

## **Report for Submission to HASC**

**from Care4Calais Volunteer working at Napier Barracks**

**16 October 2020 – 3 February 2021**

**Background:** After moving approx. 100 men from site to isolate in hotels after the Covid outbreak, the remaining men received a letter in English only, on 29 January from Clearsprings Ready Homes, stating: the men would remain in the Barracks and be split into smaller bubbles to in order to isolate. The men believed they would all be moved out to isolate so this came as a shock. On 12 January, following protests about conditions, men had also attended a virtual meeting with Home Office officials to agree that they would be gradually moved from the site. Following the large groups being moved to relative safety, the men felt let down, lied to, and afraid, and that they would all be left to catch Covid in the deteriorating conditions. Many of the men in the groups moved to hotels also had positive Covid test results so the criteria for moving men remains unclear and arbitrary.

### **Immediate concerns:**

- No nurse on site since 29 January. Many of the men need urgent medical attention due to suffering severe Covid and sleeping on the floor in freezing rooms. Doctors need to assess the men as a matter of urgency.
- Men are not in 'bubbles' as Home Office has stated, made to stand in line for food, food not brought to their rooms as Home Office has stated.
- Rubbish is piling up. No cleaning for 3 weeks. No laundry for 3 weeks. They are in dirty clothes and sleeping in dirty beds.
- Men are using the un-cleaned beds vacated by others who have left, and some of whom were Covid positive.
- All are worried about the further spread of Covid with many displaying symptoms and no further testing and isolating on site.
- After several days without it, contrary to what the Home Office has stated, electricity and heating is not fully restored to all blocks and

switched off at 11pm despite being mid-winter. Heating and electricity is intermittent.

- Men are asking for clothes to replace items lost or damaged in the fire, blankets, and food they can eat when they are very sick with Covid (like soup) and even drinking water. But NGOs are being turned away and threatened with fines under Covid legislation for non-essential journeys.
- On the night of the fire Care4Calais volunteers provided emergency food relief to the men which was taken in, in the back of a riot van and handed out by the police.
- Men have been told to drink from bathroom taps when previously they were told not to drink the water. This is not Covid safe either.
- Volunteers tried to call an ambulance for one of the men and a police officer at the gate tried to prevent the ambulance from coming.
- A member of Clearsprings staff has threatened all NGOs to stay away, especially those that have been speaking to the media.
- The men have been locked into a crime scene, in the middle of a global pandemic, with no idea who is in charge or what is going on and why where they live now resembles the war zones they have fled. They are tired, ill and very frightened.

#### **On-going Concerns:**

- Medical care insufficient. 1 nurse for 400+ men Mon-Fri. No evenings or weekends. 1 doctor's surgery locally registered some as patients. No mental health care provision despite many men being known victims of trafficking and torture.
- The men have had to tolerate being told it's okay for them to mix with others with confirmed positive Covid tests, share dorms, toilets and eating facilities.
- 28 people per dorm 14 along each wall, thin partitions and sheets strung up for 'privacy' all sharing 2 toilets and 2 showers, often broken. Social distancing impossible.
- Men are threatened with it affecting their asylum claims if they refuse to eat or stay out past curfew at 10pm.

- Poorly run clothing distributions on site led to fights breaking out and the men were blamed and Home Office told.
- Prison-like environment having a serious psychological affect on the men. Given frequent misinformation for example that they would be there for 30 days maximum, now many have been there for 4 months, that they would not get NASS payments when this decision had been overturned and they were due to receive back payments.
- One of the site managers, who has a lot of power over the men is also the Imam and reportedly treats the men differently if they do not attend prayers and do things that are considered 'haram'.
- At least 6 were identified as children, one of whom was self-harming due to the environment he found himself in.
- I know of at least 5 suicide attempts and that 22 were on suicide watch reportedly in a guarded room all locked in together and this was at the time of the Covid outbreak (around 13 Jan).
- Even stable individuals began to report a serious deterioration in their mental health due to being resident at the Barracks.
- Impact on local services has been huge due to suicide attempts and Covid outbreak, with scores of ambulances called to site and calls to 111 and 999. Home Office said there would be no impact on local services.
- Told no access to 'legal charities' or counselling services would be permitted in the Barracks by site manager.
- Lawyers prevented from going on site and also we were tightly monitored if presenting men with their legal papers - one manager insisted on reading the papers which he should not have been party to.
- Surrounded by high barbed wire fence and mesh so you can't see in or out. Feels like a prison.
- Barrack buildings severely dilapidated and scheduled for demolition, paint peeling from the walls, broken furniture and asbestos warning signs on the walls.
- Toilets and showers ill-maintained and frequently out of order.

- Volunteers asked to sign OSA. This would have meant no welfare concerns could be raised with external stakeholders.
- Location of men moved to hotel shared widely on hostile residents forums with many 1000s of members where people used hate speech and racial slurs in their comments with no moderation from admins.
- I witnessed a member of the far-right assaulting a resident of the barracks, pushing him into the path of my car – far right activity is scaring the men into never leaving the barracks at all.