



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention

Inquiry into quasi-detention

Oral evidence session with organisations supporting residents at Napier Barracks

Monday 12 July 2021, 13.00 – 14.30 (online via Zoom)

Notes

The names of some attendees who spoke at the session have been removed to protect their identities.

Attendees

Witnesses:

Dr Sophie Cartwright – Senior Policy Officer, Jesuit Refugee Service UK
Maddie Harris – Director and Founder, Humans for Rights Network

Parliamentarians:

Alison Thewliss MP (SNP) – Chair
Paul Blomfield MP (Labour)
Mary Kelly Foy MP (Labour)
Richard Fuller MP (Conservative)
Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour)
Anne McLaughlin MP (SNP)
Bell Ribeiro Addy MP (Labour)

Other attendees:

Over 30 additional guests, including experts by experience, parliamentary staff, and representatives from external organisations.

Transcript

Alison Thewliss MP So, this is the third oral evidence session of the APPG's current inquiry which is looking into the UK government's use of large-scale institutional sites, like Napier barracks in Kent, to accommodate asylum seekers in the UK.

We are quite concerned as an APPG that these sites replicate many of the features found in immigration detention settings, and we feel it's important to look in more detail at their suitability for asylum accommodation.

The inquiry has taken on even more urgency with the UK government's publication of the Nationality and Borders Bill last week and the confirmation of plans to introduce reception centres to house people seeking asylum in the UK. Sites like Napier likely give a fair indication of what to expect from these future centres, and based on the evidence received so far, there's certainly a lot to be concerned about.

As in previous sessions, the format will be a Q&A between the parliamentarians and those who are coming to give evidence. So, unfortunately we won't be able to take questions from the floor in the session, but we hope everybody will find it useful nonetheless. We continue to invite people who have information that we would like to share to contact us to share that information so that that can go into our final report.

Without further ado, I want to introduce Sophie Cartwright from the Jesuit Refugee Service UK and Maddie Harris from the Humans for Rights Network. Sophie, if you want to give a brief introduction.

Dr Sophie Cartwright Hi, everyone. Thank you very much for inviting us to give evidence. I am the Senior Policy Officer at the Jesuit Refugee Service UK and our team has been providing support to people at Napier since shortly after it opened.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you very much Sophie. Maddie Harris from Humans for Rights Network.

Maddie Harris Hi, thanks, Alison, thank you for inviting us to give evidence today. My name is Maddie Harris and I'm the Director and Founder of Humans for Rights Network, and we have been working with the men in Napier since October last year.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much. Can I ask Sophie, first of all, to give us a bit more background on the support you're currently providing to residents and give us a bit of an overview of what the work entails.

Dr Sophie Cartwright Oh, I do apologise, I was muted.

Yes, so our detention outreach team visits Napier and the nearby day centre and offers a combination of pastoral and practical support to the men who are held there. And they're often supported by a range of other JRS UK staff members, including myself.

We have worked with approximately one hundred and forty Napier residents since the camp opened. In practice, in terms of the practical support, a lot of this involves assisting people to find solicitors, facilitating access to solicitors, and ensuring that people are aware of the importance of seeking legal advice before they have their asylum interviews. Also helping them to challenge their placement there if they are especially vulnerable and ensuring that people are able to access healthcare.

We've also done work helping people to chase up Aspen cards - those are asylum support cards - where they haven't been working. You may be aware that there was a widespread problem with various places in the UK and it impacted people in Napier.

So, I think it's just significant to mention that quite a lot of what we've been doing involves plugging gaps that shouldn't be there and filling functions that in some sense perhaps the Home Office ought to be filling themselves.

Our legal team has also run workshops on the asylum system at the day centre outside of Napier, and we work collaboratively with other NGOs there to pool expertise.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you, Sophie. Maddie.

Maddie Harris So, we began supporting the men in Napier in October last year. Initially, there was nowhere outside the camp for the men to come and access support. So, in the first few months, we essentially were meeting with people outside of the camp.

We create opportunities for people to provide evidence, to bear witness to what they are, and continue to experience in the camp. Quite quickly, we also identified the need to make referrals to solicitors to assist the men in accessing justice. So that includes both supporting people who wish to challenge their place in the camp through public law solicitors, but also assisting the men in accessing asylum solicitors.

In April this year, along with some other organisations, including JRS, we set up a collaborative drop-in. So, we have one day a week where the men from Napier can come and access the support that they need.

Similarly to JRS, we also do make large numbers of referrals to both public law and asylum solicitors, and challenge various different aspects of the support that the men are receiving in the camp - again, filling many of the gaps that contractors and Migrant Help should be assisting with.

Alison Thewliss MP

Thank you very much. I want to ask a question around the healthcare aspects of the site at the moment. In our previous sessions we've heard very worrying evidence about the physical and mental impacts of being accommodated at Napier barracks both from residents themselves and from the professionals supporting them. You're seeing many of the residents in person on a regular basis, could you describe your own observations about how that's affecting people. I don't know who wants to go first, Sophie or Maddie?

Maddie Harris

I'm happy to take that first. So, I attended the first session and we also do speak with some of the medical organisations. So, I think the first thing I would want to say is we absolutely agree with the evidence that was provided on Monday.

I think, as you say, because we do see the men generally - we see some similar people regularly - the first thing that is of particular concern is that there is an almost instantaneous deterioration in people's well-being. Very early on, people become really affected by the situation and there is absolutely no mental health support of any kind to speak of, nor has there ever been.

One of the other key concerns that we have is – and we don't have figures or data around this – but we do hear very regularly from the men that there is quite a high level of prescribing going on, of both anti-depressants and sleeping tablets, which, of course, may well be necessary for some people. But there's certainly nothing holistic provided in terms of supporting people with their mental health. And as I say, the nature of the situation, that institution, the control that's exerted, is very affecting for people.

One of our other concerns in terms of the health care is the fact that we have seen consistently non-medical staff, such as security guards, essentially deciding what kind of urgency there is in terms of somebody receiving medical care. So, someone happens to see a security guard and say they want to see the nurse or say they want to see the doctor.

And the other kind of key issue is there has been a suspected outbreak of scabies in the camp. And that has felt to us to be dealt with incredibly poorly, essentially very little action taken around that at all.

So I think just to reiterate that the main issue that we feel is pressing in the camp is the psychological effect and the mental health situation for the men that are there.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you, Maddie. Sophie?

Dr Sophie Cartwright Yeah, well, I would very much affirm everything that Maddie has said. And I think it is relevant as we have a detention team that goes in whose main job is to go into detention most of the time, that kind of spiralling mental health that you see in Napier really is very similar to the pattern that we would observe in detention.

You know, it's typical perhaps that you meet someone for the first time just after they've arrived at Napier and maybe they're nervous, but they might be outgoing and able to engage with you. And, as the weeks pass, you see them withdraw and become less able to engage with the world.

And I mean, there are several factors in this. Sleep deprivation, chronic sleep deprivation – I think you've heard about in previous sessions – is a really big factor, and a total lack of any kind of privacy, are really key. And then there's also the fact that this place feels like prison - it's isolated, there are security guards and people feel powerless and imprisoned for reasons that we'll detail further later in the session. There's a sense of not being able to trust anyone around them. And these things really have a huge impact on people's mental well-being.

In terms of access to healthcare, that is a serious problem as well. So, people there can't really make an appointment with their GP directly, they have to go via the onsite nurse. And this isn't just a sort of misunderstanding – it's quite a clear policy. For example, we're aware of where someone has tried to make referrals to the GP, tried to get the solicitor to do it, the GP has said, "no, I can't do that - you have to go via the nurse."

And this is a problem in itself because residents can't make a GP appointment in the way that you or I or indeed asylum claimants living in the community could. But it's also not just a case of asking the nurse to make an appointment for them. They have to tell the nurse about why they need an appointment. And this is someone who's on site. They might struggle to be able to trust someone who is constantly there, and is perceived as connected to the Home Office, connected to the site, which is

a problematic setting for them. And bear in mind that people have healthcare problems, connected histories of torture or other serious trauma. So it's difficult to talk about.

And really there's two connected problems here with the access to healthcare. First, the supposed triage system acts as a barrier. But secondly, there's just no agency, at a really basic and important level, over access and that's really dehumanising. It's illustrative, as Maddie mentioned about people deciding whether people need healthcare - I think it's illustrative of the wider way in which Napier is a context of control and these things interact.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you very much for that. We turn now to Paul Blomfield MP for a question.

Paul Blomfield MP Thank you, Alison. And I wonder if I could pursue this issue of health care a little bit more. A few years ago, I was Vice Chair of the cross-party inquiry into immigration detention. And many of the points you just made, Sophie, echo our experience, particularly in relation to mental health. It's that sense of powerlessness and indeterminate nature of the stay, which is deeply corrosive on people's mental health.

Now, clearly, if we were accommodating people within communities, they would have access to all of the services that are available there. Could you say in a little bit more detail about why that sort of provision is denied and just a little bit more about the triaging, how that triaging works with the site nurse and what qualifications there are on the site, particularly in relation to mental health?

Dr Sophie Cartwright OK, yes, so in terms of on site, there is the site nurse. But that's all there is on site.

The triaging – it works as far as we understand it, as you have an appointment with the nurse first of all, who can then refer you to the GP. But they may not do so. Or there's instances where people have managed to get referrals to other kinds of medical appointments.

You asked an interesting question about why it's done like this. I'm going to be honest, I don't see a good rationale. Obviously, there's a good rationale for having an on-site nurse, but I think the fact that this is part of the system is indicative of a very poorly planned set-up. I'm not sure about there being a good rationale to that in any way.

There is no mental health support on site, which is very problematic. We're aware that some people who have been transferred to Napier were

previously in touch with counsellors for difficulties they were having, including severe histories of trauma and they've been removed from that. So, that's a problem. And Maddie might have something to add as well.

Maddie Harris

Thanks Sophie. I think the first thing I would like to say is that there is a complete lack of transparency provided to NGOs regarding what the processes are within that camp. We don't receive that kind of information.

So all we have to go on really is the way in which the men explain their attempts to access support. And I think that's a really key point that affects everything here - is that we don't know why they do things or how they do things.

And I think in terms of the triaging, that there is also a lack of that. You know, men have spent 10 days, 2 weeks, in hotels in London quarantining and then are moved very quickly into the camp where later, when we talk about people who are survivors of torture and trafficking, it becomes very clear that actually there is no triaging taking place.

The other thing to add is I've had men regularly say that they didn't know that there was a nurse on the site, that they don't know how to access medical care. We are told by Clearsprings and the Home Office that people do receive an induction, which we have seen a copy of, and it is in English. And people do say that they don't receive that in a way that is understood or sufficient for them to have the necessary information. Which is, of course, very concerning if the nurse is the only way for you to access medical care.

And the final point I want to make is that we have on two occasions actually called the particular GP surgery to try to make an appointment directly for somebody because they were really struggling to get the nurse to make that referral for them. We were told on both occasions that the individual has to go through the nurse in the camp. So, there's a kind of denial of rights and entitlement here in terms of that medical care that these people, the men who are in the camp, are entitled to.

Paul Blomfield MP

So can I just clarify that Maddie, that when you had intervened on behalf of people to seek to access services, those services said that you were not entitled to do that and everything had to go through the camp?

Maddie Harris

Yes, that's correct. The GP surgery said that if a man who is accommodated in Napier wished to see a GP, to see a doctor, then they needed to do so by speaking to the nurse in the camp. Yes.

Paul Blomfield MP

OK, and can I just press a little bit more on mental health, because obviously we know that so many people who will have ended up in the

camps have been through deeply traumatising experiences and mental health is likely to have a prevalence. Can I just confirm Sophie's points that you're not aware of any of the camp nursing staff having mental health backgrounds in order to effectively triage in that area? Either Maddie or Sophie. I'm trying to get whether, you know, given that mental health is a dominant issue, is there any expertise at all for the staff working on the site?

Maddie Harris

We have had information from men accommodated in Napier that casual staff have been conducting welfare checks and have been relying on other men in the camp to interpret for them.

And secondly, again, we'll come to this later when we talk about improvements, but it was only May, I think, in 2021 where the Home Office said that now everybody who works in that camp has safeguarding training.

So, I again have never seen a list of staff and what their roles are and the qualifications that they have. But certainly, absolutely concerned about the expertise and skills and training that the staff have that come to a) recognise when somebody is very unwell, but also to actually act upon that sufficiently.

Paul Blomfield MP

OK, well, I'll finish up because we are, you're right, coming on to some of the safeguarding issues in a moment. Thank you very much.

Alison Thewliss MP

Thank you very much for that. I move to Mary Kelly Foy who is on the call. Mary, can you hear us?

Mary Kelly Foy MP

Hi, Alison. I don't think I was given questions to ask. I must apologise. I was under the impression I was listening in on this one.

Alison Thewliss MP

No problem at all, I'll ping something over to you and come back to you. Richard Fuller is also on my list here with a question if he wants to come in next.

Richard Fuller MP

I'm sorry, Alison, can you hear me?

Alison Thewliss MP

Yes, we can hear you.

Richard Fuller MP

All right, I've got trouble with my camera today, so my apologies for that. So as long as everyone can hear me I will get to my question.

So this is for Maddie Harris, residents who may be children have been housed at the site, and that's raised concerns by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration in March. Have there been any

similar cases more recently? And can you advise us what's happened with those cases?

Maddie Harris

Yes, thank you, Richard. So, yes, there have been – that we know of – 4 age-disputed unaccompanied asylum seeking children accommodated in the camps since April '21. We, and again, I think it's important to say that we don't know everybody who is in the camp, and not everybody does come to the drop-in to see us. But we met one of the first children towards the end of May. He had been in the camp for a month. We had not met him before, and he was very distressed when we met him.

He told us that there were between 5 and 7 unaccompanied children in the camp and that they were being treated differently by staff, were being sort of told to sleep in a particular part of one of the dormitories.

After we met him, we were able to support him to leave the camp due to advice regarding it being in the best interest of the child. He was moved with the support of a lawyer to hotel accommodation in London.

Richard Fuller MP

That wasn't the default? So the default wasn't the children would be separated if they were unaccompanied and put out of accommodation with adults?

Maddie Harris

So, he had been telling staff in the camp for the time that he had been there, that he was 17 and no action was taken. So according to the suitability criteria, no unaccompanied children should be accommodated in Napier, but they are being and they are only appropriately supported once an NGO intervenes, essentially.

So we've met, as I say, 3 children. We know there have been 4 children in the camp and 2 of the children have told us that they have consistently been saying to staff whilst accommodated there, that they are in fact under 18 and should not be there.

Richard Fuller MP

So, this isn't an instance where children have been pretending to be adults and the policy has been followed because all the evidence available suggests they're adults. This is where the authorities have been told by the individual that they are underage and they continue to be housed?

Maddie Harris

So, these are children who arrived in the country and told officials that they were under 18, were given ages older than that, so disputed and moved into the camp.

Richard Fuller MP

OK. OK, thank you. Did I cut you off halfway through? I wasn't sure if there were further things you had to say on that?

Maddie Harris I think the key thing as I say is the fact that these are children who are saying consistently from the point of arrival in the UK and to staff in these accommodations that they are in fact under 18 are being treated differently.

One of the unaccompanied children said to us that he was repeatedly offered a private room by staff in the camp, but was not supported to leave. And that these are children that have made that known and are not being treated as they should be.

Richard Fuller MP And why - sorry, if I may, Alison but this is an interesting point - why would the authorities do that? What was going through their minds to say, "oh, I know this person says they're underage but they're not really they're overage, so let's just keep them here" with a sort of sneering look?

Or was it that actually there were some real practical issues here about why that communication didn't go the way it should have done?

Maddie Harris I think it's happened for such a number of children that I think it's I would say I would find it hard to see that as a kind of a mistake, I suppose.

In terms of why that may happen - again, it's not you know, my guess is that obviously the support that you have to provide a child is far greater than the support that is required of an adult. So, perhaps there is an interest in kind of minimising what has to be done, I suppose.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you, Richard, and we go now to Mary.

Mary Kelly Foy MP Thanks, Alison. The government has stated that it has a process for assessing the suitability of people to be housed at the barracks, and we've received evidence that suggests that this process is ineffective. Would you agree with that? And do you, for example, come across people housed at the site who don't meet the suitability criteria? And if so, what then happens in this scenario?

Dr Sophie Cartwright In short, we very frequently, routinely come across people who don't meet the suitability criteria. So, this includes survivors of torture, survivors of trafficking, people who are struggling, self-harming and people experiencing suicidal ideation. And these are obviously not mutually exclusive categories.

And it is important to note that although Napier is extremely harmful to mental health, as we noted, people have been transferred there, despite

already struggling with self-harm and / or suicidal ideation - for example, already receiving support for it.

And additionally, many victims of trafficking have actually quite clear indicators of trafficking that ought to have been picked up and even are on record. For example, they've had their asylum screening interviews at some point prior to their transfer to Napier, and these actually might mention travelling through Libya. Now, that is a huge trafficking hotspot. It's a red flag, but it appears that nothing has been done in relation to that, it hasn't been picked up nor a referral into the National Referral Mechanism made, and people are in Napier.

And in our observation, there really is no system for screening vulnerability within Napier either. So people are really only transferred out on vulnerability grounds when - a bit like, as Maddie was saying with age-disputed minors, with people who are children basically - it's only when Pre-action Protocols are issued on their behalf.

So, people who are vulnerable have to somehow mysteriously be aware of the suitability criteria, which, you know, most of them aren't. Why would they be? And then they have to resort to independent legal support to proactively push for their transfer, that's how much of a lack of a screening mechanism there is.

We're also aware of people raising specific vulnerabilities, such as a history of torture, with staff on site and nothing happening as a result.

And crucially, Napier is just a very poor context for disclosure of trauma. This is similar to detention really in that people find it very hard to trust staff on site, even healthcare. And actually the set-up tends to encourage them to withdraw. So, it makes it very hard for vulnerabilities to be identified. And really, in our opinion, this is something that couldn't really be fixed as long as asylum claimants continue to be placed in ghettoised detention-like settings in this way.

I think it's also just worth noting that we've observed a troubling lack of knowledge about the systems for identification and specifically for identifying trafficking survivors. So, I recently asked management in the site about referrals to the National Referral Mechanism. So that's the government system for identifying victims of trafficking, run by the Home Office. And the manager didn't know what this was.

And then I was referred to the person responsible for flagging vulnerability with the Home Office and that person also didn't know what the system was. So, that raises questions to me about how extensive coordination

between on site staff and relevant Home Office teams could possibly be on the issue of potential trafficking victims.

And overall, with these lack of safeguards, it is important to note that Napier is operating like a quasi-detention site, and it has many of the same problems. But it does so without even the very limited and problematic safeguards that do exist within immigration detention, such as the Gatekeeper, the Detention Centre Rules and the possibility of applying for bail. So, that's important context to this.

Maddie probably has things to add.

Maddie Harris

Thanks, Sophie. I mean, I totally agree with everything Sophie said. We have a very similar experience I think - that fundamentally the process that is being used is completely inadequate.

There's been two groups of men living in Napier - so there was a group of men that moved into the camp in September and they began to be moved out during and after the outbreak, as you know. And then a second group of men that began moving in in April - despite the fact that there had been numerous referrals, Pre-action Protocol letters rather, provided by solicitors to say my client is accommodated in Napier, they are a survivor of torture, they are a survivor of trafficking. So very clearly demonstrating to the Home Office that those systems were a failure. Yet from April, similar numbers of survivors of torture and trafficking have been moved into Napier again.

And we are providing the triaging. We are identifying these individuals, they are making disclosures to us only when they come to the drop-in or on occasion when certain organisations are able to go into the camp. It is absolutely not appropriate or safe in any way for small grassroots NGOs to be the only way in which these men can access the entitlement to support that they are that they are entitled to.

And I think, secondly, absolutely not in any way suggesting that immigration detention is an acceptable form of accommodation, but of course, in Napier, there are no safeguards. There is no triaging. There is no access to the kinds of organisations that are necessary to make sure that individuals, as I say, who have survived these things are picked up essentially.

It's not working. And I think we've tried to make that clear, we've tried to raise that issue numerous times and have seen no change, I would say, in kind of approach of any kind.

And again, as Sophie says, we also have other examples of men who have – as has been said by the Home Office – if someone is not suitable to be in

the camp, then they should make that known. Which is what Sophie has described as absolutely not possible. But, even when men have done that, no action is taken.

Mary Kelly Foy MP OK, thanks for that Maddie and Sophie.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much. We'll now move on to look at some of the legal issues. Baroness Lister with a question.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett OK, thank you. Just before I ask, I just noticed some very important information in the chat, so I hope that the secretariat will be able to capture that from [volunteer at Napier Barracks]? Thank you for that.

OK, this is initially to Sophie and then to Maddie. In previous evidence sessions, concerns have been raised about the ability of people at Napier to access legal advice and representation. We've heard something around that already today and around the limited amount that the Home Office and contractors appear to be doing to facilitate that access.

So I think from what you've already said, certainly from JRS' written evidence, that you share their concerns. But perhaps you could share them and amplify them with us? And if so, how are your organisations responding to those concerns you have around legal representation? So, starting with Sophie.

Dr Sophie Cartwright OK, yeah, thank you very much. Essentially, yes, as we've said in our written evidence, access to legal advice is really a big problem.

People are encouraged by Migrant Help to seek legal advice, but not really given meaningful support to find any. So, it's down to the small handful of NGOs, such as us, to help people find solicitors.

This is occurring against the backdrop of a sheer lack of capacity among immigration advisors, which is not helped by the location of the camp. And many advisers who do want to take on cases really don't have capacity themselves. So to give an example, we know of one sole practitioner who's working on their own, who said that they had the capacity to take on 100 cases. But it's just not possible to do those cases justice. And you see this reflected sometimes in the kind of work that is or isn't being done.

And a lot of the solicitors currently offering to represent people at Napier don't appear to have sufficient expertise in asylum law. So, I've referred already to the National Referral Mechanism before. We're aware of one legal rep with a client at Napier who didn't know of the existence of the National Referral Mechanism. Now, because that's to do with trafficking,

that is something you'd expect to be fairly basic knowledge for any legal rep who works with asylum claimants or any vulnerable migrants, really.

So I think I've talked quite a bit about our response already, but a significant chunk of our work is to do with assisting people in finding solicitors and explaining to them how important that is. This actually does take up a vast amount of energy. It's not easy and it's not a sustainable solution, really. We need high quality legal advice from people who are experts in asylum specifically. And it's vital that the advice should be face-to-face wherever possible. And neither of these things is happening.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett Thank you. Just before I pass over to Maddie, do you think the situation is worse in terms of the quality of legal representation that might be available than, say, to those in detention? Or is this just symptomatic of a wider problem of the lack of decent legal representation for asylum seekers?

Dr Sophie Cartwright That is a very good question and it is a difficult question to answer, because, as you will be well aware – you're here because doing work on detention – the quality of legal advice in detention is also very poor. It certainly is part and parcel of a wider context where there isn't enough good legal advice for people seeking asylum. I would hesitate to compare it with detention specifically in that respect. I would say that I think the location of the site is a factor, is really not helping in the extent of this problem. Yeah, I hope that's helpful.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett It is, thank you. Maddie.

Maddie Harris Thank you. So, I think that something that's really key here is that obviously – so, substantive interviews have been being conducted in Napier since April this year, which was something that we were all very surprised about. There was no warning or notice or information given to us. And often in the cases of some of the men, that was notice periods of 10 minutes.

And so, whilst, of course, we absolutely believe that somebody claiming asylum should go through a process in a timely fashion. But of course, these are often men who have very recently arrived in the country, as I said earlier, would be quarantining in a hotel for 10 days. Often, we've met a large number of the men in Napier who haven't had a phone. People are then moved into Napier, where the only kind of provision of assistance for accessing legal advice is essentially a notice with a list of solicitors, which is on the wall. 50 percent of those solicitors are firms that we ourselves have contacted to say there is a situation here - there are men in Napier who are going to have their substantive interviews very quickly, who are desperately in need of legal representation. And these are solicitors firms

who are on this list and who have, of course, said we have absolutely no capacity.

So I think it's a kind of almost performative, kind of easy-to-point-to mechanism if you like. When we can challenge it, we can say, well, you know, Migrant Help provides signposting. "Choice is important" is something that we hear all the time, which, of course, I absolutely agree with. But I think that it's a bit of an excuse to be honest.

And so, as Sophie said, you know, we have again tried to fill this gap as best as we can between Jesuit Refugee Service, Humans for Rights, and one other organisation. I think we've made over one hundred referrals to asylum solicitors for people who perhaps may never have found legal representation pre their substantive interview.

And the other thing I want to mention about legal advice is that absolutely representation is essential, but so is an understanding of the process, which again is not something that is being provided. So in fact, there's been men who've said, "oh no, I don't need a lawyer". Where of course, that is very important. And that kind of really essential information about the process is not being provided at all.

Baroness Lister of
Burtersett

Thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP

Thank you very much. We move now to Anne McLaughlin, Anne.

Anne McLaughlin MP

Thanks, Alison. Hi, Sophie. Hi, Maddie. Thank you for doing this today. And obviously thank you for everything that you're doing for people.

My question's about improvements that we've been told have been made at the barracks. So, in the first evidence session, we talked about the ruling in the High Court case. And after the ruling, the government said that significant improvements had been made. So, it's really just to ask – you're there working on the ground, what changes are you aware of that have been made and also specifically in relation to Covid security. And are the changes that are being made sufficient to address all of the concerns that have been raised? I'm laughing - I shouldn't be - but I know the answer to the last bit is going to be no. But anyway. Sophie, do want to go first?

Dr Sophie Cartwright

Sure. Yes, thanks. OK, so if I could just start by saying that I just don't think it's possible to fix the problems at Napier. Most of them, well the most fundamental ones, are really inherent to the nature of the site. And so, any improvements made are not adequate. But there's also a kind of sense that we could keep tinkering with this and it wouldn't do any good. I think there

was enough evidence before the site was actually opened at the time that it was a bad idea. But everything that's come to light since then should be sufficient to cause us really as a society to abandon this project.

Now, also, just in terms of the kinds of improvements that have been made, I think it's just worth noting that they're really neither well-planned nor effectively implemented. And that's kind of a repeating pattern from what was happening earlier, what's been happening with the site. So since, for example, the critical report from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, the Home Office has run weekly on-site sessions with asylum claimants at Napier. But they don't work very well – from what the people at Napier tell us, they really struggle to get any answers and they struggle to actually feel like they understand more coming out of the sessions. So then they don't attend. People come out confused.

And sometimes what appears to be very important information is communicated at these sessions, but in an unclear, ad-hoc way. Sometimes, for example, they're used to communicate information about the asylum process as though this is something that refers to someone's particular case but it's being communicated to a group of people. And obviously they have individual cases. So it's just the system that is supposed to be an improvement, but in itself it doesn't work.

I think I'll pass over to Maddie now as I think she might have some.

Anne McLaughlin MP Before you do, can I just say in relation to Covid have you noticed any improvements?

Dr Sophie Cartwright Well, first thing to say is that it seems that the site – again, as I think Public Health England said, this isn't a site that could easily be made Covid secure. There are a few incremental things, such as more testing. But, for example, there's still - I don't know the exact numbers today because it changes all the time – but up to a few weeks ago, there were still 13 people in some dormitories. Now, that's obviously not very Covid secure.

Sometimes if there is a concern about Covid – it's happened a couple of times, like someone has Covid symptoms or, you know, maybe just mild ones. So, a block quarantines whilst they're tested. But it's not very effective because people have been obviously in contact with each other very recently anyway.

So it's again – in terms of the Covid improvements, there is some attempt to do something. But it doesn't seem to be well planned or well implemented, and it's certainly not sufficient.

Anne McLaughlin MP Thank you. Maddie?

Maddie Harris Thank you. No, we've not seen any significant improvement. We actually have - this is not physically having seen this, this is from what the men talk to us about – as Sophie says, there are still up to 14 people - in fact, it does end up being 28 people because of the sharing of the communal facilities such as toilets - this has not changed.

We consistently hear from the men that they do struggle to social distance still and that there have been, as Sophie said, 3 situations in which there have been men with symptoms. And in each instance it was actually two blocks that were told to isolate. So once again, it feels like quite a slapdash approach to this, like disregarding, as Sophie said, the fact that actually everybody in the camp is mixing at one point or another.

And just in terms of the general conditions – again, hearing from the men that sometimes there is intermittent hot water and that kind of thing happening in and across the site.

I think one thing that is really important is the seasons. What we hear from the men is that, you know, some men who – as we've talked about earlier, not everybody is comfortable leaving the camp, certainly – but those who are, say they will spend as much time as they possibly can away from the site. And, of course, in the summer, it's possible to do that. But for men who were accommodated there over the winter, talking about it being incredibly cold and that kind of thing. We've not seen anything significant change in terms of thinking about some of those issues. There are still sheets which are dividing people's areas where they sleep, which again have been said to be a significant fire risk.

I mean, the camp is the same. Perhaps it's a bit cleaner. Perhaps there are a smaller number of people there. But from my perspective, there has been no meaningful improvement made at all. And, as Sophie said, I believe that it is not possible to improve Napier.

Anne McLaughlin MP OK, thank you. Thank you both.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. We move now to Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP Thank you very much Alison and thank you, Sophie and Maddie. You touched earlier on some of the issues regarding asylum interviews conducted on site at Napier, and obviously that's a major issue for a number of reasons. Would you be able to expand on any further issues that you might have left out about why it's problematic, and any other updates

that you've received around this? I'll start with Sophie because I believe you mentioned it didn't you?

Dr Sophie Cartwright OK, yeah, yeah. So first, just the constant stress, lack of privacy and chronic sleep deprivation mean that this is a really poor context from which to engage with interviews. And again, that finds parallels with detention.

Specifically, interviews happen sometimes with so little notice that people have very little time to prepare. For example, we once supported someone who was given an interview letter at midnight for an interview that was happening the following day. Now, obviously, this caused a huge amount of anxiety, he didn't get to sleep until 5:30am and he then had to do his interview.

And people frequently proceed with an interview without legal advice. That's partly because they may not be aware of how badly they need it. They're struggling to get it. It's also because they may not be aware it might be possible to get it. But they also fear that if they don't go ahead with their interview, they'll be waiting for one indefinitely. So there's this kind of pressure, you don't know what to do. You don't know what's going on. You're terrified of having your interview when you don't know what's going on. But you're also terrified of not getting an interview. You're in this kind of trap.

It's really relevant to what's happening at Napier that many of the people who are coming there have been issued with Notices of Intent that explain that their asylum claim may be inadmissible. So, our understanding is that everyone remaining at Napier, who hasn't already had an interview, is considered potentially inadmissible and therefore currently ineligible for an interview. That's a working understanding – the situation is haphazard. Now, this, you'll be aware, is happening under new Immigration Rules introduced in January - which, incidentally, the Nationality and Borders Bill is seeking to place into legislation. So, of course, under these Rules, asylum claimants who have travelled via third countries can have their claims deemed inadmissible. This means that they won't be processed or examined initially, but the idea is that the Home Office will seek to remove them somewhere else to have their claims processed there.

Now, that is very briefly the theory. In practice, no one has been removed under this process – that requires the agreement of third countries, and that's predictably not forthcoming. Now, for the men at Napier and many others with Notices of Intent, they haven't it seems yet been declared inadmissible but received Notices telling them they might be. At a recent weekly meeting between the Home Office and the residents at Napier, they were told that they were all inadmissible and wouldn't get an interview.

Now, this may well not be the case as people only have Notices of Intent. If it is, then this is obviously a hugely inappropriate forum to communicate such a significant piece of information, which really affects the whole course of someone's life.

And this communication has caused widespread worry. For example, even English speaking staff present at the meeting seemed to misunderstand it. And this is in the wider context that people issued with Notices of Intent at Napier had no idea what it meant, no one had explained this. So, although you're going through this process, you're just not being told what's going on. You're being held in limbo - particularly with the inadmissibility process, which is creating a further layer of uncertainty and prolonging the process.

Now, part of this is happening to asylum claimants who are elsewhere as well. Of course, it does interact with the setting, which already causes stress and increases the sense of powerlessness that people have. So, just to put this in context, everything to do with how the asylum process works at Napier and how it's explained to residents is chaotic. There's a lot of uncertainty and confusion around it, and it's very difficult for people to access the necessary legal and support resources to engage with it. So, there's so many layers making this problematic. Thank you.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP Thank you very much, Sophie. And Maddie, did you have anything to add about the process?

Maddie Harris Thank you. Yeah, I think, again, agreeing with everything that Sophie has said. But I think in terms of notice periods, we have supported men who - one man, for example, was woken up at 9:50am for an interview at 10am in the morning. I think we have 10 people who have had varying notice periods of 10 minutes up to around 12 hours.

We raised this with the Home Office. Things have appeared to improve a little bit, but that hasn't really been interviews being conducted because of the fact that, what has been made very clear to us by the Home Office is that these past few months has been what they're calling a "pilot project". So - the conducting of substantive interviews, the kind of way in which the men are accessing legal advice, where they're being conducted, how they're being conducted, the notice period - it's all something that they have been testing out. Which is, of course, deeply problematic, given the fact that these are people's lives.

When we've received information that moving forward, things will be a bit different - for example, previously five days was the notice period that they deemed sufficient for somebody pre substantive interview, which is absolutely not appropriate to prepare for that, particularly not in an

environment such as Napier. Certainly not, again, as I've said earlier, after having been in a hotel for two weeks, and not necessarily understanding or knowing the system. And that's going to be extended to 4 weeks. So, I think it's really crucial that we see this as them trialling out things, as I say, and how that's affecting people's lives.

And the only other thing I'd mention is we've heard of one incident of a man whose interview was being conducted in rooms where the sound quality has been quite poor, which I understand they are attempting to resolve by installing insulation in these rooms. But this man was moved during his substantive interview into the kitchen where his interview was therefore conducted essentially in public.

So, it's a total lack of consideration of how significant and how important it is for people's interviews to be conducted in the right way.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP And, can I just say, have we had any quite specific evidence on how being conducted in this way or having a really short time to prepare has directly impacted the outcome of all of their claims? Or have we not reached the stage yet in the case of the men that have been placed there?

Maddie Harris We haven't reached that stage yet. Sophie, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we are trying to obviously keep a very close eye on the decisions that people do receive. But that's not something that has happened yet. No one's had a decision made.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP And more generally, I think it would be very helpful to the inquiry - myself and a lot of my colleagues will often make the case about proper legal representation being needed for asylum cases. In a more general sense, have we got a direct correlation between receiving legal advice at a certain stage and the outcome of an application? We can only imagine exactly what happens when you don't have the proper legal advice, but it always helps to have figures to hand if possible.

Maddie Harris OK, yeah, as I say, that's not a point that people have reached yet, but certainly, as I say, we're trying to keep a really close eye on that. And, for example, we've been talking about the need to make sure that there is a real understanding of all of the issues and complications and barriers that exist in the site, because I think it is inevitable that we will see that this has affected the outcomes of people's claims.

Dr Sophie Cartwright Yeah, I absolutely agree with Maddie. And it's the case that we don't have a picture yet of exactly what's happened with people's claims in Napier, and partly because this process is actually taking a long time.

I think just in terms of your question about whether we have more general information – one of the key areas where JRS UK actually generally works is with people who are pursuing fresh claims. So, those are people who have often had something gone wrong, they've been let down the first time around in the system. And it's not the only thing that can go wrong, but we find that it really is very often our legal team is dealing with an issue that wouldn't have arisen if they had been able to access high quality, timely legal advice – which, as we mentioned, is a problem in different areas of the asylum system.

So, yeah, I would say that we're aware it's very much a wider problem. And that's one of the things that's really terrifying to see is it played out again in this context. And we therefore have a fairly good sense of what's going to happen.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP Thank you very much Sophie and Maddie. Thanks.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much, Bell. Moving on now to some of the security issues with the site and I'll bring in Mary Kelly Foy.

Mary Kelly Foy MP Thank you. Thanks, Alison. We gather that some of the residents at Napier have been subject to threats and harassment, both inside the camp and in the local community. So, based on what you've seen, how is this affecting the residents and how are those people with responsibility for the security dealing with that? Can I ask Maddie first?

Maddie Harris Thank you, so there's two parts obviously, as you said – there's threats received inside and threats received outside.

In terms of the threats inside the camp, we've documented a number of examples since October last year of residents in the camp being told things like, "if you speak to the media, this will affect your asylum claim", to say to people, "don't complain about things more than once, otherwise we will tell the Home Office and this will affect your asylum claim".

There's one incident where a group of men were approached by a security guard and he said that there is a list with names that are circled, and these are of people who have spoken to the media.

Most recently, we were told by some of the men that they'd been told "don't speak to the NGOs. This will affect your asylum claim."

Where this comes from is impossible to say. But I have raised this in the monthly meetings that we have with Clearsprings Ready Homes and the Home Office and other stakeholders. And the initial response very quickly

when I raised the issue of these threats was this is simply not true - which, of course, is deeply troubling because there needs to be proper investigation into that. So, in terms of the threats, and your question about how they're being dealt with, they're not being dealt with - they're being dismissed.

In terms of outside of the camp – particularly recently, we've noticed an increase in the men reporting them experiencing racial abuse and harassment, near the camp and around the town. That includes people driving past in their cars and shouting things, but also known far-right activists spending time in and around the camp.

And again, I have raised this recently, and I don't feel that there is kind of enough proactive work going on to make sure that men feel safe. The police, for example, are visiting the camp, are talking to the men about some of the rules that exist in the UK, the laws that exist here. But when I asked, do they talk to you about what you can do if you don't feel safe? The response was no.

So, I think that it's fair to say that a lot of the men have said to us that they just don't feel safe. And I think that the staff and security that are involved are actually also part of that problem.

Mary Kelly Foy MP Thank you. Sophie, do you have anything to add?

Dr Sophie Cartwright Well, I agree with everything that Maddie has said. And again, just dividing it, I suppose, into the two bits inside the camp and outside the camp – we've known people receiving a variety of poor treatment from staff. And because that's in the place that they live, it affects, for example, the time at which they might want to leave their room or go to eat or things like that. And then crucially again, people have been told not to speak to media, to politicians, to NGOs about what's going on in Napier. And told that if they do, this could impact their asylum claim. People have been told not to take photos.

And this causes a huge amount of fear. It's really an active attempt to stifle dissent. I know that you've heard in the first evidence session about men moved to Tinsley house and how that appeared to be a punitive action for speaking out against Napier. So, it's part of a wider picture here and it's causing a huge amount of fear.

In terms of harassment from outside the camp – people have said they received racial abuse that they reported to us. And in terms of both fear of abuse and it happening repeatedly, and a wider sense of being watched and singled out, this really contributes to a sense of being imprisoned in

Napier, because you don't want to go out. You hate being in the camp, but leaving it doesn't feel like an option.

And I think this is indicative of a way in which the camp isolates its residents. It prevents them really from forming organic links with the wider community and it really makes them stand out, because it's outside of the town - in order to go into the town, you're very much seen walking in from outside. And I think that's significant in this context.

And some people have actually told us, "well, I don't leave the camp because I feel like I'm being watched. And I feel like people are hostile to my presence". That's what people have said to us. And Napier is set up in such a way that it encourages or obliges people almost to self-detain. It doesn't encourage people or really support them to engage with the community. It's also relevant, I think, that the way this is a ghettoised site acts as a barrier to the local community engaging with and getting to know the people who are residents there. So, it really does in that sense militate against integration and the formation of wider community bonds.

Honestly, if one were trying, if one wished to create a system that eroded human empathy between people seeking sanctuary and host communities, one might well come up with Napier.

So, I think it's putting that abuse partly in the context – or putting the whole experience of feeling cut-off from the community in the context of the site, I think is maybe helpful.

Mary Kelly Foy MP

Thanks for that. We've heard from Ministers that the residents can come and go as they please and they're free to be part of the community. I mean, obviously, it's bad enough feeling unsafe in the community – but in fact, if the people who are meant to be providing you with security are some of those who are doing the harassment, then that's equally just a dreadful situation.

Can I ask both of you then as well? What about you, yourselves and your organisations - or even people that you know who are working in Napier? Have you had any threats or any harassment at all?

Maddie Harris

So, I have had a couple of incidents when I've been near to the camp, which involved known far-right or right wing activists filming and following. There are others as well, local volunteers who've had similar experiences.

I think similarly to the way in which we've described what the men have told us about the kind of abuse and threats that they receive, my organisation, we have heard from other volunteers, from other organisations that attend

meetings with the Home Office, also in a separate context, allegations have been made about us. For example, that we incite violence.

There's been issues with kind of more generalised, kind of slanderous remarks, I suppose - you know, talking about the NGOs encouraging the men to go on hunger strike, for example. I think there is a real issue here with both the communication and the perception and the treatment and the description of, if you like, the organisations that are involved is really problematic. Especially when some of that could well be filtering down or what is being said about us to the men – for example, saying to the men, don't speak to NGOs, that will affect your claim.

Mary Kelly Foy MP OK, thanks for that.

Dr Sophie Cartwright All I was going to say is that we have had instances where members of our team have been walking with men from Napier in parts of the town and received verbal abuse sometimes.

And there were also instances where a volunteer of ours, an interpreter - there were some protesters outside of the site and one of the Napier residents asked her to approach them and ask what this was about. I think the resident had been wondering, are these people who are supportive of refugees or opposed to refugees? But as she approached the fence just to speak to them, one of the security guards was very intimidating towards her and started shouting at her, and told her she couldn't do this. I think they were worried about there being any kind of communication.

So that's a specific incident I wanted to add. But in the main part, I think, we affirm what Maddie said about the wider context.

Mary Kelly Foy MP Thank you. Thanks for sharing that with us.

Alison Thewliss MP That's really awful. Thank you. Baroness Lister.

Baroness Lister of Burtsett You mentioned about Tinsley House, Sophie. We discussed it in our first session regarding the immigration removal centre there, which was de-designated for a period earlier this year and used to accommodate a group of men who had previously been at Napier. We gather from your written evidence that JRS UK supported some of those men. Is there any more information you can share about what happened, any concerns you wanted to raise? I mean you mentioned just now that you thought it was a kind of punitive move to send them there.

Dr Sophie Cartwright OK. So, I think the first thing to say is that access to that site was really problematic, partly because the men placed there were treated as though

they had in fact been detained. So, one of our team visited and initially wasn't allowed to see the men placed there - either on or off the premises.

So, first she was told by a security guard, "you're not allowed to see the men because they're detained", even though the site had been de-designated. On being challenged, the security guard admitted that, "OK, at the moment Tinsley House isn't a detention centre", but maintained that nonetheless our staff member couldn't meet with the men who were there, because you had to be outside and it was raining, and that would be bad for the men's health. But, you know, you would think that's a decision that they would be able to make.

And eventually there had to be quite an extensive struggle about this. But the people who were held in Tinsley House were permitted to leave the premises to meet a JRS UK staff member in the street. After a while, three officials, at least one of whom appeared to be from the Home Office, told our staff member that they needed to move their car. Now, given where it was parked, it wasn't really clear that they had authority to do this. It felt like perhaps this was another attempt to sort of move things on and obstruct access.

So I think that's one of the key things we wanted to share about Tinsley House. Really specifically it was initially said they are detained, which is not true. And the set-up made it difficult for people to leave, even if not formally detained. So, on coming out to meet with us, the men had to navigate 6 security guards at the gate to get out. And this felt very much like a prison environment. And some people said that they preferred not to leave as the feeling of freedom and then being effectively re-detained was too damaging. So, it's built to the standards of a category B prison. It's not surprising that people feel like they're imprisoned.

You asked about the kind of punitive nature of the transfer. What I have to say is mainly echoing what was said in the first session, that one of the reasons that we ended up working with these people was because they were people, some of whom were previously known to us from Napier, and they'd been transferred from Napier to Tinsley House following a fire. They'd previously been speaking out against the conditions at Napier. Our understanding is, as again was mentioned in the first evidence session, that they had been at some point arrested in connection with the fire, but all charges were dropped. And this appears to be, well why were they bailed then to Tinsley House? It seems to be a kind of extrajudicial form of punitive action, which isn't being held up to any legal scrutiny. That is obviously somewhat speculative, but I think the circumstances there merit flagging.

Mary Kelly Foy MP Thank you very much.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. I think this has been kind of answered through the course of the evidence that you've given, both of you, today - I just wondered if there's anything else you wanted to say specifically about your interactions with the Home Office and with contractors? You mentioned some of the issues around that. Is there anything else concerning that that you would like to raise? Maddie.

Maddie Harris Thank you. So, the engagement is quite limited. We have a monthly meeting and we obviously do have the ability to email in between. But we have one hour every month, which is totally inadequate given the severity of the situation.

I would say that there is a complete disregard for the evidence that we provide. So, essentially issues that are disclosed to us by the men, we will then take those to the meetings, or issues or concerns that we have. And, you know, almost throughout the entire process, there is a kind of disregard for that evidence, the denial that those issues are even really in existence.

We've never seen anything in terms of operational plans or procedures or anything like that. We've been asking to see a copy of the Covid-19 risk assessment, for example, for some time, and have recently been told that we will not receive that.

Even issues, for example, relating to unaccompanied asylum seeking children, which I raised at the meeting last week – we were told we would receive an answer to the issues that we had raised and we have not received that.

So, I think kind of generally there is a big issue here in terms of the engagement and also that would apply to the contractors too. We ask questions. We need updates. We want to understand what's going on and we want to raise concerns. But there is certainly a real inability to actually engage with us in any meaningful way.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. Sophie?

Dr Sophie Cartwright Very similar to what Maddie has said. The Home Office and contractors are very resistant to sharing information. One of the things about the risk assessment in relation to Covid is that we were asking for it, partly, in case we had volunteers who live with vulnerable family members or something. It seemed like quite a practical and necessary and one would think relatively uncontroversial piece of information. But it's not forthcoming.

And also just systems change with no notice. So we mentioned before blocks being quarantined because of Covid scares. We never find out from the site, we find that out from the people on the site. So just the whole thing is really chaotic. And you can ask one person – firstly they don't often seem to have very much information. But if you ask one person, they'll tell you one thing. Someone else will tell you something slightly different. Or it's just not communicated at all.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you. And from what you said earlier, you haven't been able to access the site yourselves, either organisation?

Maddie Harris So, we have very recently been granted access, but it's to run a quite specific workshop. There was a very long process to get to this point, including quite a lot of inaccurate information, such as - we were told as a group of organisations "we've had many offers of support. We're just working through those".

We were also told initially that the activity we'd suggested was duplicated. We were told by who. We know this organisation. We spoke to them. This was not the case. So, we will have access. There are other organisations who do, but that's actually quite a recent development.

And I think in terms of access, us being able to go in and run a workshop is good, but it's absolutely not enough. So, we frequently are supporting men who are having issues around communicating with their solicitors and vice versa, solicitors who are struggling to contact the men. And I think what is absolutely necessary is that there is a way for organisations who have clients or members or individuals that they're supporting in the camp, for us to be able to kind of meaningfully engage with those people in a private setting.

Sophie can kind of talk more about physically what it's like when you go into the camp. But certainly it does not feel in any way from what we hear, like a kind of constructive, safe place in which people can have open conversations with people.

And just one final thing is that it's our understanding that not a single solicitor has ever been able to visit the camp to meet with their client.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you. Sophie?

Dr Sophie Cartwright So just to clarify, we do have physical access to the site and have done for quite a while. Access to different parts of the site is restricted. And one thing that I think is significant is that it's not really clear what's permitted and what isn't. So, if you were on site and you walk a little bit in one direction, a

security guard may tell you that you're entering a restricted area and this can be concretely problematic. For example, it happened when a colleague of mine was trying to accompany a Napier resident to the nurse, and was told "you can't go there".

Maddie already talked about the difficulty of any private space in which you can have a conversation with someone, and that's significant if there's legally significant things. But you're there partly to offer pastoral support and there's nowhere that people can feel remotely safe talking to you.

Again, we've asked for a written protocol about which areas of the site are restricted and we haven't been given one. And we've asked for a written protocol for NGOs visiting the site. The site managers told us that the document exists, and we've sent emails requesting it, and we haven't got a response.

So, on-site there are a lot of restrictions and we are very fortunate to have access to the site. We are one of the very few organisations that does, as Maddie has said.

Alison Thewliss MP

OK, that's useful to know. Thank you. I don't know if any of the other parliamentarians on the call had anything else that they wanted to ask? OK, I don't see anybody that's jumping in here.

OK, I understand that [volunteer at Napier Barracks], who is on the line here as well, has had some experience too that perhaps she would like to briefly share?

[Volunteer at Napier Barracks]

Hi, everybody. Yeah - I mean, many of the things that Maddie and Sophie have been talking about are things that I have experienced myself.

So, I live in Folkestone and I have been working or supporting residents at the barracks back since September, since it opened. And that started in a very sort of organic way, let's say, with me and a friend delivering some needed items to some of the men and then getting filmed by the far-right and witnessing one of the far-right attacking one of the residents. So, that was a very unpleasant start to everything.

And so I was working with Care4Calais but now I'm just running the drop-in centre on Wednesdays.

I've been into Napier Barracks on a number of occasions now. I'm not going in at the moment, but I have been in fairly recently. And thinking about the improvements that they've made - I mean, it doesn't look very different. So, having been in there in that September / winter period, and then going in

when they've had the second group of people in there, the difference is that they've put some signage up, for example, which says that this is the interview room - which, of course, makes everybody feel like they're going to get their interview as soon as they arrive at Napier. They see that sign when they go in. There's a sign that indicates where the nurse's surgery is.

But there's not really much you can do to change those buildings. They are deteriorating rapidly and they haven't done anything to improve the buildings. They were built in the 1890s and they're riddled with asbestos. And there's absolutely nothing you can do about that.

And the communal rooms, the space that they have, which is operated by Migrant Help, which is a space where they can go and get information from the Migrant Help workers on site – again, it's just like paint peeling off the walls, torn lino on the floor. It's just a really miserable place and a miserable environment.

As soon as they took the barbed wire down, which was just before the judgment was handed down, some local people with strong feelings about the camp decided to jump over the fence and try to attack some of the residents inside as well.

So, however they try to dress up Napier, it will never be suitable, it will never be humane. There's absolutely no way in my opinion.

And I'm happy to submit some more written evidence if needed.

Alison Thewliss MP

That would be very useful. Thanks for coming in with that [volunteer at Napier Barracks], that was very helpful. I don't know, Maddie, Sophie, have you got anything finally you would like to add?

Maddie Harris

Just a couple of things that I would like to add. The Home Office has been experimenting with men's lives, both in terms of their physical and mental well-being, but also in terms of their asylum claims. I think I was sort of surprised by the first evidence session that I attended, and hearing a lot of what we are seeing and hearing from the men on the ground reflected back. That there is and there was never any plan. That men were moved into a camp, and security guards have been controlling and surveilling these people for many months now, and that continues.

And I think the second thing I wanted to say is, as we've already mentioned, we talk about reception centres. We've had a reception centre in the UK since September. And I think that if what they have been doing in Napier is what we will see moving forward, that's deeply, deeply concerning. Because from my experience, men who we've met earlier on

and then who spent a period of time in the camp, they do not sound like the same people after they spend a period of time in that camp. It is deeply, deeply distressing and harmful for people.

And just finally, that there just does appear to be a complete lack of accountability and a complete lack of oversight. A High Court judge has ruled the camp to be inadequate accommodation. Yet there are still, as of Thursday last week, one hundred and seventy men in the camp. Yeah, that's just some last remarks I wanted to make.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you, Sophie.

Dr Sophie Cartwright Yes, in large part – what she said.

I just want to reiterate again how people do feel really dehumanised and literally say things like, "I didn't feel like a person when I was there". They describe changes in their personality and how they interact with the world. It's really a deeply damaging context.

And, I think it's relevant because it seems to be a part of the conception for reception centres and this seems to be about some sort of streamlining of asylum processing. This is a really appalling context for asylum processing. The asylum system there is not working at all, and often actually what's happening is causing many delays. It's likely to cause delays further down the line because so much is going wrong at this stage.

And something about what Maddie said with reference to the lack of a plan. There is a willful resistance to evidence, as far as I can see, throughout this process. Right from the very beginning, when there's already a warning from Public Health England that you shouldn't open this accommodation, certainly during a pandemic, because of the risk of Covid. That's exactly what happens. And they keep going.

And when you are resistant to scrutiny, it's very easy to be resistant to evidence because it's a method for refusing to engage with it and for pretending it's not there. I think this is a really disturbing context on many levels and it's having a huge, huge human impact.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much. Thank you very much to Maddie and to Sophie for the evidence that they've given today. It's been incredibly powerful to listen to your experience, and I'm very grateful for your time and your expertise this afternoon.

Thank you also to all colleagues who joined and asked questions and to the over 40 people who've been listening in on the call as well. I'm very grateful

that so many people have come to listen and hopefully to share what you've heard as well with other people, because I think it is important that people hear what's been going on here and people understand what the impact of this is on individuals.

We can still, of course, take any additional written evidence from those who have come to give evidence today and from others on the call. And we have an opportunity coming up in the second reading of the Nationality and Borders Bill, which is taking place on Monday and Tuesday next week in the House of Commons, which is a good opportunity to highlight some of the concerns that we have as an APPG and the things that we have heard as part of this inquiry. So I would very much encourage members who can take part in that debate to do so, and to highlight some of the issues that we've heard.

The inquiry has gathered already a very comprehensive body of evidence, and we will be using that in coming weeks to put that together and compile a report of what we have heard. And we'll keep everybody informed as to when that report is going to be issued and colleagues who are on the APPG will also hear the progress on this.

In the meantime, the transcripts and where we have videos, some of the oral evidence that we've received will be available on the APPG's website, so information can be more widely accessed and shared. So, the video from the first session is on there. We agreed not to put some of the video from the second session on there, and there will be a video from this session going up there as soon as we can manage to do that.

But thank you all so very much for your time today. I'm very grateful for your time, your expertise and for the ongoing work that you're doing, supporting these men at the camp. It's incredibly important work, and I'm sure that they're grateful for everything that you're doing to help support them in such difficult circumstances.

Thank you all very much. Have a good day.