



House of Commons
Public Accounts Committee

The Asylum Transformation Programme

Seventy-Sixth Report of
Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	4
Conclusions and recommendations	5
1 Working through the backlog of asylum decisions	8
The backlog of asylum decisions	8
How addressing the backlog will impact on the wider asylum system	10
2 Finding accommodation for people who are waiting for a decision	12
Sourcing alternative accommodation to hotels	12
Hotel use, safeguarding, and Home Office stakeholder engagement	13
Formal minutes	15
Witnesses	16
Published written evidence	16
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	17

Summary

The Home Office's failure to process asylum claims efficiently has led to unacceptable costs to the taxpayer. In 2022–23 the Home Office spent £3.6 billion supporting destitute people who are waiting for it to make a decision on their future. Since we took evidence, the Home Office has published data showing that 175,000 people were waiting for an asylum decision at the end of June 2023, a 44% increase over the previous 12 months.

Despite claiming to have increased the number of asylum decisions it makes through its asylum and protection transformation programme (the Programme), the Home Office still faces a huge challenge to clear the backlog it has allowed to build up. We are concerned that the way the Home Office has increased the number of decisions it makes, by introducing poorly designed questionnaires and assuming claims are withdrawn, may mean that people with a genuine need for asylum will not have their application properly considered.

The Home Office's plans for finding accommodation for people seeking asylum are also in doubt. Through the Programme, the Home Office initially expected to find a total of 500 new beds every week to accommodate people currently in hotels, but it has found, on average, only 48. It seemingly has no plan for how it will acquire enough accommodation in local areas to end its reliance on hotels. The Home Office's current plan, to make potentially vulnerable people share rooms with someone they may never have met, has not been thought through. We were not convinced that the Home Office has considered the trauma some people seeking asylum will have faced, or the protections required to ensure it is implementing room-sharing safely. The Home Office presented this 'plan' to local authorities as a *fait accompli*, rather than an issue for discussion.

We were also concerned that the Home Office did not seem to understand the implications of making more asylum decisions on the wider asylum system. The Home Office acknowledged that making more decisions will mean courts hear significantly more appeals and Immigration Enforcement will need to detain and remove many more failed asylum seekers. But the implications of this will not be set out in a proper business case until 2024, after the deadline the Prime Minister set for clearing the backlog of older cases. By this point, it will be too late for the courts and Immigration Enforcement, as well as local authorities and the Department for Work & Pensions, to make informed preparations. Unless the Home Office improves its understanding and communicates this across the system quickly, people seeking refuge may just be passed from one backlog in the Home Office to another backlog elsewhere in the system.

Introduction

The Home Office is responsible for making decisions on whether to grant or refuse asylum applications, and for supporting and accommodating destitute people while they are waiting for a decision. At the end of June 2023, around 175,000 people were awaiting a decision and the Home Office was providing accommodation for around 113,000 of them. Over half of the people waiting for a decision had been waiting for at least a year.

The Home Office started to develop the asylum and protection transformation programme (the Programme) in 2021, to create a fair, supportive, and efficient system. So far, the Home Office has prioritised increasing the number of decisions it makes so it supports fewer people, and increasing its supply of accommodation so it can move people waiting for a decision out of hotels and into somewhere cheaper. The Home Office expects the Programme to save £15 billion on the cost of supporting people seeking asylum over the period 2022–23 to 2031–32.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Despite the Home Office's confidence that it will clear the backlog of asylum decisions by the end of December, it still faces a huge challenge to do so.** At 30 June 2023 there were around 175,000 people awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. Around 91,000 people (52% of the total backlog) had been waiting for a decision for at least a year, having made an asylum claim before the Nationality and Borders Act came into force on 28 June 2022. These people are part of the 'legacy' backlog of decisions, which the Prime Minister has committed to clearing by the end of 2023. The Home Office told us in July that it had stopped all its other recruitment programmes so it can hire more caseworkers to make asylum decisions, and that it aimed to have 2,500 caseworkers by September 2023, up from nearly 1,600 in July. The Minister for Immigration subsequently told the House that the Home Office had reached 2,500 caseworkers by 1 September 2023. However, it takes around a year for new caseworkers to be fully productive so the promised new staff might come too late to meet the Prime Ministers commitment to clear the legacy backlog by the end of 2023. The Home Office would need to make around 2,600 decisions a week from the start of July to the end of December if it is to meet this commitment, 900 more than the 1,700 that it told us it made in the first week of July. Even if it is successful in clearing the legacy cases, the Home Office still expects there to be more than 80,000 'newer' claims waiting for a decision.

Recommendation 1: *The Home Office should update the Committee, as part of its Treasury Minute response, on its progress in increasing caseworker numbers and decisions and clearing the legacy backlog. It should also set out how it intends to reduce the backlog of newer claims that it has allowed to build up.*

2. **The focus on streamlining decision-making may inadvertently lead to more flawed decisions, or the withdrawal of genuine asylum claims.** The Home Office is now collecting more detailed information through a questionnaire for people from six countries where most claims result in asylum being granted, in the hope that it will be able to make decisions quicker and without lengthy interviews. The Home Office worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to reform its asylum processes, but we share the UNHCR's concern that the poor design of the new questionnaire may affect caseworkers' ability to make the correct decision on a claim. We also note the significant increase in 'administrative' decisions, where claims are withdrawn either by the claimant, or directly by the Home Office if someone has not complied with their requirements. We are concerned about how the Home Office will assure itself that it is not incorrectly withdrawing genuine asylum claims, should the significant number of withdrawals persist.

Recommendation 2: *Alongside its Treasury Minute response the Home Office should write to the Committee setting out:*

- *The number of administrative decisions made each month since the introduction of its streamlined asylum process;*

- *How its internal quality assurance arrangements have changed to reflect the introduction of the streamlined asylum process, what these arrangements have shown about quality of decisions made under the process, and how learning from this has been used; and*
 - *What further evaluation of the streamlined asylum process is planned, in particular to ensure that the Home Office makes the right asylum decisions.*
3. **The Home Office does not have a credible plan for ending the use of hotels to accommodate people waiting for a decision and the unacceptable cost this creates.** The Home Office spent £2.3 billion on hotels in 2022–23 to accommodate people waiting for their asylum decision. In April 2023, there were 48,000 people waiting for a decision while living in hotels. To reduce its reliance on hotels the Home Office has sought ‘dispersal accommodation’ in local areas. But while it initially hoped to find 500 new beds every week, it found, on average, just 48 new beds a week in the year to April 2023. The Home Office has struggled to procure larger scale accommodation and has now told us it is “maximising the use of hotels” by increasing the number of people who share hotel rooms, though it could not set out how much money this would save. We were surprised to hear that the Home Office is paying for in excess of 5,000 empty hotel beds as a ‘buffer’ in case its initial accommodation sites, such as Manston, cannot cope with the number of people arriving. The Home Office has told us that to plan effectively it needs to estimate future demands on the UK asylum system, and that it uses several ‘scenarios’ to model how many people will arrive in the UK. However, it told us that it does not have a date for when it expects to stop using hotels under these scenarios.

Recommendation 3: *The Home Office should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out how and by when it intends to reduce its use of hotels, and when it intends to stop using hotels altogether, under its different planning scenarios about the number of people applying for asylum.*

4. **The Home Office is failing to engage meaningfully with local authorities on decisions that affect their residents and already strained public services.** We have previously reported that the Home Office has not adequately engaged with local stakeholders on asylum accommodation. This continues to be the case. The Home Office acknowledged that its letters about maximising the use of hotels were to inform local authorities of its decision, not to consult them. It has also sent contradictory letters to councils about how much accommodation it intends to source in local areas, and it seemed to have no practical solutions to progress its ‘place-based-approach’. Worryingly, the lack of coordination between the Home Office and local government means the Home Office is competing with councils and their partners to secure accommodation, driving up prices and exacerbating the homelessness challenges that local authorities already face.

Recommendation 4: *The Home Office should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out how its ‘place-based approach’ will give local authorities a meaningful say on the use of accommodation in their areas, and what specific actions it will take to improve its relationships with local authorities.*

5. **The Home Office does not have adequate safeguards to protect against the risks of vulnerable people having to share accommodation with strangers.** The Home Office has written to councils informing them that the number of people staying in hotels will double. It plans to achieve this by making people share rooms. The Home Office said an assessment would be carried out before people are moved into shared rooms, but it struggled to explain what that assessment would consider other than language and nationality. There was no clarity on whether the Home Office planned to consider the trauma that people claiming asylum might have faced and, while the Home Office said it would review health records when we asked about mental health, we are concerned that it does not have a robust process in place to make sure sharing arrangements will be safe. If the Home Office implements room sharing without proper safeguards there could be serious consequences.

Recommendation 5: The Home Office should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out in detail the measures it will take to identify any vulnerabilities individuals waiting for a decision have, and how it will manage the risks to the individual that these may present.

6. **The Home Office failed to convince us that it understands the full implications of its programme on the wider asylum system, affecting the ability of others to plan.** The current business case for the asylum and protection transformation programme is incomplete and unrealistic. The Home Office acknowledged that it has not looked broadly enough at the impact of rapidly clearing its asylum backlog, and that its business case ignores the challenges and costs that bodies such as Immigration Enforcement and the courts will need to overcome to avoid creating new backlogs. The Home Office will not be updating its business case until early 2024, at least six months later than it had told the NAO and after the date it expects to have made decisions on all of the older, ‘legacy’ cases. This delay means other organisations in the wider asylum system cannot make informed plans and makes it more likely that new backlogs will appear elsewhere in the asylum system.

Recommendation 6: The Home Office should publish its updated business case so the intentions and impacts of the Programme are clear and transparent to Parliament, the public and other organisations.

In its Treasury Minute response, the Home Office should set a date by which this business case will be published.

1 Working through the backlog of asylum decisions

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Home Office about its asylum and protection transformation programme.¹
2. The Home Office is responsible for making decisions about asylum claims, and for supporting and accommodating destitute people while they are waiting for a decision. In 2022–23 the Home Office spent £3.6 billion on asylum and protection, up from £1.9 billion the year before. Around £2.3 billion of this was on hotel accommodation for people waiting for their decision.²
3. The Home Office has made a series of legislative and policy changes since 2021 which it believes will reduce the cost and improve the fairness of the asylum system. This includes the New Plan for Immigration (2021), the Nationality and Borders Act (2022), the Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda (2022), and the Illegal Migration Act (2023).³
4. Alongside these changes, the Home Office has also introduced the asylum and protection transformation programme (the Programme). The Programme has four core objectives: improving the ‘customer journey’; improving working experience; improving public and partner trust; and creating a flexible, sustainable and efficient asylum system.⁴ The vision of the Programme is to create a system “that is fair, supportive and efficient, where decisions made are right first time and customers in need of protection receive it quickly, and all are treated with dignity and respect”. So far, the Home Office has prioritised increasing the number of decisions it makes so it supports fewer people, and increasing its supply of accommodation so it can move people waiting for a decision out of hotels and into somewhere cheaper.⁵ The Home Office expects the Programme to save £15 billion on the cost of supporting people seeking asylum over the period 2022–23 to 2031–32.⁶

The backlog of asylum decisions

5. On 13 December 2022, the Prime Minister made a statement to the House setting out that the Home Office would “abolish the backlog of initial asylum decisions” by the end of 2023.⁷ The Minister for Immigration later clarified that the Prime Minister was talking about ‘legacy’ claims, which is how the Home Office describes asylum claims made before the Nationality and Borders Act came into force on 28 June 2022.⁸ As at 30 June 2023 there were 91,000 people who had been waiting for decisions as part of the legacy backlog, meaning they had been waiting for at least a year. On top of this there were a further 84,000 people, from 66,000 asylum applications made since 28 June 2022, who were also waiting for a decision.⁹ In total, at the end of June 2023, there were around 175,000 people

1 C&AG’s Report, The asylum and protection transformation programme, Session 2022–23, HC 1375, 16 June 2023

2 C&AG’s Report, figure 4

3 C&AG’s Report, para 5

4 C&AG’s Report, figure 7

5 C&AG’s Report, para 1.11

6 C&AG’s Report, figure 8

7 PM Statement on illegal migration: 13 December 2022, 13 December 2022

8 Hansard, Asylum Backlog, UIN 902854, 19 December 2022

9 Home Office, Immigration system statistics: Asylum and Resettlement - Summary tables: Asy_10b, 24 August 2023; Home Office, Immigration system statistics: Asylum and Resettlement - Asylum applications awaiting a decision: Asy_D03, 24 August 2023

awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, a 44% increase on the previous year, with the Home Office providing accommodation to around 113,000 of those waiting for a decision.¹⁰

6. Home Office caseworkers are responsible for making decisions about asylum claims. The Home Office told us it expected to have 2,500 caseworkers by September 2023, more than double the number of caseworkers it employed at the end of 2022.¹¹ During our evidence session, it told us that it had 1,594 caseworkers, that it had cancelled all other recruitment to focus on hiring more caseworkers and that it would reach the 2,500 target by September.¹² On 5 September 2023, the Minister for Immigration told the House that the Home Office had reached 2,500 caseworkers by 1 September 2023.¹³ However, during our evidence session the Home Office acknowledged that it takes “a year or so” for new caseworkers to be fully productive.¹⁴

7. In the year to April 2023, 25% of caseworkers left their role.¹⁵ The Home Office told us the proportion of caseworkers leaving had reduced since the C&AG’s report (published in June 2023) and that some caseworkers leave the role for internal promotions, but it acknowledged that this level of turnover is “nowhere near where it needs to be, which is at 7% or 8%”.¹⁶ The Home Office also said that it recruits caseworkers through a rolling campaign, so that it will be able to keep the number of caseworkers at 2,500.¹⁷

8. The Home Office told us that it has increased the number of decisions caseworkers make by focussing on “bottlenecks” in the system. It said that asylum claims requiring decisions had not been reaching caseworkers quickly enough and, when they did, the claims were not immediately ready to make decisions on. The Home Office said that removing these bottlenecks had been a “big part” of speeding up decisions.¹⁸

9. The Home Office also told us about its streamlined asylum process, which is used for people applying for asylum who are from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Sudan.¹⁹ It said that this process includes people seeking asylum completing a questionnaire before their interview, meaning interviews can be shorter and caseworkers can make more decisions.²⁰ The Home Office’s guidance on the streamlined asylum process says that, where possible, a decision will be taken without an interview.²¹ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been supporting the Home Office on some of its work to transform the asylum system.²²

10. However the UNHCR, as well as the Public Law Project and Dr Jo Wilding from the Migration Law Clinic, have raised concerns about the streamlined asylum process questionnaire.²³ Though the Home Office told us that it had worked with the UNHCR

10 Home Office, Immigration system statistics: Asylum and Resettlement - Asylum seekers in receipt of support: Asy_D09, 24 August 2023

11 C&AG’s Report, para 3.5 ; PM Statement on illegal migration: 13 December 2022, 13 December 202

12 Qq 17, 20, 34

13 Hansard, Illegal Migration Update, 5 September 2023

14 Q 25

15 C&AG’s Report, para 3.6

16 Qq 22, 37

17 Q 36

18 Q 12

19 Q 15, Home Office, Streamlined asylum processing guidance, 16 August 2023

20 Q 12; C&AG’s Report, para 3.11

21 Home Office, Streamlined asylum processing guidance, 16 August 2023

22 TAP0004; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR’s Guide to Asylum Reform in the United Kingdom, 23 February 2021

23 TAP0001; TAP0004; TAP0005

to improve the questionnaire, the written evidence we have received indicates that the questionnaires are poorly designed, lack clear instructions and are only available in English.²⁴ Written evidence suggested that some of these weaknesses, along with IT system issues, may mean the Home Office is unable to achieve the expected decision-making increases from the new questionnaires.²⁵

11. When deciding on an asylum claim, the Home Office can make what it calls ‘administrative decisions’ if a person claiming asylum withdraws their claim or if the Home Office decides a claim is ‘implicitly withdrawn’. The Home Office may withdraw a claim if, for example, a person seeking asylum leaves the UK before the Home Office decides their claim, fails to attend an asylum interview, or fails to complete an asylum questionnaire when asked to do so.²⁶ The poor design, and the requirement to complete the questionnaire in English, may mean that some people are less likely to return the questionnaire, leading the Home Office to decide that an asylum claim has been implicitly withdrawn.²⁷ In April 2023, 72% of asylum decisions made by the Home Office were administrative decisions.²⁸ The Home Office told us that the increase in administrative decisions coincided with it focusing on claims for people from Albania, and that at the time of our evidence session it was making more substantive decisions.²⁹

12. As a result of the changes it has made, the Home Office has increased the number of asylum decisions it makes from an average of 1,310 each week in April 2023, to 1,700 in the first week of July 2023.³⁰ To meet its commitment to clear the legacy backlog by the end of 2023, it will need to increase this and make an average of nearly 2,600 decisions every week from the start of July 2023 to the end of the year.³¹ We have made this calculation using the number of legacy cases remaining at 30 June 2023 (67,870 decisions) divided by the number of weeks from then to 31 December 2023 (26.3). The Home Office’s analysis suggested that even if it clears the backlog of legacy claims by the end of 2023, there will still be another backlog of around 84,000 asylum claims that were made after 28 June 2022.³²

How addressing the backlog will impact on the wider asylum system

13. While the Programme aims to increase the number of asylum decisions that the Home Office makes, the Home Office acknowledged that it has not looked broadly enough at benefits and costs beyond the asylum and protection team of increasing decisions.³³ For example, its business case does not account for economic benefits, such as someone receiving a decision and being able to move into work.³⁴ The Home Office acknowledged that there will be an impact on HM Courts & Tribunals Service, who will need to manage more appeals against asylum decisions and Immigration Enforcement, who may need to

24 Qq 119–120

25 TAP0004; TAP0005

26 C&AG’s Report, para 3.12

27 TAP0005; C&AG’s Report, para 3.11

28 C&AG’s Report, para 3.12

29 Q 57

30 Q 43; C&AG’s Report, para 3.12

31 Home Office, Immigration system statistics: Asylum and Resettlement - Summary tables: Asy_10a, 24 August 2023

32 C&AG’s Report, para 3.14

33 Q 128

34 Qq 129–130; C&AG’s Report, para 9

detain and remove the increased number of people who are refused asylum. The Home Office also listed the Department for Work & Pensions and the Department for Education as bodies that would be affected by the Programme.³⁵

14. The Home Office told us it would include a wider range of costs and benefits in the next iteration of its business case, which it plans to produce early in 2024.³⁶ It had previously told the NAO it would update the business case in Summer 2023.³⁷ We note that the updated business case is now not expected until after the date by which the Home Office expects to have cleared the legacy backlog. When we questioned the Home Office about whether the Programme business case is realistic, the Home Office replied that it still expects there to be a “significant benefit to the taxpayer” from the Programme, and that it would “iterate from the previous version” and “sharpen” its analysis.³⁸

35 Qq 128, 132

36 Q 170

37 C&AG’s Report, para 2.5

38 Qq 172–173

2 Finding accommodation for people who are waiting for a decision

Sourcing alternative accommodation to hotels

15. In 2022–23, the Home Office spent £2.3 billion on hotels to accommodate people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim and in April 2023, there were 48,000 people waiting for a decision in hotels.³⁹ In his statement to the House on 13 December 2022, the Prime Minister said that the Home Office would end the use of hotels to house asylum seekers.⁴⁰ An early version of the business case for the Programme expected the Home Office to find 500 new beds in local communities every week and stop using hotels by December 2023.⁴¹ The Home Office later revised this to 350 beds a week but, in the year to the end of April 2023, it found on average just 48 new beds a week.⁴² When we took evidence in July 2023 the Home Office told us that it was then finding more than 48 beds a week but was not close to 350 a week on a regular basis.⁴³

16. When we asked the Home Office why it was so far from achieving its accommodation targets, it told us that there is a “huge amount of pressure” for the type of accommodation it is trying to source.⁴⁴ In written evidence, the Local Government Association (LGA) told us that providers sourcing accommodation for the Home Office compete with councils seeking accommodation for domestic families and people who have resettled in the UK or been granted asylum, which increases prices and distorts local markets.⁴⁵ The Home Office acknowledged that it was “in similar parts of the market” to councils.⁴⁶ The LGA told us that homelessness, low social housing stock and an unaffordable private rented sector are “creating a housing crisis”, and that this will make the government’s plans to house people waiting for an asylum decision across all local authorities challenging. The Home Office is planning to implement a ‘place-based approach’ and said it was seeking “to get into a position where [it has] a much closer and ongoing dialogue” with providers and local areas.⁴⁷ It told us that it would have “meaningful discussions” with every local authority where there is concern about the changes that it is implementing.⁴⁸

17. The Home Office also told us that it pays for around 5,000 empty hotel rooms as a ‘buffer’ in case it needs more space than exists at its initial holding facilities such as Manston, where many asylum seekers are first taken when they arrive in the UK.⁴⁹ This buffer is on top of what it terms ‘ringfenced hotels’ which it can move people to “quickly as an overflow from Manston before they come into the more permanent estate”, although during our evidence session the Home Office did not set out how many beds it reserved in ringfenced hotels.⁵⁰ The Home Office said that increasing dispersal

39 C&AG’s Report, paras 4, 1.8

40 PM Statement on illegal migration: 13 December 2022, 13 December 2022

41 C&AG’s Report, para 3.19

42 C&AG’s Report, figure 9

43 Q 59

44 Q 59

45 TAP0006

46 Q 134

47 Q 110

48 Q 94

49 Qq 98–101

50 Qq 98–101

accommodation through the transformation programme was a big part of its plan to increase accommodation supply and reduce hotel use, but that it was also looking to use a number of larger sites as alternative accommodation.⁵¹ The Home Office has faced several challenges in securing such accommodation. This has included legal challenges against the use of former military sites and difficulties finding ports that will hold barges.⁵²

Hotel use, safeguarding, and Home Office stakeholder engagement

18. The Home Office said it is very difficult to estimate how many people will claim asylum because of uncertain migration patterns, but that it has low, medium and high scenarios that it uses for planning purposes.⁵³ When we asked the Home Office when it planned to stop using hotels for people waiting for their asylum decision, it said there were “too many variables” and that it “deliberately” did not have a date for this.⁵⁴

19. The Home Office explained that, as a way to limit the number of hotels it is using, it will accommodate more people in each hotel by increasing the amount of room-sharing.⁵⁵ It told us that it had so far increased the number of beds available in hotels by a number “in the high hundreds” through room sharing, and that its providers were working with hotels so that more room sharing could be implemented.⁵⁶ The Home Office told us that it was confident this could provide “several thousand” more beds.⁵⁷ However, it said that it pays its providers by bed rather than per room and was very vague about how much money the increased room-sharing would save, and promised to come back to us to share the detail.⁵⁸ The Home Office did write to us on 18 August 2023, but the letter provided little clarity as to how room sharing would result in savings and did not state how much money that the Home Office expects to save.⁵⁹

20. In our 2020 report Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme, we found that the Home Office had not adequately engaged with local stakeholders on asylum accommodation.⁶⁰ In response to that report, the Home Office told us that it had taken steps to improve its engagement work.⁶¹

21. The Home Office told us that it is working with the Local Government Association and individual councils and was “talking about all the big issues that arise, whether that is housing capacity, health, safeguarding and so on”.⁶² Specifically on room-sharing, the Home Office said it was “talking that through nationally and individually with councils”.⁶³ We pointed out that councils had already received letters telling them how many more people would need to be accommodated in hotels. The Home Office acknowledged that its communications had not been about whether the increase in room-sharing will happen,

51 Q 61

52 House of Commons Library, Asylum accommodation: hotels, vessels and large-scale sites, CBP 9831, 7 July 2023

53 Q 63

54 Qq 89–90

55 Q 91

56 Qq 66–68

57 Q 66

58 Q 115

59 Correspondence from the Home Office to PAC dated 18 August 2023

60 Committee of Public Accounts, Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme, Twenty-Fifth Report of Session 2019–21, HC 683, 20 November 2020

61 HM Treasury, Government responses to the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty-Fifth to the Twenty-Ninth reports from Session 2019–21, CP 376, February 2021

62 Qq 81, 143

63 Qq 85–86

but about how it will be done and how risks will be managed.⁶⁴ The Home Office could not answer a specific question asking why Hull City Council received a letter from the Home Office saying that it was halting further increases in the asylum seeking population due to unsustainable pressures in the area, only to receive another letter 10 days later saying it would double the number of people in hotels in the city.⁶⁵ In a letter the Home Office sent to us on 18 August 2023, it said that dispersed accommodation procurement in Hull was paused, except for any accommodation already in the process of being procured. It said that room sharing in hotels was treated separately from dispersed accommodation.⁶⁶

22. When we asked the Home Office how it was ensuring the safety of the people it is pairing up to share a hotel room, it was unable to clearly articulate its plans and said that there “might be people for whom it is not appropriate if they share”.⁶⁷ It said it was looking at the records it holds, at the experience of people who were already living in its estate, and at nationality and language.⁶⁸ It provided no further detail when we asked specifically whether it would consider mental health.⁶⁹ We asked if anybody was speaking to the asylum seekers or completing an assessment, as would be the case for a social services placement, and the Home Office said that its providers were “explaining” that they would be moving people into shared rooms.⁷⁰

23. The Home Office said it would come back to us with further details on its processes for deciding who will share rooms but its letter of 18 August added little detail about how the Home Office would ensure people are kept safe, and it largely repeated what was said in our evidence session.⁷¹ The letter did add that room sharing was for people of the same sex, and that the Home Office encourages room sharing with family and friends.⁷²

64 Q 87

65 Q 145

66 Correspondence from the Home Office to PAC dated 18 August 2023

67 Q 77

68 Q 71

69 Q 72

70 Qq 74–75

71 Q 85, Correspondence from the Home Office to PAC dated 18 August 2023

72 Correspondence from the Home Office to PAC dated 18 August 2023

Formal minutes

Thursday 19 October 2023

Members present:

Dame Meg Hillier

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr Jonathan Djanogly

Mr Mark Francois

Ben Lake

Anne Marie Morris

Declaration of interests

Olivia Blake drew attention to her entry in the Register of Interests and declared that she was Co-Chair of APPG on Migration and Chair of the APPG SEND, and that she received research funding from The Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy Project (RAMP).

Draft Report (*The asylum transformation programme*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 23 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventy-sixth of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Monday 23 October at 3.30pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Monday 10 July 2023

Sir Matthew Rycroft KCMG CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; **Simon Ridley**, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office; **Abi Tierney**, Director General, HM Passport Office and UK Visas and Immigration

Q1-176

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

TAP numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Amnesty International UK (TAP0002)
- 2 Local Government Association (TAP0006)
- 3 Public Law Project (TAP0005)
- 4 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (TAP0004)
- 5 Wilding, Dr Jo (Lecturer and researcher, University of Sussex) (TAP0001)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2020–21	HC 59
2nd	Lessons from implementing IR35 reforms	HC 60
3rd	The future of the Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors	HC 118
4th	Use of evaluation and modelling in government	HC 254
5th	Local economic growth	HC 252
6th	Department of Health and Social Care 2020–21 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 253
7th	Armoured Vehicles: the Ajax programme	HC 259
8th	Financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England	HC 257
9th	Child Maintenance	HC 255
10th	Restoration and Renewal of Parliament	HC 49
11th	The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme in England	HC 258
12th	Management of PPE contracts	HC 260
13th	Secure training centres and secure schools	HC 30
14th	Investigation into the British Steel Pension Scheme	HC 251
15th	The Police Uplift Programme	HC 261
16th	Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 29
17th	Government's contracts with Randox Laboratories Ltd	HC 28
18th	Government actions to combat waste crime	HC 33
19th	Regulating after EU Exit	HC 32
20th	Whole of Government Accounts 2019–20	HC 31
21st	Transforming electronic monitoring services	HC 34
22nd	Tackling local air quality breaches	HC 37
23rd	Measuring and reporting public sector greenhouse gas emissions	HC 39
24th	Redevelopment of Defra's animal health infrastructure	HC 42
25th	Regulation of energy suppliers	HC 41
26th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2021–22 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 44
27th	Evaluating innovation projects in children's social care	HC 38

Number	Title	Reference
28th	Improving the Accounting Officer Assessment process	HC 43
29th	The Affordable Homes Programme since 2015	HC 684
30th	Developing workforce skills for a strong economy	HC 685
31st	Managing central government property	HC 48
32nd	Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity	HC 46
33rd	HMRC performance in 2021–22	HC 686
34th	The Creation of the UK Infrastructure Bank	HC 45
35th	Introducing Integrated Care Systems	HC 47
36th	The Defence digital strategy	HC 727
37th	Support for vulnerable adolescents	HC 730
38th	Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 729
39th	Excess Votes 2021–22	HC 1132
40th	COVID employment support schemes	HC 810
41st	Driving licence backlogs at the DVLA	HC 735
42nd	The Restart Scheme for long-term unemployed people	HC 733
43rd	Progress combatting fraud	HC 40
44th	The Digital Services Tax	HC 732
45th	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22	HC 1254
46th	BBC Digital	HC 736
47th	Investigation into the UK Passport Office	HC 738
48th	MoD Equipment Plan 2022–2032	HC 731
49th	Managing tax compliance following the pandemic	HC 739
50th	Government Shared Services	HC 734
51st	Tackling Defra’s ageing digital services	HC 737
52nd	Restoration & Renewal of the Palace of Westminster – 2023 Recall	HC 1021
53rd	The performance of UK Security Vetting	HC 994
54th	Alcohol treatment services	HC 1001
55th	Education recovery in schools in England	HC 998
56th	Supporting investment into the UK	HC 996
57th	AEA Technology Pension Case	HC 1005
58th	Energy bills support	HC 1074
59th	Decarbonising the power sector	HC 1003
60th	Timeliness of local auditor reporting	HC 995
61st	Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme	HC 1002

Number	Title	Reference
62nd	Department of Health and Social Care 2021–22 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 997
63rd	HS2 Euston	HC 1004
64th	The Emergency Services Network	HC 1006
65th	Progress in improving NHS mental health services	HC 1000
66th	PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic	HC 1590
67th	Child Trust Funds	HC 1231
68th	Local authority administered COVID support schemes in England	HC 1234
69th	Tackling fraud and corruption against government	HC 1230
70th	Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency	HC 1229
71st	Resetting government programmes	HC 1231
72nd	Update on the rollout of smart meters	HC 1332
73rd	Access to urgent and emergency care	HC 1336
1st Special Report	Sixth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 50
2nd Special Report	Seventh Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1055

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Low emission cars	HC 186
2nd	BBC strategic financial management	HC 187
3rd	COVID-19: Support for children’s education	HC 240
4th	COVID-19: Local government finance	HC 239
5th	COVID-19: Government Support for Charities	HC 250
6th	Public Sector Pensions	HC 289
7th	Adult Social Care Markets	HC 252
8th	COVID 19: Culture Recovery Fund	HC 340
9th	Fraud and Error	HC 253
10th	Overview of the English rail system	HC 170
11th	Local auditor reporting on local government in England	HC 171
12th	COVID 19: Cost Tracker Update	HC 173
13th	Initial lessons from the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 175
14th	Windrush Compensation Scheme	HC 174
15th	DWP Employment support	HC 177

Number	Title	Reference
16th	Principles of effective regulation	HC 176
17th	High Speed 2: Progress at Summer 2021	HC 329
18th	Government's delivery through arm's-length bodies	HC 181
19th	Protecting consumers from unsafe products	HC 180
20th	Optimising the defence estate	HC 179
21st	School Funding	HC 183
22nd	Improving the performance of major defence equipment contracts	HC 185
23rd	Test and Trace update	HC 182
24th	Crossrail: A progress update	HC 184
25th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2020–21 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 633
26th	Lessons from Greensill Capital: accreditation to business support schemes	HC 169
27th	Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme	HC 635
28th	Efficiency in government	HC 636
29th	The National Law Enforcement Data Programme	HC 638
30th	Challenges in implementing digital change	HC 637
31st	Environmental Land Management Scheme	HC 639
32nd	Delivering gigabitcapable broadband	HC 743
33rd	Underpayments of the State Pension	HC 654
34th	Local Government Finance System: Overview and Challenges	HC 646
35th	The pharmacy early payment and salary advance schemes in the NHS	HC 745
36th	EU Exit: UK Border post transition	HC 746
37th	HMRC Performance in 2020–21	HC 641
38th	COVID-19 cost tracker update	HC 640
39th	DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme	HC 655
40th	Excess votes 2020–21: Serious Fraud Office	HC 1099
41st	Achieving Net Zero: Follow up	HC 642
42nd	Financial sustainability of schools in England	HC 650
43rd	Reducing the backlog in criminal courts	HC 643
44th	NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 747
45th	Progress with trade negotiations	HC 993
46th	Government preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for government on risk	HC 952
47th	Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20	HC 994
48th	HMRC's management of tax debt	HC 953

Number	Title	Reference
49th	Regulation of private renting	HC 996
50th	Bounce Back Loans Scheme: Follow-up	HC 951
51st	Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system	HC 997
52nd	Ministry of Defence Equipment Plan 2021–31	HC 1164
1st Special Report	Fifth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 222

Session**2019–21**

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
2nd	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
3rd	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
4th	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
5th	University technical colleges	HC 87
6th	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
7th	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
8th	NHS capital expenditure and financial management	HC 344
9th	Water supply and demand management	HC 378
10th	Defence capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
11th	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
12th	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
13th	Whole of Government Response to COVID-19	HC 404
14th	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
15th	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
16th	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 406
17th	Immigration enforcement	HC 407
18th	NHS nursing workforce	HC 408
19th	Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster	HC 549
20th	Tackling the tax gap	HC 650
21st	Government support for UK exporters	HC 679
22nd	Digital transformation in the NHS	HC 680
23rd	Delivering carrier strike	HC 684
24th	Selecting towns for the Towns Fund	HC 651
25th	Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme	HC 683
26th	Department of Work and Pensions Accounts 2019–20	HC 681

Number	Title	Reference
27th	Covid-19: Supply of ventilators	HC 685
28th	The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's management of the Magnox contract	HC 653
29th	Whitehall preparations for EU Exit	HC 682
30th	The production and distribution of cash	HC 654
31st	Starter Homes	HC 88
32nd	Specialist Skills in the civil service	HC 686
33rd	Covid-19: Bounce Back Loan Scheme	HC 687
34th	Covid-19: Support for jobs	HC 920
35th	Improving Broadband	HC 688
36th	HMRC performance 2019–20	HC 690
37th	Whole of Government Accounts 2018–19	HC 655
38th	Managing colleges' financial sustainability	HC 692
39th	Lessons from major projects and programmes	HC 694
40th	Achieving government's long-term environmental goals	HC 927
41st	COVID 19: the free school meals voucher scheme	HC 689
42nd	COVID-19: Government procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment	HC 928
43rd	COVID-19: Planning for a vaccine Part 1	HC 930
44th	Excess Votes 2019–20	HC 1205
45th	Managing flood risk	HC 931
46th	Achieving Net Zero	HC 935
47th	COVID-19: Test, track and trace (part 1)	HC 932
48th	Digital Services at the Border	HC 936
49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
50th	Defence Equipment Plan 2020–2030	HC 693
51st	Managing the expiry of PFI contracts	HC 1114
52nd	Key challenges facing the Ministry of Justice	HC 1190
53rd	Covid 19: supporting the vulnerable during lockdown	HC 938
54th	Improving single living accommodation for service personnel	HC 940
55th	Environmental tax measures	HC 937
56th	Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund	HC 941