

Reply from the Asylum Accommodation Team

Please see below the recent reply that I have received from the Asylum Accommodation team following the meeting where I raised various points of concern

Dear John Redwood,

Thank you for attending the asylum accommodation MP engagement session on 23 February 2023. We hope that you found this informative and useful. This email is a follow up with points raised on that call. Please accept my apologies for not responding to your email sooner, my team is continuing to deal with a huge increase in correspondence and we are trying to balance getting responses with maintaining service delivery and regular engagement. I do hope this information is still relevant and of use to you.

As discussed on this call there are two hotels within your constituency which are being used to house asylum seekers – Double Tree by Hilton Reading and Flexistay Reading. There are currently no plans to decommission these hotels. There are also currently no plans in the pipeline to add further hotels within your constituency. However, as you will be aware with the current situation and pressure upon asylum accommodation that this could change fairly quickly. Do be assured however that we will inform you if there are any hotels we intend to use.

With respect to your questions on decision making, we are committed to reducing the time people spend in the asylum system and have a number of initiatives in order to do this.

Firstly, Asylum Operations is being restructured into three separate casework units, each with different responsibilities and overseen by a dedicated Deputy Director;

- Pre-2022 Act claims
- Post-2022 Act claims
- Children's (both pre/post 2022 Act) and Secondary (including Further Submissions and Statelessness) claims.

The introduction of a new asylum operating model will enable all claims to be processed more efficiently, and we have also invested in a programme of transformation and business improvement initiatives intended to speed up decision making and reduce the time people spend in the asylum system. We are also continuing to develop existing and new technology to help build on recent improvements such as digital interviewing and move away from a paper-based system. We are streamlining and digitising the case-working process to enable more effective workflow, appointment booking and decision-making. Additionally, the Home Office have introduced specialist decision-making units, providing greater ownership and management of cohorts of asylum cases,

and we also have extensive recruitment and training plans in place for our caseworkers, including career progression options.

In terms of our wider regional plans, all Local Authority areas in England, Scotland and Wales became an asylum dispersal area by default on 13 April 2022. This shift to 'Full Dispersal' will help to increase the number of suitable properties that can be procured for dispersal accommodation for destitute asylum seekers. Allocation plans have been developed in partnership with local government regions and nations, to agree a more equitable spread of dispersed accommodation across the UK. Most regions' plans (9 of 11) are at 70% or more of the region's procurement target. We will use regional governance to progress towards 100% through monitoring procurement against plans.

We also wrote to each Region/Nation on Friday, 20 January 2023 setting out the agreed Full Dispersal plan for each region/nation and confirming our position on the SMP principles. We are in the process of establishing governance and assurance framework that will monitor progress against plans and highlight areas where further work is required. We will continue to work collaboratively with LAs to agree regional plans for the implementation of full dispersal. All governance boards have now been established between HO, LAs and Accommodation providers to monitor the progress of property acquisition against the agreed plans. The first Governance Board for the South East was held on 21 March 2023.

If you have any further questions then please do not hesitate to contact my team.

Kind Regards,

Asylum Accommodation MP Engagement Team