



Ms Yvette Cooper
Home Affairs Committee
By Email

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Ask for: Health and Social Care Cell
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Dear Ms Cooper

RE: Home Affairs Committee – Napier Barracks

Thank you for your email requesting further information on Covid-19 measures at Napier Barracks. We hope we have addressed your questions below.

When the Home Office informed the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care Cell or its individual bodies that it intended to use Napier Barracks for contingency asylum accommodation in September 2020 and what was your response?

The Home Office did not inform the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care Cell that it intended to use Napier Barracks for asylum accommodation in September 2020. There was no consultation with the Council or statutory partners before use of the site was confirmed.

Kent County Council (KCC) were informed on 15 September 2020 and the then KCC Director of Public Health was invited to a meeting to discuss the use of the barracks. The then Deputy Director of Public Health was also asked to participate in a public engagement meeting by Folkestone and Hythe Council.

Partners were particularly disappointed given that Home Office and Clearsprings representatives had earlier in the year attended the Kent Council Leaders meeting and agreed to maintain a Kent-wide exemption on adult asylum accommodation given the existing UASC pressures had not materially changed and the significant work in preparing for the end of the EU transition period and Operation Fennel.

Whether you were given sufficient time to prepare for Napier to be opened as asylum accommodation, and if not, what was the impact of this on public safety and on the safety of the residents of the barracks?

We were disappointed and surprised that there was no consultation with KCC before use of the site was confirmed.

On being notified, KCC did respond with concerns on the suitability of the site for this purpose, coronavirus safety, and the potential added pressure on local public services already stretched by responding both to the pandemic and the end of the Brexit transition period.

KCC's Corporate Management Team responded to multidisciplinary meetings regarding mental health and wellbeing of the residents of Napier Barracks at the height of the pandemic, and when the outbreak was at its worst, escalated our concerns through NCRC to convene a cross-departmental meeting. Appropriate screening and assessment of intake of service users was recommended. We urged appropriate level of mental health provision to reflect the complexity of service users and assessment of their risks of developing mental health problems. We were clear that KCC and local NHS providers were responsible for ongoing safeguarding, urgent primary care and specialist health services.

We would also note that the operation of Napier Barracks has created considerable additional pressure on KCC adult social care and public health functions whilst these teams were working to protect the Kent population from COVID-19. The site operation has also created additional pressure for other members of Health and Social Care Cell, including Public Health England (PHE) and Kent Police.

In direct response to the question, the absence of sufficient notice and detailed plans being provided, meant that there was an impact on public safety and a significant impact on the safety of the residents of the barracks as evidenced by responses to the proceeding questions.

The public health advice you provided to the Home Office, Clearsprings and other bodies involved in the management of Napier and the care of its residents and whether this advice was taken up?

The management of communicable disease outbreaks is a function of PHE (members of Health and Social Care Cell). Correspondence from PHE colleagues on 24 September indicates that there was agreement that the site management were responsible for arranging compliance with legislation and guidance. Clearsprings were given advice on this date about the definitions of a contact, and how to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID to minimise the need for isolation of large numbers of contact should a case occur i.e., how to define households.

The Barracks was visited by an infection control nurse on 19 January 2021 and it is clear that there were issues with definitions of households and adequate cohorting. It is clear that during the initial outbreak attempts were made to cohort residents according to COVID status, but this was discontinued due to no spare capacity having been reserved for isolation or quarantining, as well as unrest on the site resulting in no cohorting on the site which would have contributed to the number of people that contracted COVID-19 on the site. Subsequent to this the Home Office and Clearsprings have engaged with KCC Public Health and PHE to discuss further public health measures to reduce the risk of another outbreak of COVID-19 (or other communicable disease) on the site.

Whether you considered the use of multi-occupancy dormitories at Napier was safe and compliant with national Covid regulations and guidelines? If you considered it was not, what was your response to the Home Office and PHE?

KCC Public Health have been clear with the Home Office that accommodation for asylum seekers should consist of single room accommodation with en-suite facilities, as recommended by Public Health England guidance. This is not only to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission, but all communicable diseases. This is not possible at Napier Barracks and we requested risk assessments and plans for the management of outbreaks, including cohorting arrangements in the event of COVID-19 cases on the site. These were not provided and colleagues from PHE, KCC Public Health and the Health and Social Care Cell have subsequently worked with Home Office and their contractors to develop these plans. The work is ongoing.

Your assessment of how far the accommodation has been covid-safe throughout this period?

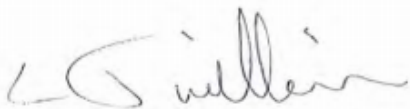
The sizeable outbreak in the barracks is evidence that the accommodation has not been safe throughout the period of its use.

Your assessment of whether the accommodation is currently covid-safe?

KCC Public Health and colleagues from PHE have worked with Home Office and their contractors to develop plans to improve Covid-security and outbreak management plans at the Napier Barracks site. The work is ongoing, but it is difficult to envisage that the site can be considered Covid-safe given the proposed numbers of service users for this site.

This response has been prepared on behalf of the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care Cell specifically in response to the questions asked. In addition to the above, the County Council took steps regarding their statutory and operational position to raise and escalate concerns in their own right that can be shared if helpful.

Your sincerely,

	
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