



Committee of Public Accounts

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 5776 Email pubaccom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk/pac

Matthew Rycroft CBE
Permanent Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

02 March 2021

Dear Mr Rycroft,

Re: Treasury Minute response to the Committee's report on the asylum accommodation and support transformation programme

Thank you for the February 2021 Treasury Minute response to our report on the asylum accommodation and support transformation programme. I was interested to hear about the changes you have put in place since our evidence session, for example on your approach to managing the new contracts for the asylum support service, where I look forward to your promised update on progress in May. I was also interested to see the measures you are taking to improve transparency by sharing more performance information with stakeholders.

However, there were several aspects of the response where we were disappointed, despite your acceptance of the recommendations. We felt the responses often needed to be much more specific and time-bound, so we can be assured that the measures you describe will achieve real improvement for service users:

- At recommendation 1, you note the development of a 'Directorate Engagement Strategy' without explaining its scope, implementation plans or expected outputs.
- At recommendation 2, on reducing the use of hotels, you do not set out a time-bound and quantified plan, nor a date when this will be available, although our recommendation asked for this by February 2021. Given the impact of extensive hotel use on asylum seekers' well-being, we would like to see more specific plans.
- At recommendation 6, your response does not address the Committee's recommendation that a safeguarding assurance framework should be published. It describes the mechanisms for safeguarding without providing transparency on standards to which all stakeholders should be able to refer.

We felt your response was ambiguous in one area. At recommendation 3, on future models for the asylum support service, it is not clear whether including these contracts in the Department's procurement pipeline will allow enough lead-time to consider significant changes of approach. Is the 'recommended' timeline referred to

in line with our recommendation to look at this by July 2021 or simply the Department's usual schedule to renew contracts without changing the service model?

Please write back to me on these issues by Monday 5 April. I am copying this letter to the Treasury Officer of Accounts and to the Comptroller & Auditor General.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Meg Hillier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MEG HILLIER MP
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS