

Rt Hon. Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

02 March 2021

Dear Chair,

RE: Recommendation 1, Twenty-Fifth Report of Session 2019-21: Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation Programme

I am writing to you in relation to recommendation 1 of the Twenty-Fifth report of the 2019-2021 session of the Public Accounts Committee report into the Asylum Accommodation and Support programme, which was published on 20 November 2020.

The recommendation asked that the Department should, as a matter of urgency, communicate with NHS bodies, MPs and other key stakeholders such as the police, setting out how we will consult and engage with them in future. The Department should write to the Committee within three months to confirm its approach. Apologies for the slight delay in this response reaching you.

I would like to reassure the Committee that we have developed and launched updated internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that direct operational teams and our providers to engage with key statutory stakeholders prior to opening new hotels and large-scale contingency accommodation sites. The SOP clearly sets out roles and responsibilities for Home Office staff and for our providers in this process.

To underpin these SOPs, we have developed an engagement framework that sets out who, when and how to engage with key stakeholders when proposing new hotels or large new sites. This approach ensures that Home Office staff and our providers engage right from the planning stage with our key stakeholders. This early engagement provides a holistic view of the suitability of

each site and is used to inform ministerial and operational decisions about site development. This includes delivering very early engagement with Local Authorities, MPs, Police, Health colleagues, and NGOs. Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) also facilitate early strategic and ongoing multi- agency engagement with local statutory and non-government organisation stakeholders on our behalf.

The framework has been tested in the South East and East of England SMP regions and feedback concerning our proactive early engagement has been positive. We will write to all SMPs and the Local Government Associations in the UK this month to set out our future engagement approach in relation to contingency sites and will ask SMPs to outline this approach with their local partners too. We will use feedback from our partners to develop and enhance the framework further.

Concerning the other recommendations, the Treasury Minutes Progress Reports process is underway, which will update against these. This will be laid in Parliament in May 2021.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Rycroft', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Rycroft CBE