upon request. Information about legal aid is advertised on all residential units and in languages that meet the current demographic of residents.

Detained individuals can also utilise private legal representation (outside of the legal aid DDA scheme). All people in IRCs are provided with a mobile phone and have access to landline telephones on request, , email and video calling facilities which can be used to contact legal representatives, family, or friends.

6. We understand that in 2019/20, the Home Office conducted a review in of its decision-making re asylum claims made on the grounds of sexual orientation, and that the review led to an Action Plan. What did the review find, what was in the Action Plan, and what changes have been implemented as a result?

In her reply to a Parliamentary Question asked on 22 May 2019 by Kate Green, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins confirmed that there were no plans to publish the findings of the internal review. In respect to the guidance provided for caseworkers, we have ensured that our products are accessible, easy to understand and cover what caseworkers need to deliver high quality decisions in asylum cases. As and when guidance is reviewed we routinely consult with operational teams internally and external stakeholders to seek their views before publishing any updated version.

7. How frequently do decision-makers receive refresher training on claims based on sexual orientation?

Initial training is provided to new decision makers by the Asylum Operations Training Team. This is through a five-week Foundation Training Programme covering all aspects of asylum decision making, including bespoke modules dedicated to considering sexuality and gender identity. To consolidate training a practical skills workshop has been developed and rolled out to all decision makers to provide further guidance on this area. Senior case workers retain the right to refresh decision maker interview skills through the workshop if it is considered necessary.

8. What is the average length of service of an asylum caseworker?

The Home Office currently employs 1,375 asylum caseworkers in total, as of January 2023.

We do not have an exact breakdown of asylum caseworkers currently employed by the Home Office, in term of number of years served.

We have implemented a recruitment and retention allowance which has reduced Decision Maker attrition rates by 30%, helping us maintain experienced asylum Decision Makers.

9. What precise information are women given about gender sensitive interview practices – inc. female interviewer; childcare – when invited for their substantive interview?

Women who claim asylum can request a female interviewing officer and interpreter if this would make them feel more able to disclose sensitive information. They can also request to bring a friend or companion with them to interview to provide support if there are exceptional circumstances, assuming that it is not otherwise inappropriate for them to attend, for example because they are separately claiming asylum themselves. We do not expect claimants to disclose sensitive information in front of children and recognise the importance of childcare to give claimants the space they need to disclose relevant information.

Asylum claimants are provided with an information booklet at screening, which includes information on the asylum process and the support available, including during the interview. They are asked at screening and in the invitation to interview letter if they have a gender preference for their interviewer and interpreter. Further, the invitation to interview letter provides answers to frequently asked questions, which includes information on requesting a male or female interviewer and interpreter, who can accompany claimants in the interview and information regarding childcare.

10. How many requests are made by female asylum seekers to have a female interviewer, and what proportion of such requests are granted?

The Home Office does not record the number of requests made by female asylum seekers to have a female interviewer in a way that can be easily aggregated so we cannot provide figures for this response. However, claimants are asked at the screening interview if they would like a male or female interviewer. They are also asked again in the invitation to interview letter and advised to telephone us if they have a preference and have not advised us already and that we will do our best to arrange this. When a request for a male or female interviewer or interpreter is made in advance of the interview, every effort is made to meet this requirement as far as operationally possible. If this requirement cannot be met on the scheduled day the interview is normally re-arranged.

11. To set out in detail actions being taken to find UASCs who are missing from hotel accommodation, including steps being taken to investigate whether any children have been abducted and/or exploited

The wellbeing of children and minors in our care is an absolute priority. Robust safeguarding procedures are in place to ensure all children and minors are safe and supported as we seek urgent placements with a local authority.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are supported by team leaders and support workers who are on site 24 hours a day. Further care is provided in hotels by teams of social workers and nurses. All children receive a welfare interview on their arrival at accommodation, which includes questions designed to identify potential indicators of trafficking or safeguarding issues. The movements of under-18s in and

out of hotels are monitored and recorded and they are accompanied by support workers when attending - organised activities and social excursions off-site, and where specific needs are identified.

Any child or minor going missing is extremely serious, and we work around the clock with the police and local authorities to urgently locate them and ensure they are safe. Many of those who have gone missing are subsequently traced and located. When any child goes missing, a multi-agency, missing persons protocol is mobilised, alongside the police and local authorities, to establish their whereabouts and ensure they are safe. The Home Office follows the MARS (Missing After Reasonable Steps) protocol, which is widely used across children's homes and supported accommodation for minors, to help support safeguarding planning and prevention. Local authorities have a statutory duty to protect all children, regardless of where they go missing from. This can be from home or from a care setting as a looked-after child. If a child is found and returned to a UASC Hotel, an on-site Social Worker conducts a returns interview to identify appropriate next steps.

If indicators that a child is a potential risk of modern slavery present, a referral is made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The Single Competent Authority (SCA) make a decision on this referral. Children who are identified to be at risk are placed on a safety plan by the team at the hotel.

We are determined to stop the use of hotels for all minors. To achieve this goal, we are providing local authorities with £15,000 for every unaccompanied child they take into their care from a UASC Hotel. In 2022 there were 5,242 applications from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), a 39% increase on the number prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (3,775 in 2019). Of these, 3,681 (70%) were aged 16 or 17. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has seen 4,187 children transferred to local authorities with children's services between 1 July 2021 and 31 December 2022. This compares to 775 children transferred in the same time frame in previous years (440% increase).

12. What is the average length of time taken to process applications for visas in the Homes for Ukraine scheme?

The Government moved at pace to set up three schemes to ensure Ukrainians fleeing the war could find sanctuary in the UK: the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Ukraine Extension Scheme and the Ukrainian Family Scheme.

The Home Office does not capture data on the average processing times for Homes for Ukraine visas. However, we are working hard to process applications under all the Ukraine schemes to ensure they are resolved as quickly as possible.

The number of cases we are currently processing is comfortably in line with the applications we are receiving, with over 212,000 visas granted so far.

13. By what calculation did the Home Office arrive at the allocation of 69p within the £40 per week asylum support?

The rate of Asylum Support increased to £45 per week in December 2022 for those in dispersal and self-catered accommodation and £9.10 for those in full board accommodation. The rates are reviewed each year to ensure they cover essential living needs. The items identified as essential include food, clothes and toiletries. Costs related to clothes, toiletries – which includes female sanitary products – household cleaning and laundry items, non-prescription medicines and those related to travel and communication, were based on market research conducted in 2019 which was thereafter uprated by applying the 10.1% CPI rate for September 2022. Our accommodation Providers provide female sanitary products in Initial (and Contingency) Accommodation sites

14. Do you have data on instances of pregnant women being moved between asylum accommodation (whether contingency accommodation or dispersal accommodation) and the proportion of instances in which the advice of the woman's clinician had/had not been received in advance of the move?

We do not hold this information in a reportable format and to provide it would involve a manual trawl of individual records and free text notes, done at disproportionate costs.

15. Has the Government considered adopting the Scotland position on free period products?

The Home Office provide cash support for asylum seekers in Home Office Accommodation to pay for essential living items, including period products. In December 2022, we raised the allowance to £45 for those in Dispersal and Self Catering Accommodation and £9.10 for those in full board accommodation. We also committed to reviewing the methodology for previous increases to ensure financial support was appropriate.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Robert Jenrick', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration