



Home Office

Simon Ridley
Second Permanent Secretary

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Sir Geoffrey,

I would like to thank you and the members of the Public Accounts Committee for sharing your report following the investigation into the acquisition of the Northeye site in Bexhill, and the recommendations made in this report. I am writing to follow up on Recommendation 6

The Home Office should, alongside its Treasury Minute response, write to the Committee setting out how it intends to reduce spending on asylum support, including: by when it will have processed the current backlog of asylum claims; how it will work with HMCTS to ensure Immigration Tribunals have enough capacity to hear appeals in a timely way; by when it expects to stop using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers; how it will ensure asylum seekers are fairly dispersed and integrated in Local Authorities; and by when it expects the Border Security Command to reduce arrivals from small boats.

As you will know, the Government is taking steps to reduce spend on asylum support and end the prolonged use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers. I expect to see spending on asylum support fall considerably this financial year as a result of sustained efforts to reduce the supported population, including by clearing the asylum backlog, and increase the supply of alternative accommodation, including through better utilisation of existing stock. Nevertheless, we are aware of the scale of the challenge and that action must be driven across multiple fronts to restore order to the immigration system so that every part – border security, case processing, appeals and returns – operates efficiently. I have summarised this latest activity across three strands: reducing inflow into the system; speeding up flow through the system by tackling backlogs in decision-making and more efficient move processes; and increasing alternative supply.

Reducing inflow into the system

Firstly, the new Border Security Command (BSC) will take action upstream to reduce the flow of irregular migrants into the asylum system. As set out in the Delivering Border Security statement, the BSC's first priority is to tackle organised immigration crime (OIC) and reduce irregular migration to the UK by making the business model of the criminal smuggling gangs unviable. This is an international issue that requires cooperation and collaboration with our partners around the globe.

The BSC is leading this new international effort to tighten border security, as demonstrated by the Anti-Smuggling Action Plan that the Home Secretary secured with G7 partners in Italy, the new Joint Action Plan with Germany to shut down smuggling networks, and progressed work with Calais Group partners to deliver the Calais Group Priority Plan in 2025.

As part of the Home Secretary's visit to Iraq in November, a world-first border security statement was signed with the Government of Iraq to target people smuggling gangs and strengthen border security co-operation. On 4th March 2025, the UK launched a deterrence communications campaign in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to counter the misinformation and myths that people smugglers post online.

In January this year, the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill was introduced to Parliament. This landmark legislation features new counter terror-style powers to identify, disrupt and smash people smuggling gangs. The Bill includes stronger powers to seize and search mobile phones to investigate organised immigration crime alongside new offences against gangs conspiring to plan crossings, selling or handling small boat parts for use in the Channel, supplying forged ID documents, for migrants attempting to come here illegally.

But with one third of asylum applications now coming from people who arrive via legal means, we cannot stop here and we are actively reviewing visa policy changes where required. We are also tackling the impacts of visa abuse by cracking down on employers who flout the rules when sponsoring overseas candidates. This practice puts undue pressure on our asylum system when agents breach employment standards. We have introduced additional measures that will see more severe sanctions placed on those who offend and earlier intervention where there are clear signs of rule breaking. Action plans will bind businesses that commit minor breaches to a specific course of improvements and correct issues and the maximum time these can be applied from 3 to 12 months.

Change will not happen overnight, but as evidenced by the work the BSC has coordinated with colleagues both domestically and internationally, great strides have already been made to tackle irregular migration, ensuring that we can dismantle the criminal smuggling gangs who undermine our border security and help bring those responsible to justice.

Speeding up flow through the system

i) Initial Decisions

Secondly, the department is working at pace to reduce the backlog of cases in both initial decisions and appeals. A backlog in initial decisions accrued prior to the general election as a result of decisions made by the previous Government to pause case-working on cases linked to the implementation of the Rwanda scheme, and the rate of initial decisions fell by over 70%. Since the Home Office restarted case-working of all asylum cases in the summer, the rate of initial decisions has increased significantly, rising by 52% in the last three months of 2024. We are managing this process robustly and carefully, including by maintaining sufficient numbers of asylum decision-makers to ensure that all asylum claims will continue to be assessed on an individual basis, in line with published policies. With the improvements we are making to speed up asylum decisions, we will clear the asylum backlog.

ii) **Appeals**

Thirdly, we are also working with the Ministry of Justice to tackle the appeals backlog in the First Tier Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber (FTT-IAC). The Government recently announced a boost in the number of days the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal will be sitting, which will be to near maximum capacity, helping to speed up asylum claims. The Ministry of Justice is also undertaking recruitment of judges and tribunal members across all courts and tribunals. By improving our appeals system, we will reduce the volume of claimants waiting for decisions so that they may be moved on from the system, therefore making more affordable bedspaces available and directly contributing to exiting hotels.

iii) **Efficient move-on and integration**

Fourthly, the Government is aware of the need for a smooth transition between asylum accommodation and other accommodation for those asylum seekers who are granted leave to remain. There are substantial pressures in the asylum system, but we are working to make sure individuals have the support they need following a positive asylum decision and to help local authorities better plan their assistance to those individuals. From 9 December 2024, the Home Office has operationalised a pilot to extend the grace period following a positive asylum decision to 56 days from the date of decision to support local authorities during a period of increased asylum decision making. We are making support for newly-recognised refugees available through Migrant Help and their partners, which includes advice on how to access the labour market.

To support the new regional Governance arrangements and in response to feedback from our partners, we have designed and built a cross-cohort data tool in collaboration with ASRA data teams, the Place-Based Visibility Tool v3 (PBVT3). The tool can be used to show a UK, regional / national and Local Authority level view of demand so we can intelligently match service users to available accommodation, at all times taking into account Local Authority resource and capabilities.

We have placed Asylum Move On Liaison Officers (AMLOs) in regions across England (London, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, West and East Midlands) equating to 40 LAs with expansion due into Belfast and Glasgow. The team are continuing to expand the offer of AMLO provision, supporting Service Users on a national basis across the Dispersed and Contingent Accommodation estate. They will work with service users at the start of the Move On process alongside Migrant Help to identify and resolve issues to ensure a successful Move On within SLA timeframes. It is important that individuals initiate plans to move on from asylum support as soon as they are served their asylum decision in order to maximise the time they have to make move on arrangements. Work is ongoing to provide the right support to service users to make them aware of the steps they can take after their decision is issued. This will form part of the work undertaken by the AMLO team, alongside the support already given through Migrant Help.

We are also aware that the current increased decision making has placed increased pressure on LAs to provide advice and support to a greater number of newly granted refugees leaving the asylum accommodation system. In recognition of these pressures and as a contribution to costs incurred, a one-off payment of £2.8m of funding has been made and weighted to LAs across England, Scotland and Wales based on the number of asylum decisions taken during the second half of 2024/25.

Alternative supply

Finally, we are continuing increase the supply of more affordable, sustainable and suitable accommodation as an alternative to hotels through our work to develop the accommodation estate. Since Full Dispersal was mandated in April 2022, the Home Office has been working to achieve a more fair and equitable spread of Dispersal Accommodation (DA) nationwide. We have developed an indexed approach to ensure the procurement and occupancy of DA across the UK is more evidence based and considers a range of factors. The overarching factors are market availability; current population; and local pressures. This is to ensure the Home Office can procure accommodation to fulfil its statutory duty, while carefully considering the impact on local areas – for example, in relation to levels of homelessness.

It remains important that local views and intelligence are factored into the procurement of dispersed accommodation- local authorities have the opportunity to feed into the consultation process. Alongside this, the Home Office engages regularly with local authorities across the UK and Strategic Migration Partnerships, to discuss the dispersed accommodation estate in local authority areas. While continuing to carefully grow the dispersal estate, we are also exploring other novel accommodation solutions, working closely with other government departments and local authorities, although the exact yield and shape of these proposals remain subject to funding and Ministerial decisions

Taken together, these programmes of work will reduce spending on asylum support by reducing the inflow of people into the asylum support system; reducing the amount of time people spend within that system receiving financial support from the Home Office; and reducing the unit cost of accommodation. Hotel usage has already fallen considerably since the peak in summer 2023, reducing the daily cost of asylum hotels from £9m to a current daily spend of below £6m.

We remain on track to deliver this Government's commitment to end the use of hotels for the supported asylum population by the end of this Parliament and – in so doing – deliver a fairer, faster and firmer system whilst achieving value for money for the UK taxpayer.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Ridley
Acting Permanent Secretary
Home Office