

Portland Port: Vessel Accommodating Asylum Seekers Q&A

This document shares current answers to questions received in regards to the Home Office announcing a vessel to accommodate asylum seekers in Portland Port. Questions and answers continue to be updated.

Cohort

- **How many asylum seekers will be initially placed in the accommodation and what is your programme to increase occupation over time?**

There will be a phased programme of embarkation. We are conscious of the need to manage arrivals in a way that local services can support, and are discussing this with the council, Dorset NHS and others.

- **When will the first asylum seekers arrive?**

We anticipate the initial arrivals to embark from the middle of June.

- **Which countries will the asylum seekers be arriving from?**

Those being accommodated are likely to come from various countries - with varying language skills - and already be in the asylum system, having been through initial screening and checks. They will have had their fingerprints and identities recorded by the Home Office prior to going aboard.

- **What will the age/gender of the asylum seekers be?**

Those being accommodated will be single adult males aged 18 to 65.

- **Will those accommodated on the vessel speak English and how will interpreting needs be covered and paid for?**

Individuals will have varying levels of English. We are discussing with the local voluntary and community sector about providing English language training and support.

- **Where will the asylum seekers be in the asylum process? Will they have been processed/screened, will they be new seekers or moved here from other UK locations?**

Those being accommodated are already in the asylum system, having been through initial screening and checks. They will have had their fingerprints and identities recorded by the Home Office prior to going on board.

- **How will local partners be informed about those that claim to be or are found to be unaccompanied minors to enable us to meet our safeguarding duties?**

Only those over 18 will be accommodated. They will have been through initial screening and checks.

Accommodation and facilities

- **Is this form of accommodation appropriate, are there better and more suitable forms of accommodation?**

This is not a new approach. We are using vessels as accommodation, as they are in Scotland and in the Netherlands, to help reduce costs and speed supply of accommodation. Under Sections 95 and 98 of the Immigration Act 1999, the Home Secretary has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation. Accommodation and onboard facilities will be designed to ensure the essential needs of those accommodated there are met – this will include healthcare provision, catering facilities and 24/7 security. There will be robust processes in place to assess and manage the requirements of anyone accommodated on the vessel. We will work with the service provider and local transport companies to ensure anyone accommodated on the vessel will be able to obtain all their essential needs.

- **Who is contracted as the provider of the vessel and will the same provider be responsible for all facilities, services, staff etc both on the barge and shore side?**

Corporate Travel Management (CTM) will be responsible for managing the services on and off the barge. CTM has a strong track record of providing this kind of accommodation and we are confident that it has the ability to manage the vessel and its supporting services. It has worked closely and successfully with local authorities and other public and voluntary organisations in Scotland.

- **What support and advisory services are being provided by Home Office contractors, Clear Springs Ready Homes and Migrant Help, and if they are not being used are their services being replicated?**

The vessel will be managed by our supplier (CTM), under contractual terms agreed with the Home Office. The same supplier has safely and successfully managed two vessels for Ukrainian refugees for the Scottish Government over the past year. There are no current plans for Clearsprings Ready Homes to be involved in the delivery of this accommodation. Migrant Help will provide advice and support to asylum seekers under our Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) arrangement.

- **What is the programme for onboard refurbishment and fit out?**

The barge will go through refurbishment and general maintenance before it arrives.



- **What facilities will be provided on board?**

All occupants of the barge will be provided with basic and functional ensuite accommodation, three meals a day and clean laundry; plus, there will be exercise and communal recreational facilities to support their well-being, alongside transport to and from the Port. We are in discussion with the local NHS on the potential range of on-site medical facilities, to help mitigate the impact on local health services, and are talking to the local Voluntary and Community Sector about providing a range of activities, from English language training and supporting faith observance, to community cohesion, and mental health well-being.

- **What is the food provision for asylum seekers on board the vessel in Portland?**

Those accommodated on the vessel will be provided with three meals a day. There will be a choice of menu with hot and cold options that caters for special dietary requirements i.e. vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, and food allergies should be available. Portion size should be in line with the NHS 5 a day guideline.

- **We have been told each person will have his own ensuite room. How big are these rooms? Is there a communal area for these people to relax if they so wish?**

All occupants of the barge will be provided with basic ensuite accommodation. The cabins are appropriately sized for the number of occupants per room and with any other facilities reasonably required, such as recreational space.

- **What on shore facilities are being arranged and by whom?**

Apart from transport, we are assessing whether we require the use of any building on the quayside.

- **If the council needs to access any onshore facilities to fulfil duties how will this be arranged?**

Appropriate access by council and regulatory bodies will be provided as required.

- **What provisions are being arranged for utilities (water, sewerage, electricity, gas, phone/mobile/WiFi)?**

Appropriate utilities will be provided to support the accommodation barge, including water, power and WiFi connectivity. Mobile phones will be provided as required.

- **Will the vessel be connected to shore power or run on diesel generators?**

Onboard generators will be used to power the vessel.



- **How will the sewage waste and grey water be removed, dumped and where? What about general waste and rubbish?**

Portland Port has a Waste Management Plan that ensures that all ships using the Harbour dispose of all waste in an efficient and environmentally correct manner.

Travel and access

- **The Port is a secure area and is set apart from any facilities, there are limited access routes onto and off the isle of Portland and few local bus services. How will you overcome the challenge of enabling people aboard the vessel to come and go during the day?**

Access will be influenced by health and safety requirements at the port. When off-site services are required, transport services will be available, linking up to the nearest town or city. Those living on site are non-detained.

- **How will asylum seekers be able to come and go from the vessel and port? What are the specific transport arrangements, and how do these take account of the single road between Weymouth and Portland and the peak summer months?**

Buses will be provided to take those accommodated on the vessel from the port to a local drop off point to be decided in conjunction with the Multi Agency Forum. The specific arrangements are being worked through and will be based on requirements.

- **Will the expectation for asylum seekers to return to the vessel by 11pm be an informal curfew? If a person has not returned to the port by curfew or following a phone call what arrangements will be put in place?**

There will be no curfew. As a matter of routine everywhere, if someone is late returning from a visit off the vessel, they will be contacted to check on their welfare.

- **How many hours a day do you expect them to spend on the barge? Are they required to be there overnight? How many hours will they spend off the barge and where?**

There are no set expectations. This is a matter for personal choice and will undoubtedly vary from day-to-day individual-by-individual.

- **If the Council, Police, Health or other statutory agencies need to access the vessel to fulfil their duties how will this be arranged?**

The Home Office is working with Portland Port to ensure that access to the port for those accessing the barge. Such arrangements are being discussed through the Multi Agency Forum and the place and regulatory sub group.

Safety and security

- **What security arrangements will be in place on board and in the port? Who will provide the security arrangements?**
Security forms an integral part of the proposed site, a specialist security provider will be working on site 24/7. We are working closely with Dorset Police to ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place. The safety and security of the local communities, those asylum seekers on the sites and the sites themselves are of the utmost importance
- **What are the arrangements for resource in relation to protests and impacts on existing communities and where there may be divisive views?**
We are working closely with key stakeholders, including Dorset Police, to address local concerns, so that we not only minimise any potential impact on the local area (including the summer holiday season), but identify potential benefits.
- **What arrangements are the Home Office making to avoid engagement between asylum seekers and local criminal infrastructure?**
We are working closely with Dorset Police and the Multi Agency Forum security and safety sub group to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place. The safety and security of the local communities, those asylum seekers on the sites and the sites themselves are of the utmost importance.

Health

- **As mental health assessments are undertaken in high risk situations, how will safety be guaranteed given the environment to the individual being assessed and the assessors?**
Through the Multi Agency Forum health sub group, we are working closely with local health colleagues to ensure appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place.
- **What is the planned/commissioned health provision both on the accommodation, in the port or in the wider community for this cohort given local healthcare constraints?**
For all sites, we are considering the impact on local services including the NHS, this includes on-site healthcare to limit pressures on local NHS services. This is being actively discussed through the MAF.
- **Will there be any mental health facility on board?**
We are working closely with local health colleagues to ensure appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place.

- **What procedures will be in place to prevent the spread of Infectious Disease and when will details be shared?**

Appropriate procedures will be in place to prevent the spread of infectious disease, which is being considered by the Multi Agency Forum health sub group.

Impact on community

- **What funding is available for local authorities, community groups or organisations?**

Local funding plans are being developed and further information will be shared in due course.

- **If asylum seekers will be able to volunteer within the community, how will they be vetted?**

We are working with the local voluntary sector to understand local opportunities to undertake voluntary work in the community.

- **What benefits will there be for Portland and its people?**

Local funding plans are being developed and further information will be shared in due course. We are in discussions with local partners on potential legacy benefits.

- **What support will there be to ease concerns around community cohesion?**

We are taking steps to engage with the local community and the local voluntary charitable sector through the Multi Agency Forum.

Regulatory

- **There are environmental and regulatory conversations that need to take place. How are you addressing concerns about the impact on the environment from a constantly running generator and the visual impact of a large accommodation barge against the heritage setting of Portland Port?**

These issues are being discussed through the Multi Agency Forum and the place and regulatory sub group.