

The UK Government's plans for 'asylum accommodation centres' – what you need to know

May 2022

The UK Government has announced an intention to move towards a system of housing people seeking asylum in large-scale 'accommodation centres' and is currently pressing ahead with plans to open a large-scale facility in an ex-RAF base in the small village of Linton-on-Ouse, North Yorkshire.

For the last twenty years, the system of asylum 'dispersal' in the UK has meant that people have been housed as neighbours and as a part of our communities, while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. The Government's plans are a move towards segregating people seeking asylum away from communities, and placing them in large institutional settings, which share many of the features of detention. There is a wealth of evidence that this type of facility causes harm to people. At the same time, the Government is seeking to 'offshore' responsibility for people seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda.

The Government should immediately scrap its plans to move to a segregated, harmful model of prison-like facilities.

People seeking asylum should be accommodated in safe, dignified housing alongside their neighbours in the communities which many of them will become an integral part of for years to come.

How have people seeking asylum been housed until now?

The Government has a [statutory obligation](#) to provide accommodation and/or financial support to anyone applying for asylum who would otherwise be destitute. When people who would otherwise be destitute enter the asylum system, they have traditionally entered 'Initial Accommodation' while their request for financial support and accommodation is considered. This is usually provided in a full-board facility, and is a short-term measure, supposed to be for a matter of weeks.

Once [asylum support \(currently £40.85 a week\)](#) is granted, people are moved to 'dispersal accommodation' in the community while they await a decision on their asylum claim. This is on a '[no choice](#)' basis, apart from in specific circumstances. The system is [managed through contracts](#) outsourced by the Home Office to a small number of large private contractors (Serco Limited, Mears Limited and Clearsprings Ready Homes).

While far from perfect, this system has ensured that people have not been segregated from the communities around them and are able to access support and friendship.

What has changed?

During the [COVID 19 pandemic](#), the use of unsuitable hotels and hostels to accommodate people seeking asylum increased. There were several reasons for this, but the most significant was a [growth in the backlog](#) of asylum cases awaiting decision by the Home Office, which has reached historic levels - at the end of 2021 [there were 100,564 people](#) (relating to 81,978 cases) waiting for an outcome on their initial asylum claim. As more people have been kept [waiting in limbo](#) for longer for the outcome of their case, the reliance on unsuitable accommodation by the Home Office has increased.

Over time, the Government has moved towards using asylum accommodation as a visible deterrent to those who would seek safety in the UK, and it has chosen to move towards ever more segregation. In September 2020, the Home Office commenced the dangerous use of former military barracks at Penally in Pembrokeshire and Napier in Folkestone. In April 2021 in its '[New Plan for Immigration](#)' it announced '[proposals for reception centres to provide basic accommodation whilst processing...claims](#)'. And through its [Nationality and Borders Act](#), it has [built on previous legislation](#) to pave the way for the routine and widespread use of large scale institutional facilities like this, and [lifted time limits](#) on the amount of time people can be placed in them.

What is happening at Linton-on-Ouse?

On 14 April 2022, with Parliament in recess, the Government announced it would be [opening a 'reception centre'](#) at a former RAF base in Linton-on-Ouse, a small rural village in North Yorkshire with a population of approximately 600 adults. At first, [it said](#) that it would look to place up to 500 single men at the site, although [it was soon revealed](#) that the plans were to place up to 1500 people there, and to do so within a matter of weeks (by the end of May / early June). The status of this centre (ie whether it is intended it will be an 'accommodation centre' as laid out in legislation) is not currently clear.

The decision to use the site was announced without any prior consultation with the village residents or the community more widely in the District, the Parish Council, the District Council, local police or health services. The Government has also not to date engaged in any public, transparent planning process, although work at the site is underway. There is unified local opposition to the site, with villagers [organising to fight it](#) on the grounds that it is the #WrongPlanWrongPlace. The District Council is [taking legal advice](#) with a view to mounting a legal challenge, [supported by](#) local MP Kevin Hollinrake.

Significant questions remain over the Home Office's plans for the site, including whether an element of detention at the site is envisaged, and over any possible links with its plans to offshore people to Rwanda.

How do we know 'accommodation centres' will cause harm?

There is a wealth of evidence that this kind of facility directly harms people seeking asylum, who have [described their experiences as being 'prison-like'](#). In particular, the facility at Napier has been at the centre of scandal after scandal: with a [High Court judgement](#) finding inadequate accommodation, flawed screening processes and unlawful detention, and [official inspections](#) finding 'wholly unsuitable conditions' and 'fundamental failures of leadership and planning'. An [inquiry by MPs](#) also found that physical and social isolation, lack of privacy, sleep deprivation, restriction on movement, targeting by the far right, along with their ex-military nature make these facilities 'fundamentally unsuitable' to house people seeking asylum, and constitute a form of 'quasi-detention.' Internationally, similar models of 'reception centres' [have been condemned](#) by humanitarian and human rights organisations, with the Greek camp that [reportedly inspired](#) the Home Secretary billed a '[dystopian nightmare](#)'.

There is an alternative: the Government and the Home Office must radically rebalance the way they work with local communities. They must redouble efforts to expand the use of dispersed asylum accommodation in our communities, resourcing and working in partnership with and with the consent of the communities they are supposed to serve.

Take Action!

Write to your MP using [our template letter](#): <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/stop-accommodation-centres>

[Get in touch](#) with your local Asylum Matters Campaigns Manager or contact us at info@asylummatters.org if you'd like to join the campaign against accommodation centres