

APPG – Napier Barracks Evidence

Submission of Evidence from [name], [job title], at Drop In Centre for Napier Barracks and [job title] at Care4Calais from November 2020 – May 2020

Legal Access:

- The location of Napier Barracks on the edge of a small town on the South coast denies asylum seekers access to lawyers. Folkestone has one immigration solicitor, TNA. In October and November 2020 they started taking referrals from Care4Calais but took on 30 people - too many for a small firm. They also demonstrated that they did not have the capacity for complex case work and were not familiar with referring through the NRM for victims of torture and trafficking.
- As late as March 2021 we were meeting people who had been at the Barracks for 6 months and had not yet found a solicitor. No access had been offered in the camp by Migrant Help.
- In November 2020, when I went to site to give men their legal papers to instruct their asylum lawyers, the papers were taken off me and scrutinized by camp management.
- The men were told and are still being told by some staff that they don't need a lawyer yet and it's better to wait until they reach their dispersal accommodation, despite the fact they may have their asylum interview in the camp.
- No lawyer has ever set foot in Napier. TNA, the Folkestone based practice, have requested access but were always denied. This is extremely concerning given that interviews are now conducted on site.
- The Migrant Help Client Advisor on site is also a First Responder with the duty of referring onto the NRM. We have no evidence that she has made any referrals despite there being a vast number of victims of torture and trafficking at Napier. As far as we know, all referrals have been made by NGOs.

Local Hostility:

- Local online FB groups and online forums are full of hate speech and racist abuse towards the residents of Napier. In September 2020, When Folkestone & Hythe District Council released a press release about the use of the camp to house asylum seekers they did nothing to remove or moderate the hate speech that followed in the comments.
- The council itself seems to always be on the back foot, asking irrelevant questions at SESPM meetings and have never consulted with the NGOs directly that work on the ground supporting the residents. The main fears of council officers focus on men 'absconding' from the camp into the local community.

- The style of the accommodation means the perception in the local community is that the people housed there must be criminals when in fact they are extremely vulnerable people, vulnerable to abusive behaviour themselves.
- Volunteers living in Folkestone have to be careful when collecting donations or recruiting volunteers to ensure that they are not targeted or infiltrated by far right members. We work hard to ensure the Drop In remains a safe space but it's hard to raise donations when you cannot easily promote your work.
- Following the judicial review there was a further increase in hate crime and far right presence outside the camp. One [nationality] man, was verbally abused by two women from their car, who told him to go back to where he came from, and that they: 'had better go in case he tries to behead us'. The man had spoken to the BBC and read the comments online beneath the interview and was hurt and shocked and found it very difficult to understand why he was being targeted with abuse. After this he found it hard to leave the Barracks unaccompanied. He has since been moved to other accommodation but we remain concerned about his welfare.
- Men have sadly often reported that on their short walk to the Church Drop In, they are racially abused from passing cars and it has deterred many from coming to seek support.
- Far right presence in the area has made it unsafe for NGOs to operate and unsafe for the residents. After barbed wire was removed from the site in the wake of the judgment, some drunken locals jumped the fence and attacked the residents with a glass bottle. It is evident that the barbed wire is problematic for the residents because being surrounded by it can trigger painful memories but when it is removed it renders them unsafe from violence directed towards asylum seekers; with or without the barbed wire, the site proves itself to be a desperately unsuitable place to house asylum seekers.
- In September 2020 I was targeted along with my friend who is of [nationality] heritage, when delivering aid to the camp when it first opened. We were filmed and threatened by a far right group. We then watched them attack one of the men as he was leaving the site. My friend challenged them and they filmed her and my number plate and posted this on YouTube, Twitter and far right media channels. We felt very unsafe after this. We avoided the welcome rally we were due to attend after the police advised us not to go. The police also advised me to change my number plate.
- No one in the local community wishes asylum seekers to be housed at Napier Barracks and the opinions are split between those who don't want Napier because it is inhumane and not fit for purpose and those who do not want Napier because they do not want asylum seekers living in a large group amidst their community.

Conditions:

- When men first arrived in early April 2021, they were given the same broken beds used by the previous occupants with filthy mattresses. It took about 2 weeks for new mattresses to arrive, but before that scabies broke out.
- The rooms still have the same flimsy curtains and there is no enforcement of the non-smoking rule in the dorms by staff so it is only matter of time before a fire incident.
- Dorms are freezing in winter and boiling in the summer. The old khaki green paint is peeling from the walls and the linoleum is patched and broken. Furniture for the offices was salvaged from skips. Lockers are cheap and easy to break into.
- Aid is difficult to distribute in the Barracks and outside, because it is almost always impossible to get enough of the items needed and never identical items to ensure fairness.
- Migrant Help provide none of the necessities especially in terms of clothing that they are contractually bound to provide. The residents wear broken flip-flops and when they are transferred (often with minutes notice) they are forced to stuff their clothes into bin bags. NGOs grouped together to provide trainers for 300 residents and the Home Office have since tried to claim credit for this. We feel trapped – like we have to help, but in helping we then start to enable this type of facility.
- Many ‘improvements’ are in reality provided by NGOs and local volunteers for free and it is hard to understand where £500,000 has allegedly been spent making these improvements.
- Due to the fact there are fewer older people in the 2nd cohort, there are many young men together. Often in their respective communities there will be elders who take care of the younger men and keep them calm and support them. Because there are few people over the age of 50 this has led to skirmishes breaking out between different groups.
- Tensions are compounded by the fact that it’s very difficult to sleep. Throughout the night people call their family, get up to use the bathroom, smoke, have night terrors – most people do not sleep until 4 or 5 am. At 8am they are woken by heavy plant machinery demolishing the buildings flanking their dorms. Dust from the demolition fills the dorms and makes it difficult to breathe. The men get stuck in a cycle of poor sleep and not being able to attend appointments or leave the Barracks for some respite.
- The house where the Indian staff on student visas lived from September to March has been condemned and is adorned with ‘out of bounds’ signs. The fabric of the site is literally crumbling before your eyes.

Covid:

- It took at least two months before camp management organized for the men to have their vaccinations – this programme could have started much earlier. Men were not signposted to local walk-in clinics even when their age group became eligible.
- The dorm style accommodation means all illnesses, not just Covid, have the potential to sweep through the camp. I cannot think of another example in the UK right now, where people are forced to live like this.
- The reporting of a positive test result to NGOs is very haphazard and shared in an informal WhatsApp group through the MH Client Advisor. We are told if blocks are isolating and that there have been PCR tests and await the result – often we have to chase it – even when we are running the Drop In centre the next day and need to know ASAP if we can run it or not.
- The major outbreak of Covid at the camp was such a dark moment in the pandemic and in the history of immigration to the UK. I have included the report I submitted to the HASC on 3rd Feb 2021, presented by Dr Jill O’Leary, as it describes how we assisted a man with severe Covid symptoms with leaving the Barracks in the aftermath of the fire. Without this help we fear he may have died.
- Update 9.8.21: A positive Covid case has been confirmed at the Barracks. We have had not official communication from HO, MH or CRS. One of the men shared the confirmation letter with us dated 5.8.21. As organisers of the Drop In we should be informed officially and because of the threat of an outbreak in the wider community. We will not run the Drop In on 11.8.21. The HO have refused to share their Covid risk assessment for the Barracks with us or agree a protocol for informing supporting NGOs of positive cases.
- Further to the above point – levels of vaccination in the camp are low due to many being recently arrived people. Furthermore health screenings are inadequate so underlying health issues are largely unidentified. The positive case poses the risk of a very serious outbreak with dire consequences for the unvaccinated asylum seekers.

Medical Provision

- Immigration Minister Chris Philp wrote to Damien Collins and said there would be no impact on local services. Immediately when the camp opened there was a huge impact as the men had limited access to medical care, which meant they had to call 111.
- There is an onsite nurse employed by Thornbury Nursing services and the men have to go through him to book a doctor’s appointment at White House Surgery. Something is not right about this arrangement – residents cannot book an appointment there themselves – some residents who were transferred into Napier were never deregistered from their prior practices and reregistered at White House Surgery. The GP surgeries are notoriously over-stretched in Folkestone and there is no way, at its peak capacity, that WHS registered 400+ new patients. We believe they are only

registered if and when the nurse believes they need to see a GP. It is not equivalent access to a GP to other asylum seekers not held in such accommodation in the UK.

Safeguarding and welfare

- The new 'Welfare' Manager is [name] a person who, during the major Covid outbreak, told everyone they were all one household and could mix freely. A person who was sending uninfected men to hospital with Covid positive cases so they could translate, subsequently infecting them with Covid. Their safeguarding training is level 2. This is not high enough for a camp that frequently becomes residence to incorrectly age assessed unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable people. We have witnessed this manager favouring demonstrably younger residents over others in the camp 'taking them under their wing' but not referring them to the Refugee Council, not putting in place the safeguards to ensure they are removed from the camp for assessment and housed with social services.
- This manager also tried to dissuade me from having a young person removed from the camp by claiming that the young person had disclosed that they were over 18;; this same young person had only ever told me he was under 18 and he had the documents to prove he was a child. He has since had his unaccompanied minor status accepted and is in care. The only reason I can think of that the manager lied about this disclosure was so that he could keep this young person under his influence in the camp.
- There were a lot of suicide attempts and attempts to escape when the second cohort moved in. I was sent images of a man who had tried to self-harm. One underage person attempted suicide immediately after being transferred out to a hotel. A man who was removed due to self-harming was sent from Napier to a squalid filthy hotel with bed bugs, blood stains on the bed and used disposable masks bundled up down underneath it.
- There is no evidence of regular paid translators being present on site and security staff often step in to translate on what should really be confidential conversations.
- Another manager on site, [name], deals with the day to day running of the camp and is also the Imam. This is hugely problematic. A religious leader should not be involved with running the site and have a position of such power. The men have said that those who regularly attend prayers are treated more favourably and those that are lapsed Muslims, seeking asylum on grounds of sexual orientation, drink alcohol or have tattoos for example, suffer as a result. This same person was the Imam at the notorious Brook house.

I would like to end this by adding that Philomena Creffield, who is in charge of Napier Barracks for the Home Office, said the following in the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration meeting: '80% of asylum seekers are unsuitable for housing at Napier Barracks due to vulnerabilities.'

Which begs the question, if only 20% are suitable, and even this percentage is questionable, why even use it? The answer seems to be because this quasi-detention accommodation is deliberately punitive. This is utterly inhumane and this type of accommodation needs to be challenged before other even more horrifying 'solutions' are put in place.