



Home Office

**Abi Tierney**

Director General, UK Visas and Immigration  
and Her Majesty's Passport Office

2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

[www.gov.uk/home-office](http://www.gov.uk/home-office)

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP  
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

By email

18 January 2021

Dear Committee Chair,

### **Follow up to the HASC evidence session of 2 December 2020**

During my appearance supporting the Immigration Minister at the Home Affairs Select Committee on 2 December I committed to write on several points. I would also like to take this opportunity to provide further clarification on my evidence and additional information requested following the evidence session.

#### **Kent Intake Unit**

We are committed to delivering long term, sustainable accommodation solutions. In the meantime, works have been undertaken in the existing accommodation to deliver improved facilities:

- In 2019, the heating and air conditioning in KIU was overhauled to ensure better temperature control during the warm summer weather and going into the winter months the unit will be properly heated. Within these works, the Short-term Holding Facility (STHF) was redecorated, in order to modernise.
- In July last year alterations to the Atrium were completed to provide a safe and secure contingency waiting area during spikes in intake (such as the arrival of several small boats in quick succession) with access to clothing, toilets, and food.
- In the same period last year, two rooms within the detained area in KIU were re-established as interview rooms, increasing the interview room numbers to 12. This has provided increased capacity for purposes of asylum registration and de-briefings. More recently also providing interview room capacity for the

age-assessments to be completed by the social workers based in the Kent Intake Unit.

- In December last year, the Mitie booking-in room was reconfigured to increase flow. Changes saw an increase in seating from 14 to 30 seats; the counter was reconfigured to allow for three persons to be booked-in concurrently rather than one.
- This year, work has been commissioned to provide upgraded shower facilities in the Frontier House STHF.
- Since the HMIP inspection, works to ensure the toilets and sinks are in proper working order have also been completed.

### **Abridged screening interviews**

The abridged asylum screening interview was introduced on 30 March last year as part of the 'reduced contact asylum intake process'. As the Committee will be aware, this process is currently subject to ongoing litigation and as such it would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail, but I would like to clarify what was stated at the session when I advised that the full asylum screening interviews are now being completed.

In line with the interim relief granted by Mr Justice Fordham on 13 November, questions 3.1 and 3.3 have been returned to the asylum screening questionnaire with immediate effect.

Further, to meet with statement of change of the immigration rules (HC1043), we have since reviewed the contents of the asylum screening interview and published new guidance on 31 December. The new guidance makes clear that there may be justified reasons for contingency measures being put in place where the screening may need to be abridged, particularly to manage risks linked to Covid 19 but that there are minimum requirements of the questions which must be asked.

### **Age Assessment Data, and whether it has been provided to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP)**

On age assessments, I stated at the session that: "Since January 2020, we have confirmed approx. 2,480 claimed to be UASC and we have confirmed 1,900 were UASC. I will write to you to confirm that the Inspector has this information."

I can confirm we have provided data - as requested by HMIP - for arrivals between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 31<sup>st</sup> August. We will engage with HMIP to ensure they are provided with any additional data to meet their needs.

## **Yarl's Wood**

You asked how many children may have been held at Yarl's Wood. I can confirm that between 1 June and 31 August 2020, there were three<sup>1</sup> individuals who, following age assessments conducted by the Home Office were referred to, and placed into the care of, local authorities, to conduct a formal age assessment. This is standard practice to ensure age can be properly assessed.

## **Healthcare workers**

I can confirm we have responded to the letter from the British Medical Association, Royal College of Psychiatrists', Faculty of Public Health, Doctors of the World UK, Freedom from Torture and the Helen Bamber Foundation and have sent a copy to the Committee as agreed.

## **Cessation of asylum support**

At the session, and also in your follow-up questions sent following the session, you asked for further information on cessation of asylum support.

The Home Office took the decision to pause cessations of asylum support on 27 March 2020, so that asylum seekers whose cases were resolved and who would no longer normally be eligible for asylum support would be able to remain in their accommodation and follow the public health guidance in place at that time.

We resumed "positive cessations" (where the person has been granted immigration status) on 11 August; but have taken a careful, phased approach to this. The individuals have a 28-day grace period before they must leave their accommodation, and are provided with help throughout by the *Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE)* service, administered by Migrant Help. Throughout the pandemic we have worked closely with local authorities to support them in planning for the resumption of these decisions and ensure a proportionate approach. We have shared data with local authorities on all positive cases to assist them in the movement into local authority housing. Weekly meetings have taken place with Strategic Migration Partnerships to support the work between the Home Office and local authorities to move people on from Home Office accommodation.

Those leaving our accommodation as a consequence of being granted status can access the job market, apply for mainstream benefits, if required, and receive assistance to obtain alternative housing from local authorities.

Some "negative cessations" (where the person has been refused asylum and exhausted their appeal rights) resumed from September but were paused again in November following the imposition of stronger lockdown measures. These decisions

---

<sup>1</sup> This figure is provisional management information which is subject to change and has not been assured to the level published data

currently remain paused pending consideration of the impact of the current coronavirus restrictions.

Failed asylum seekers have no basis of stay in the UK and it is important that, as soon as it is appropriate to do so, they are managed out of the asylum accommodation estate, so that we free up scarce spaces for new asylum seekers arriving in the UK and reduce the need to use emergency contingency accommodation such as hotels, and reducing the burden on the UK taxpayers.

Failed asylum seekers are encouraged and facilitated to return to their countries of origin. The Home Office will pay for the cost of their return home and provides generous reintegration assistance.

Before taking any decision to resume negative cessations we will continue to work with and share our approach with Public Health authorities and will work within public health guidelines and legal advice.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abi Tierney', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Abi Tierney**

Director General, UK Visas and Immigration and Her Majesty's Passport Office