

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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3 March 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for attending the Committee last Wednesday, with the Permanent Secretary and the Director General of Border Force, to present evidence on your work.

During that oral evidence you made a series of commitments to provide further information in writing. These are set out below, together with some further questions on which we would appreciate a response:

Institutional Accommodation

On 18 February I wrote to request information concerning the use of contingency accommodation with particular (but not exclusive) reference to the use of Penally Camp and Napier Barracks.

1. Please provide to the Committee the full information requested in that letter of 18 February.

(a) With regard to the documents requested by the Committee in that letter and in oral evidence (QQ94-100), these are:

(i) the summary of recommendations and the full text of the 'rapid review' of initial accommodation, including barracks sites, by Human Applications to "provide assurance of compliance with public health guidelines to prevent the transmission of Covid 19";

(ii) the equality impact assessment into the policy of using MoD sites to accommodate asylum seekers, which the Home Office has confirmed has been released in response to a Freedom of Information request from another body;

(iii) the health assessment carried out by NHS Kent and Medway clinical commissioning group to inform the management of the residents of Napier Barracks in relation to Covid outbreaks, and the equivalent document for Penally Camp;

(iv) the PHE assessment of dormitory and shared bedroom accommodation dated 7 September 2020 (Q98)

(v) a copy of the public health advice which was available to the Home Office in respect of the use of Penally Camp for asylum accommodation at the time when the Home Office decided to use the Camp for this purpose; and similarly, a copy of the public health advice which was available in respect of Napier Barracks when the Home Office decided to use the site as asylum accommodation (Q127);

(vi) further public health advice received by the Home Office relating to dormitory and shared bedroom accommodation including but not limited to advice received on the appropriateness during the pandemic of accommodating up to 28 people in the same dormitory;

(vii) the plans relating to the movement of asylum seekers in Glasgow from flats into contingency accommodation during the first lockdown, together with the associated exit and recovery plans;

(viii) the revised Covid management plan for Napier barracks following the meeting between the Home Office and public health officials on 18 February (requested by 8 March).

If in any case you conclude that ongoing legal action prevents you from providing the document, please explain this and advise when you might reasonably expect, following the conclusion of that legal action, to be able to provide the document.

2. Please advise us:

(a) how many asylum seekers have been moved into (i) Napier Barracks (ii) Penally Camp (iii) RAF Coltishall and (iv) Tinsley House IRC since (i) 1 January and (ii) 29 January, and how many of those remain resident at the time when you respond to this letter;

(b) how many asylum seekers in total are resident at (i) Napier Barracks (ii) Penally Camp (iii) RAF Coltishall and (iv) Tinsley House IRC at the time when you respond to this letter

3. Following your answer to the Committee at Q120, please confirm to the Committee

(a) how the implementation of Public Health England advice is managed by the Department, and what is the role of (i) the accommodation provider and (ii) any companies to which elements of accommodation and service provision are subcontracted in implementing this advice;

(b) what is the role of the local authority in assuring the implementation of public health guidance at Napier Barracks and Penally Camp;

(c) which local authorities the Home Office is working with as partners in the establishment and operation of Napier Barracks and Penally Camp;

(d) what is the frequency of contact with those partners, and when was the last contact between the Home Office and each of those partners;

(e) whether the local authority partner in each case formally approved the site as Covid compliant or provided other advice on Covid compliance (Q124); please provide copy of the relevant advice or approval;

(f) what steps the Home Office has taken, and on which dates, since 1 August 2020 to obtain independent expert assurance that measures taken to ensure Covid compliance at Napier Barracks and Penally Camp are adequate and effective.

4. Please explain to the Committee what the other facilities are that you referred to at Q106, that you intend to adapt as future asylum accommodation, and whether you anticipate those facilities will provide initial and/or contingency accommodation.

5. Please provide the Committee with details of your exit plan for the use of contingency accommodation, including:

(a) steps being taken by the Government to reduce the backlog of asylum cases awaiting a decision;

(b) what consultation has been undertaken with local authorities since 1 July 2020 in relation to increasing participation in dispersal;

(c) what the results of consultations listed in response to (b) above have been;

(d) estimated timescales for ending the current reliance on contingency accommodation in (i) hotels (ii) former military accommodation and (iii) other accommodation (e.g. Tinsley House IRC);

(e) the projected reduction in numbers of people housed in those categories of contingency accommodation; and

(f) the expected cost of contingency accommodation until it is wound up. (Q101)

6. At Q127 you told the Committee that “every single individual who comes into the care, the estate, of the Home Office has personalised support” which enables the Home Office to see ‘the face behind the case’. Please set out for the Committee what personalised support means in this context and explain:

(a) the process by which the individual’s personal support needs are identified;

(b) at what stages in the individual’s asylum application those needs are assessed and reviewed;

(c) what steps have been taken by the Home Office, and on what dates, to obtain independent expert assurance that this assessment process is fit for purpose.

7. Following the Chair's request at Q127 please also provide to the Committee the dates on which the Ministerial decision was taken to proceed with:

(a) the accommodation of asylum seekers in (i) Penally Camp and (ii) Napier Barracks; and

(b) the accommodation of those asylum seekers in dormitories.

8. Please could you explain why the Home Office:

(a) deems the new immigration removal centre at Hassockfield to be necessary;

(b) when it will be opened;

(c) whether all those accommodated at this site will be women;

(d) how many people it is expected to accommodate, and in what kind of accommodation;

(e) the cost of opening and running the centre;

(f) how the opening of the centre relates to the Home Office's 2018 commitment, following Stephen Shaw's recommendation to process women's asylum claims in the community, to develop alternatives to detention for those who are vulnerable. (Q175)

Borders

9. Please could you provide your latest estimate of the numbers, and proportion, of people arriving at the UK border and then proceeding to take public transport to their home address? (Q180)

10. Please could you provide the Home Office's estimate of the proportion of people fully complying with at-home quarantine, and the methodology used to calculate that estimate? (Q181)

11. According to NPCC data, up to 14 February (i.e. the day before the introduction of hotel quarantine), there was "no further enforcement action" taken against 2,543 individuals suspected of non-compliance with quarantine requirements as there had been either no answer at the quarantine address, or nobody with the relevant name living there. This is approximately 15% of the total numbers referred to the police . Based on previous NPCC data, between 20 December and 14 February 5,837 cases were taken by police, of which 706 cases (12%) resulted in "no further enforcement action" . You committed to providing the Committee with information about how these cases are followed up (Q153ff).

(a) What happens to these cases once the police have concluded that it is not possible for them to take further action? Are they referred back to the Home Office and, if so, what does the Home Office do with the information?

(b) What specifically is the Home Office doing to support police forces to persist in locating individuals who may be breaching quarantine?

(c) While the Committee understands that providing false information on a Passenger Locator Form could be severely punishable, it is concerned that the total amount of information flowing through the quarantine assurance system is not yet fully accurate. Therefore, what is Border Force doing, and planning to do, to improve checks on the accuracy of information on forms, or make changes to the form itself, so that false addresses cannot be given? How will these actions be monitored?

(d) How many of the Of the 2,543 cases where “no one was at home further enforcement action” was taken, how many were referred back to Border Force, and what action was then taken? Could you pleasePlease provide us with a breakdown of outcomes for those 2,543 cases, and in particular how many cases led to a of then eventually led to the issue of an FPN?.

12. Based on NPCC figures that 5,837 quarantine enforcement took place between 20 December and 14 February, this would suggest approximately 104 visits per day. On 27 January, you told the House that “there will be an increase of about 1,000 targeted follow-up visits a day, and that at a time when numbers are reducing”. Do you still intend to increase follow-up visits to these extent? If so, by when do you intend this target to be reached, and are you satisfied with progress to date?

13. In oral evidence, Paul Lincoln told us that there are “about 14,000 or 15,000 people coming into the country on any given day” (Q142). He said that over a third of these were likely to be hauliers.

(a) Setting aside the third of this number who are likely to be hauliers how many of the remaining c.10,000 people arriving each day do you estimate to be quarantining at home rather than in hotels?

(b) How many of these do you expect to receive a call from the Isolation Assurance Service each day?

TOEIC

14. You committed to writing the Committee following the completion of tribunals relating to TOEIC to indicate actions the department will take. Please advise the Committee when you might reasonably expect to be able to do so (Q164).

Social media and Online Harms

15. How many reports of Child Sexual Exploitation online does the Home Office estimate could be lost as a result of the end-to-end-encryption of Facebook Messenger? (Q166)

16. Could you expand on your point about the effect of loss of “imageries” on enforcement? (Q166)

17. Could you describe to the Committee the “technical options” your department and Ofcom and considering to assist in identifying and tackling online CSE content in end-to-end encrypted environments? We appreciate that this information may best be provided confidentially (Q166).

EU Settlement Scheme

18. Could you please publish, or provide a timetable for publication of, the full guidance on ‘reasonable excuses’ for delayed application to the European Union Settlement Scheme? (Q107)

PNC

19. You told us that Matthew Rycroft has led reviews of Home Office technology programmes that were “in a very difficult situation a year ago” (Q132). Can you provide us with the outcome of those reviews, and if they are ongoing, can you tell us when they will be completed?

20. Mr Rycroft offered to: “provide the full impact of the effect of the deleted records from the police national computer once all the recovery has happened.” Can you tell us when this will be, and assure the Committee that the impact report will be provided to the Committee in full as soon as it is complete? (Q134)

21. Mr Rycroft also offered to “update the Committee in due course on the future of the successor to the police national computer—the national law enforcement programme.” Can you tell the Committee when it should expect to receive this update? (Q134)

Channel Crossings

22. In response to a question from Tim Loughton about the numbers of people crossing the Channel and actions being taken to reduce Covid-19 importation risk from this cohort, you said you would be “happy to write with more specifics” (Q165). Could you therefore provide::

(a) An update to the annex you sent to the Committee last year titled “Clandestine events involving small boats and the number of people attached to those events”, which covers Q3 and Q4 2020, and includes a quarterly breakdown of individuals arriving clandestinely. If data has been collected, could you also provide the provisional number of people who arrived in January 2021;

(b) Detail of the number of people arriving in that cohort who tested positive for Covid-19 on, or shortly after, arrival in the UK;

(c) Confirmation that all arrivals have been isolated in Covid-secure accommodation as required by UK legislation;

(d) Detail of the “whole programme of work” of joint work with the French authorities (Q165)

23. Mr Rycroft offered to provide the Committee with the number of “returnees who have been sent back to EU countries since 1 January”. (Q172) He also offered to provide an update on children coming through family reunion routes (Q174).

(a) Can you please provide these figures?

(b) If possible, could you also provide: (i) the nationalities of the returnees and the countries to which they have been returned (ii) the number and proportion of the total number of asylum seekers who have made an asylum claim since 1 January whose cases the Home Office deems to be inadmissible under changes to the Immigration Rules presented to Parliament on 10 December 2020 (HC 1043) and (iii) the number of people who are currently awaiting transfer to and from the UK under the Dublin Regulation.

24. Mr Rycroft also offered (Q173) to provide the Committee with updates on progress on bilateral arrangements with EU States. Can you tell us how and when this information will be provided?

Please provide answers to these questions by Wednesday 17 March.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Yvette Cooper MP