

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

4 October 2018

Dear Home Secretary

Asylum accommodation

You will be aware that the Committee has a longstanding interest in the provision of asylum accommodation. Following our predecessor Committee's report on this subject (Session 2016-17, HC637), we wrote to the Immigration Minister on 9 July to express our alarm over the Government's failure to secure compliant bids for the new asylum accommodation contracts for the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and Northern Ireland.

The Immigration Minister responded to our questions on 13 July. Since then, further concerns have been raised, particularly reporting that the Government has failed to inform and involve local authorities regarding the revised tender and the development of the new contracts. It is these same local authorities which will pick up the pieces if the transition to the new contracts cannot be achieved effectively.

In light of the well-recorded problems with the transition to COMPASS in 2012 there is an urgent need for the Government to reassure local authorities and other service providers that the lessons from that experience have been learned. The Committee would therefore be grateful to receive your answers to the following further questions by Monday 15 October:

Withdrawal of dispersal areas

1(a) What are your contingency plans in the event that existing dispersal areas withdraw when the new contracts start in September 2019?

(b) Have you directly confirmed the willingness of existing local authority dispersal areas to participate in dispersal after September 2019?

(c) What precise steps are you taking to ensure the continuing participation of these dispersal areas, especially in terms of:

- (i) Granting formal oversight and scrutiny powers for councils in respect of dispersal happening in the local authority area;
- (ii) Setting and publishing criteria which must be met before asylum seekers may be dispersed to a local authority area; and
- (iii) Providing direct, long-term funding (not Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers) to local authorities to enable them to manage the impact of dispersal on communities and enable integration?

Managing the risk of delay

2. In her letter of 13 July, the Immigration Minister indicated that the Government has contingency plans in place to manage the risks of transition to the 2019 contracts and to support asylum accommodation in the event of delays.

(a) What consultation has there been with local authorities in respect of these plans? Which local authorities have been consulted, and when?

(b) What measures in the plans respond specifically to the lessons learned following implementation of the 2012 contracts?

(c) What estimate has the Government made of the potential additional management cost to local authorities, per month, in the event that an extended transition period is required for the 2019 contracts, as was required in some regions in 2012?

(d) What arrangements is the Government making to defray that additional expenditure, if required?

Engagement on contracts and the tender

3. In October 2017, the Government wrote to the Committee that the Home Office was "engaging with a range of stakeholders to consider options" for the 2019 contracts (Second Special Report Session 2017-18: Asylum Accommodation: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2016-17 (HC 551)).

(a) Which individuals and organisations have been involved in this engagement activity, and over what period?

(b) In what ways has engagement been conducted (eg. online consultation, focus groups, meetings)?

(c) What consultation, and with whom, has taken place specifically in relation to the AASC 2 tender in May 2018?

(d) How has feedback received through stakeholder engagement been reflected in the tendering process and in the new contracts which will come into force in 2019?

Contract specifications

4. What specifications will be made in the new contracts with regard to:

- (a) providing a sufficient amount of Initial Accommodation;
- (b) accommodation standards;

- (c) preventing forced bedroom sharing;
- (d) use of large scale HMOs (Houses of multiple occupation); and
- (e) meeting the needs of vulnerable groups (including children; disabled people; elderly people; pregnant women; people who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence; and people who have been evaluated as having special needs)?

Where those specifications have changed from the 2012 contracts what changes have been made, and why?

5. When will the Government publish the Statement of Requirements and Performance Management regime for the new contracts?

6. Will a review period be built into the contracts? If so, who will conduct the review and when will it take place?

Need for shared responsibility

7(a) What are the reasons for locating asylum accommodation predominantly in private sector housing in the most deprived wards and streets in local authority areas?

(b) What provisions are in the new contracts to secure a fairer distribution to council areas currently housing few or no asylum seekers?

(c) What advice has the Government received on whether s101 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 can be used to enforce dispersal, including advice on its effects on local authorities' ability to meet their own legal duties?

Non-negotiable criteria for dispersal


8. What availability requirements, in relation to the following services, determine whether or not a local authority area can accept asylum seekers:

- (i) Solicitors with asylum law expertise;
- (ii) Trauma and psychological health and wellbeing services; and
- (iii) English as a second language classes?

Repossession or evictions in 'asylum accommodation'

9. What advice has the Government received on repossession or evictions in asylum accommodation under the housing law regimes in different parts of the UK, and what methods do Government contractors employ to encourage or effect repossession of accommodation?

Yours sincerely,



Yvette Cooper MP