



1 March 2024

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP  
Chair  
Home Affairs Committee  
Committee Office  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Dame Diana,

Thank you for your letter of 1 February 2024 and for the opportunity to respond to your questions following your recent visit to the Bibby Stockholm. Responses to your questions are provided below.

### **Asylum seekers chosen to reside on the barge**

- 1. How does the Home Office decide, amongst those who fit the suitability criteria to be accommodated at the Bibby Stockholm, which asylum seekers will be accommodated there?**

Those we assess as suitable are given the opportunity to submit representations or reasons why they are not suited, in line with the [Failure to travel guidance for the Bibby Stockholm](#). We do not routinely publish this data, nor discuss individual cases.

- 2. To what extent does the Home Office monitor whether asylum seekers placed on the Bibby Stockholm remain suitable to live on the barge?**

Each person's suitability is assessed at regular intervals through welfare checks.

- 3. To what extent are residents informed and updated on their asylum application, and made aware of how long they are likely to remain on the vessel for?**

Residents are kept informed of their asylum application through communications from the Home Office, in the same way as any other service user. The maximum expected length of stay on the vessel is likely to be up to 9 months.

## Living conditions

4. **Is the Home Office confident that living conditions on the barge are suitable for asylum seekers, and do not violate the human rights of individuals living there?**

Yes.

5. **Can you confirm whether the Home Office is meeting its legal obligations in terms of the numbers of people residing in each of the cabins?**

Yes.

## Isolation

6. **What support (financial or otherwise) is given to asylum seekers wishing to leave the barge to visit family and friends who may live outside of Weymouth? What are the rules for asylum seekers who wish to leave the barge for long and short periods of time, for example to visit friends or to attend religious services?**

An explanation of what asylum seekers can expect to receive is set out in this publicly available document: [Asylum support: What you'll get - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-support-what-youll-get).

7. **What is the procedure when the whereabouts of an asylum seeker that should be on the barge are not known? What are the consequences for such an asylum seeker if their whereabouts remain unknown?**

Advice to caseworkers on those staying away for more than 7 consecutive days is set out in this publicly available document: [Conditions of support: caseworker guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-support-caseworker-guidance).

8. **What is being done to facilitate the connection of asylum seekers to the local communities in Portland and other surrounding areas?**

The Home Office, Dorset Council, local public agencies, and the vessel's management team work closely and continually together to ensure life on board the barge is positive for service users.

## Medical facilities and services

9. **Can the Home Office confirm that all those residing on the vessel have been screened in order to identify any health issues?**

Upon arrival in the UK, all service users are offered a health check.

10. **What mental health support is available to those currently residing on the Bibby Stockholm?**

The Home Office has published guidance on safeguarding and asylum seekers at: [Asylum support contracts safeguarding framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-support-contracts-safeguarding-framework).

**11. What has been done to improve access to mental health services since the recent suicide?**

A mental health practitioner is now on site for barge residents to access alongside the routine GP service. We do not provide data on those using this service, nor discuss individual cases.

**12. What safeguards are in place for those who are self-harming on the vessel?**

The Home Office has published guidance on safeguarding asylum seekers at: [Asylum support contracts safeguarding framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115222/asylum-support-contracts-safeguarding-framework.pdf).

**13. How often is a GP required to be onsite at the Bibby Stockholm and their working hours?**

Service users have access to on-board primary care medical facilities which are staffed 5 days a week, normally between 9am and 5pm. An appointment system is in operation, as well as a walk-in facility.

### **Right to work**

**14. How many asylum seekers in the UK have had their asylum claims outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of their own? How many have applied for, and how many have been granted the right to work?**

We do not publish data on individuals who are granted Permission to Work (PTW). However, there is public data available on asylum claims with initial decisions outstanding beyond 12 months. The number of asylum seekers in the UK awaiting an initial decision for more than 12 months is routinely published as part of transparency data at ASY\_02 in: [Immigration and protection data: Q4 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115222/immigration-and-protection-data-q4-2023.pdf). The current data shows the position on 31 December 2023, and will be updated in our next release.

**15. Are all of those who fit the criteria above granted a right to work? If not, why?**

Further information on an asylum seeker's right to work can be found in this document: [Working in the UK while an asylum case is considered - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115222/working-in-the-uk-while-an-asylum-case-is-considered.pdf).

### **Engagement and consultation with the local community**

**16. To what extent did the Home Office engage with, and consult, local communities in Portland and surrounding areas before the placement of the barge in Portland?**

There was no legal requirement for the Government to 'consult' - however, the department engaged with local authorities at the earliest opportunity.

**17. What is being done to ensure that local communities are represented, and local concerns are considered whilst the Bibby Stockholm is in Portland?**

We continue to work closely with key stakeholders through a regular Multi-Agency Forum to understand and address local concerns, and to minimise any potential impact on the local area.

**18. Does the Home Office commit to consult with local communities if it wishes to extend the operation of Bibby Stockholm in Portland?**

The barge is in place for 18 months and it remains under review.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to write.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Pursglove', is centered on the page.

**Tom Pursglove MP**  
**Minister of State for Legal Migration and the Border**