



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention

Report of Visit to Napier Barracks on 2 February 2022

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About the APPG on Immigration Detention

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Immigration Detention brings together Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum who share concerns about the use of immigration detention in the UK.

The group aims to raise awareness within Parliament about immigration detention and its impacts. It offers Members of Parliament and Peers opportunities to debate issues with relevant experts from outside Parliament, including people with lived experience of detention, as well as lawyers, medical professionals, academics and representatives from non-profit organisations. Using the information gathered through its work, the APPG advocates for evidence-based reforms to immigration detention policy, and for the welfare of detainees.

The current Chair of the APPG is Alison Thewliss, MP for Glasgow Central. A full list of officers and members of the APPG is available at <https://appgdetention.org.uk/about/current-members/>.

The secretariat of the APPG on Immigration Detention is provided by the charity Medical Justice.

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Acknowledgements

The APPG Visit Members extends its thanks to the Home Office officials and on-site staff for facilitating the site visit to Napier, and speaking with them on the day.

The APPG Visit Members also wishes to thank the current and former residents of Napier Barracks who spoke with them during the course of the visit. The APPG Visit Members are conscious of the bravery required to discuss the types of issues in this report when directly affected by them, and of the emotional toll that doing so can take. They are very grateful too to the staff and volunteers of JRS UK, the Humans for Rights Network and Napier Friends who also shared information and updates on the situation at Napier.

Finally, the APPG Visit Members also thank Elspeth Macdonald at Medical Justice / the APPG Secretariat for her work in organising the visit and writing the Visit Report.

Executive Summary

On 2 February 2022, members of the APPG on Immigration Detention conducted a visit to Napier Barracks, a former UK military base in Kent used by the UK government to house people seeking asylum since September 2020.

The visit followed on from an inquiry by the APPG last year into the use of Napier and other similar sites. The APPG Inquiry Panel found that such sites were “fundamentally unsuitable” to house people seeking asylum, and that people housed there had been subjected to “appalling” treatment and conditions.

This report summarises the evidence gathered during the inquiry and lays out the additional information gathered by APPG Visit Member at Napier in February. It warns that changes introduced by the Home Office have not addressed the fundamental problems of the site. This is despite a ruling by the High Court that the site did not meet minimum standards for asylum accommodation, and numerous and repeated concerns expressed by other bodies including independent inspectors, parliamentarians, charities and residents themselves.

The report highlights that serious concerns continue, including in relation to:

- inadequate safeguarding of vulnerable people, such as victims of torture and trafficking, with little being done to identify residents who are in need of support
- the physical environment of the site, which was run-down, isolated and bleak, with many buildings in an extremely poor state of repair
- a near total lack of privacy and private spaces at the site, with residents continuing to be accommodated in dormitories of up to 12-14 people and having to share showers, toilets, and other facilities
- noise levels in the dormitories, and the sleep deprivation and the negative impact on residents’ mental health resulting from this
- inadequate access for residents to healthcare and legal advice, and the difficulties they face in engaging with their asylum claim at the site
- the site’s prison-like nature and military features, including security checks upon entering and the presence of security guards patrolling
- the lack of autonomy, choice and control over their daily lives that residents experience at the site.

The report explains that, having seen and experienced the sites for themselves, the APPG Visit Members are firmly of the view that Napier and other sites like it are fundamentally unsuitable for use as asylum accommodation, and do not allow a person to engage effectively with their asylum claim.

The APPG Visit Members also confirm in the report their support for the recommendations contained in the 2021 APPG Inquiry Report, including a call to close Napier with immediate and permanent effect, and to ensure that people seeking asylum are housed in decent, safe accommodation in the community that supports their well-being and recovery from trauma, facilitates their engagement with the asylum process, and allows them to build links with their community.

1. Introduction

From May to December 2021, the APPG on Immigration Detention conducted an inquiry into the UK government's use of former military barracks and Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) as asylum accommodation. Evidence was gathered from May to September 2021, and a full APPG Inquiry Report was published in December 2021.¹

One of the sites examined during the inquiry was Napier Barracks in Folkestone, Kent. The Home Office has contracted out the running of the site to a private company, Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH). CRH in turn sub-contract out various services at the site to other private companies.²

Following on from the inquiry, a number of parliamentarians and staff (the 'APPG Visit Members' – full list at Section 2) conducted a site visit to Napier Barracks on Thursday 3 February 2022. The site visit was arranged by the Home Office and CRH.

Prior to the site visit, the APPG Visit Members met independently off-site with representatives from two charities - JRS UK and the Humans for Rights Network - that provide direct support to Napier residents. Two former Napier residents also attended and spoke at this meeting.

This report builds on the full APPG Inquiry Report and lays out the updates and observations gathered during the visit.

It is important to note the limitations of the visit, which affected in turn the amount and type of information that APPG Visit Members could gather. These limitations included:

- APPG Visit Members submitted a number of requests to the Home Office prior to the Napier site visit. Some of the requests were included in the visit itinerary, such as viewing the sleeping blocks. Home Office officials advised some of these requests could be included, such as viewing the sleeping blocks, but that others could not be. The requests that were not included speaking privately with residents (i.e. without Home Office officials or on-site staff present) if residents wished; speaking privately with various key staff members; and viewing the facilities in which residents' on-site substantive asylum interviews are taking place.
- Meetings between APPG Visit Members and residents were pre-arranged, and took place in a public area (the Dining Hall). Home Office officials and on-site staff did not participate in the conversations, but were present in the room while they took place.
- Conversations took place between APPG Visit Members and on-site staff and volunteers whilst moving around the site. Due to time constraints, these conversations were short and did not allow for detailed discussion of topics or concerns.

¹ <https://appgdetention.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/211209-APPG-on-Immigration-Detention-Report-of-Inquiry-into-Quasi-Detention.pdf>

² For a list of sub-contractors correct at September 2021 see: <https://appgdetention.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CRH-submission-on-Napier.pdf>

2. Visit Members

The parliamentarians and staff members who took part in the visit were:

- Alison Thewliss MP (APPG Chair) – SNP
- Stuart McDonald MP – SNP
- Anne McLaughlin MP – SNP
- Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP – Labour
- Kirsty McCafferty – Office of Alison Thewliss MP
- Alexander Belic – Office of Alison Thewliss MP
- Elspeth Macdonald – APPG Secretariat

3. Findings

3.1 Safeguarding

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

- There were **inadequate safeguards** in place to prevent harm and abuse of residents.
- For example, there were **serious concerns over effectiveness of the Home Office’s “suitability criteria” process**, a key safeguard supposed to screen out people whom the government accept are too vulnerable to be accommodated at the sites,³ and **no effective mechanisms to proactively identify vulnerabilities amongst residents once living at the sites.**
- Instead, the **Home Office was inappropriately and unrealistically relying on vulnerable residents themselves, or their legal representatives, to raise issues of vulnerability.**
- As a result, **many vulnerable people found to be accommodated at the sites**, including unaccompanied age-disputed children; people who were self-harming, suicidal or had other serious mental health conditions; and victims of torture and trafficking.

³ The categories of people too vulnerable to be accommodated at the sites include people who are victims of trafficking, torture, sexual violence or other serious forms of violence, disabled or have complex health needs, and others. The full list and details of the process are laid out in the Allocation of Accommodation Policy at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-requests-policy>. Home Office officials use the “suitability criteria” process to assess both a person’s initial suitability for accommodation at the sites (i.e. at the point of transfer in) as well as their ongoing suitability (i.e. once they are already accommodated there).

- In June 2021, the **High Court found the “suitability criteria” process to be unlawful** and ruled that the Home Office needed a better system for identifying vulnerability if it were to continue to Napier as asylum accommodation.⁴

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

Concerns persisted in relation to safeguarding. Despite the High Court ruling in June 2021, the Home Office did not appear to have made any changes to significantly improve the effectiveness of the “suitability criteria” process. Charities reported that vulnerable people were still being accommodated at the site. For example, the Humans for Rights Network reported that between April and November 2021 they had encountered 32 residents at Napier who were victims of torture or trafficking. The charity noted that, since they were not in contact with every resident, the total number of such victims at the site during this time period was likely to have been higher.

During the Napier site visit, the on-site nurse gave an example of a resident he had encountered recently who was a victim of trafficking and had been at the site for two weeks. He also described how it could take time for residents to build up enough trust to disclose such information to him. This suggested residents who were vulnerable might be spending additional time at the site before being identified.

Home Office officials and the nurse explained that when a resident was identified as vulnerable, they would be referred to a Home Office safeguarding team to be considered for transfer away from the site. There appeared to be delays in this process however: the charity JRS UK highlighted a recent case where a resident had submitted a request to be transferred away from the site due to his vulnerability, but did not receive a response from the Home Office for two weeks.

Home Office officials explained that residents who requested a transfer away from the site due to their vulnerability would be sent to hotel asylum accommodation; in contrast, residents who did not make such a request and stayed at Napier for their full period would be sent to dispersal accommodation in the community. APPG Visit Members found this policy concerning in two regards. Firstly, conditions in hotel asylum accommodation have been described as “dehumanising” and shown to negatively affect the mental and physical health of asylum seekers.⁵ Returning people who are known to be vulnerable to such accommodation is highly inappropriate and puts their health further at risk. Secondly, the policy may result in vulnerable people feeling

⁴ *R (NB & Ors) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2021] EWHC 1489 (Admin)*

⁵ For a discussion of the impacts of hotel accommodation on asylum seekers, including in terms of mental and physical health, see: <https://media.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/22152856/I-sat-watching-my-life-go-by-my-window-for-so-long-23rd-April-2021.pdf>. See also: <https://asylumatters.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2021/12/In-a-place-like-prison.pdf>

they must stay at the site, despite the risk this could pose to their health, in order to secure dispersal accommodation in the community. This was an issue about which both the Humans for Rights Network and JRS UK reported concerns.

There still appeared to be little done on-site to proactively identify people who were vulnerable or in need of support. Residents did not, for example, receive a health screening/assessment either prior to being sent to Napier or once at the site. It was not clear how residents who were too unwell to seek help for themselves would be identified or receive the support they needed.

It was also not clear how much prior experience on-site staff had in working with people seeking asylum or other vulnerable groups. Certainly no staff highlighted such experience to APPG Visit Members during discussions. Whilst moving around the site, Home Office officials pointed out to APPG Visit Members how residents were laughing together, commenting how positive this was and suggesting it demonstrated that residents were happy. APPG Visit Members were concerned by this interpretation of the residents' behaviour. People may laugh for numerous reasons in adverse circumstances, despite serious unmet needs, trauma or mental health issues; such behaviour should not be interpreted as being 'happy' with the situation. The officials' reassurance by such superficial observations suggested a lack of exploration of residents' actual wellbeing and a lack of understanding of mental health.

JRS UK pointed out that there was no duty phone line at the site via which external parties could raise concerns about a resident, or make contact with them. They also noted that when visiting the site, their staff were followed by a security guard at all times. This was problematic for a number of reasons, including the fact that it made it much harder for residents to disclose sensitive personal information (for example, past histories of torture or trafficking) during their conversations with JRS UK staff. This in turn made it less likely that vulnerable residents would be identified.

3.2 Physical conditions

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

- The sites **had an isolating effect on residents**, both physically and socially. This **made accessing support and building links with their community more difficult**.
- The sites **were military/prison-like in nature**. This could be **re-traumatising, particularly for victims of torture / trafficking**.
- There was a **prevalence of shared facilities at the sites** including dormitories, toilets and showers. This led in turn to a **lack of privacy, noise and sleep deprivation**.
- Residents were likely to find it **difficult to disclose sensitive personal information, such as histories of torture or trafficking, in such settings**. This could **negatively**

affect their asylum claims, and ability to access healthcare and other support.

- There were **poor levels of cleanliness and repair, Covid-19 safety concerns**, including the difficulty of social distancing, and **fire safety concerns**, including use of combustible plywood bed partitions.
- There were **concerns around food and nutrition**, including lack of quality and choice of meals, and lack of facilities for residents to cook independently.

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

The overall environment at Napier was run-down, isolated, and bleak. The site is located on the outskirts of Folkestone and there appeared to be few amenities nearby. Many of the buildings were in an extremely poor state of repair, with paint peeling off walls and doors, areas of water-damage and black mould, broken windows and sparse decoration. The doors of some of the buildings and rooms (e.g. healthcare room, welfare office, administrative offices) were being kept open; this may have been a Covid-19 safety measure, but had the effect of making the buildings very cold. A sleeping block with extensive fire damage remained unrepaired; the block was cordoned off but the damage was still clearly visible.

Over 300 men were accommodated at the site on the day of the site visit. There were few indoor areas in which to spend time in except the sleeping blocks. On the day of the visit the weather was dry and a number of residents congregated outside, either playing football or simply standing. During wet weather, it was clear that residents would have little option but to remain in their dormitories.

The controlling, prison-like nature of the site was very apparent from the point of arrival. Entrance to the site was through a door in a tall perimeter fence manned by a security guard. Once inside, there was an army-style check-point with a barrier and small office manned by a number of additional security guards. At the check-point, APPG Visit Members were asked to provide their passport/ID, names, postcodes, and mobile phone numbers which were recorded and were given a security name badge. APPG Visit Members witnessed a group of three residents entering the site through the checkpoint at the same time as them; one resident was carrying a bag and this was searched by a security guard.

Once inside, security guards were present and patrolling around the site. APPG Visit Members noted that this had a significant effect on the atmosphere at the site, creating a strong sense of being watched at all times, and of not being able to move around freely but rather needing to keep one's movements and behaviour in check.

Military features were also on display at the site: one example was a sign still in place on one building giving advice on how to load/unload a rifle. CRH staff also explained that the site was

adjacent to an active Military of Defence (MOD) site; the active site, including its fence topped with razor wire, was clearly visible from the south east corner of the Napier site.

The lack of privacy and private spaces at the site became very clear during the tour of facilities. Almost all facilities at the site are shared and APPG Visit Members did not see any private spaces available for residents to use. One resident explained that, due to a lack of other private spaces, he made most of his phone calls from the toilet.

APPG Visit Members were told that Wi-Fi connectivity at the site was poor at times. Many residents relied on Wi-Fi connection to be able to make phone calls; the poor connectivity therefore impacted on their ability to stay in touch with friends, family and other key contacts such as legal representatives.

APPG Visit Members were shown three types of sleeping blocks: one with single/double rooms, one with dormitories containing 5-7 beds, and one with dormitories containing 12-14 beds. The latter (12-14 beds) is how the majority of the sleeping blocks at Napier are arranged.⁶

The dormitories consisted of a central walkway with bed spaces either side, wooden partition walls that did not reach the ceiling between each bed space and a curtain pulled across at the front. The curtain was thin and not fully opaque. One resident described the dormitory arrangements as “prison-like”.

Some residents were in their bed spaces when APPG Visit Members entered the dormitories; one resident was conducting a video call with a child. It was not clear whether residents knew that the APPG Visit Members were coming or had given consent for them to enter. The experience demonstrated to APPG Visit Members the lack of privacy and control that residents had over their living space.

Noise levels in the dormitories, a consequence of accommodating large numbers of people together in one room, was a key concern raised by residents. Phone calls and music could be heard by APPG Visit Members whilst in the dormitories, and it was clear how easily this could impact on others. Residents highlighted how the noise deprived them of sleep and impacted on their mental health. One resident told APPG Visit Members that, due to ongoing mental health concerns, he needed a calm environment and the ability to rest; as a result he was finding the noisy, shared sleeping arrangements and consequent lack of sleep very difficult.

A strong smell of cigarette smoke was apparent on entering one sleeping block, suggesting that someone was smoking in the building. This was a concern in terms of residents’ well-being and comfort. It also posed a fire-safety risk.

APPG Visit Members ate the same lunch as residents during the visit. While the quality and portion sizes were good, the options available were limited (one vegetarian and one non-

⁶ See <https://appgdetention.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CRH-submission-on-Napier.pdf>

vegetarian main dish for example) and meals were served at set times. This provided an obvious example of the lack of choice and control that residents had over their lives. Residents who spoke to APPG Visit Members appeared to be content with food at the site, but some expressed a desire to be able to cook their own meals. If hungry outside set meal times, Home Office officials said that residents could access additional fruit and snacks during set hours each day from a ‘tuck shop’ office, though the APPG Visit Members did not visit this or ascertain what was available.

3.3 Other treatment of residents

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

- **Residents were transferred to the site in a distressing manner**, with little or no notice, and without knowing their destination.
- There were **restrictions on residents’ movements in and out of the site**, including signing in/out, bag searches, and limits on how long residents could stay away from the site. Harassment and abuse from people outside the site (see below) and stigma and shame at being accommodated there also prevented residents from leaving the site. **Such restrictions left residents feeling unsafe and trapped.**
- **Residents faced intimidation and mistreatment by on-site staff**, including being told that speaking to media or making complaints would negatively affect their asylum claims.
- **Residents also faced harassment and abuse from people outside the site**, such as those with anti-migrant views and members of far-right groups.
- There was **a lack of communication by the Home Office with residents**, including inadequate information about the progress of their asylum claim, which negatively affected their mental health.
- Initially residents were not told how long they would be accommodated at the site; from April 2021, the Home Office introduced a policy that **residents would be accommodated at the site for between 60 to 90 days.**

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

It appeared that transfers to Napier were continuing to be conducted in a distressing manner: some residents reported to APPG Visit Members that they were not told where they were being taken when they were transferred to the site, and that it had been a worrying experience.

APPG Visit Members were not able to explore the restrictions on residents’ movements in detail; however, as noted in Section 3.2, they witnessed a resident having his bag searched upon returning to the site, indicating that bag searches were still taking place.

JRS UK reported that one resident they were in touch with at site had initially been keen to come and speak to APPG Visit Members during the off-site meeting. In the event, however, he did not attend; JRS UK explained that he was concerned that the Home Office might learn of his attendance and that this would negatively affect his asylum claim. APPG Visit Members felt this pointed to a continued atmosphere of intimidation of residents and had the effect of stifling of dissent at the site.

The lack of autonomy, choice and control over much of their lives that residents' experienced at the site was very apparent during the visit. As well as the shared facilities, lack of privacy and security measures such as guards and bag searches, APPG Visit Members noted a number of other examples: residents were allocated one day each week on which their clothes would be washed (at a service wash in the on-site laundry which residents would collect the following day), meals were served at set times with little choice over what food was received, and there were no facilities for residents to cook independently (see Section 3.2).

The recreation areas and activities available to residents were entirely insufficient given the number of residents (300+). A concrete football pitch was situated in the middle of the site, though APPG Visit Members were told that there was only one football available for use. Staff spoke about volleyball matches being played but this was not evident during the visit. Visit Members were shown around a recreation room which had one television and a pool table that was in a poor state of repair. Residents told APPG Visit Members that access to the television was limited, such that they could not watch a full game of football for example.

An area with new gym equipment had been installed recently. Though Home Office officials spoke enthusiastically of the new facility during the visit, APPG Visit Members were told by a separate source that officials had initially instructed staff not to install the equipment since the site was supposed to be "basic". Reportedly it was only after an intervention by an MP who had visited the site several weeks earlier that the Home Office changed its position and the equipment was made available to residents.

A police officer had been assigned to the site. He seemed very committed to supporting residents and had for example arranged for some residents to play a football against a local team. He and other on-site staff spoke of organising additional activities in the community for residents to take part in, including voluntary work and other sports activities. Arrangements for these generally seemed to be in the early stages.

The police officer and staff were also running a number of classes for residents, including on topics such as knife crime, anti-social behaviour, and healthy relationships. Whilst APPG Visit Members were not able to discuss the curriculum in detail, they were concerned that there appeared to be an emphasis on law enforcement topics rather than how residents could stay safe, for example when facing harassment or abuse in the local community.

It was also not clear why the Home Office had chosen a police officer to help deliver these activities and classes. APPG Visit Members felt it was a further example of the prison-like

atmosphere at the site and risked leaving residents feeling ‘criminalised’. They were also concerned the choice could be inappropriate for some residents (e.g. those who had experienced abuse by police or other figures of authority previously), making it harder for them to engage.

Volunteers from Napier Friends, a local voluntary charity, offered English language lessons on-site and APPG Visit Members briefly viewed a lesson taking place. The classroom was small and cramped given the number of participants. Whilst those teaching were clearly working hard in difficult circumstances, APPG Visit Members felt it was inappropriate for the Home Office to be relying on unpaid volunteers to provide one of the few activities available on site. Napier Friends told APPG Visit Members that the lessons were very popular and that they had had to turn residents away. This suggested that demand for such classes was outstripping supply, yet neither the Home Office nor CRH appeared to be putting any additional provision in place.

Residents at the site receive a small cash allowance (£8 per week) with which to buy essential items. Some told APPG Visit Members that they struggled to buy clothes because they had so little money. Some free shoes and clothes were available for residents at the site, but when APPG Visit Members inspected these their quality did not appear to be very high. Many residents at the site were wearing flip-flop sandals, despite the cold February temperatures. When asked, on-site staff stated that residents preferred to wear sandals over closed shoes. APPG Visit Members were not able to verify this with residents themselves.

A number of charities (JRS UK, the Humans for Rights Network and Samphire) had recently collected 300 coats to donate to residents. The charities had requested access to the site in order to distribute the coats. The Home Office had initially granted access, but had subsequently withdrawn the access the day before the distribution was due to take place. The reasons for the denial of access were not clear to the charities.

APPG Visit Members asked Home Office officials and contractor staff about the incident. Home Office officials confirmed that the coats were still on site but had not been distributed. This was concerning for a number of reasons, not least the likely need for warm clothing given the time of year and cold temperatures. Home Office officials suggested there was a question around the quality of the coats, but confirmed they had not conducted a quality check of the items. They also told APPG Visit Members they did not believe the coats were necessary as residents already had everything they needed. This did not seem to accord with comments from residents about struggling to buy clothes (see above).

3.4 Access to healthcare

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

The Home Office gave **little notice to local healthcare providers before opening the sites**. Moving a vulnerable population there without the necessary healthcare in place was **fundamentally unethical**.

- There was **inadequate provision of healthcare on-site** - including insufficient staff; lack of appropriate expertise/training amongst staff; medical triaging by non-medical staff; an absence of on-site mental health services; cases of residents not receiving necessary medication; and high levels of sleeping pill and anti-depressant prescriptions.
- There was **inadequate access to healthcare in the community** - including residents not being registered at local GP practice or not being aware that they had been registered; apparent gatekeeping of access to GP appointments; referrals to community health services not being made; fear about their ability to recover safely at the site preventing residents from pursuing medical treatments (e.g. surgery); medical treatments being interrupted by residents being transferred to the site.
- More fundamentally, **sites like Napier were not appropriate for people with serious mental health problems**, given the way in which such setting could exacerbate symptoms and were not conducive to recovery.

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

APPG Visit Members visited the healthcare office and spoke with the on-site nurse and his assistant. The nurse was available during working hours (09.00-17.00) and, according to a notice in the window of the office, Monday – Thursday only. APPG Visit Members asked what would happen if a resident was taken ill outside these hours; staff explained that they would need to call 111.

Healthcare staff were of the view that residents were aware of the healthcare services available on site and could seek them out if needed. APPG Visit Members were concerned by this approach, as it is often the most vulnerable people (for example those with mental ill-health) who are the least able to advocate for themselves and seek help. It was not clear how vulnerable residents who did not present themselves to healthcare on-site would be detected or receive the support they needed.

The nurse reported that there had been cases of residents with severe mental health issues that had been missed initially. No mental health services were available on-site. The on-site nurse spoke of the difficulty of people beginning mental health treatments whilst at the site, since they would not be at the site long enough for treatment to be effective. APPG Visit Members felt this was a clear example of the site's unsuitability as asylum accommodation, since vulnerable people

were being placed into a setting that not only negatively affected their mental health, but also added additional potential delays in terms of accessing the support they needed.

There were also concerns regarding infection control, particularly in the dormitories, for example in relation to Covid-19 and tuberculosis.

3.5 Access to legal support

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

- Residents required legal support in two key areas: **immigration law and public law.**
- **Access to legal advice was inadequate** – due to a lack of planning and facilitation by the Home Office; a lack of relevant firms in the local area; inadequate signposting to firms by on-site contractor Migrant Help; a lack of private space for confidential legal discussions; insufficient internet and mobile phone access; and difficulty of visits for legal representatives, and of travelling to law firms' offices for residents.
- **Many of the conditions at Napier made it an extremely poor environment from which to engage with the asylum process**, including mental health deterioration, lack of sleep, and difficulty in accessing legal advice.
- Nonetheless the Home Office had been **“trailing” the introduction of on-site asylum substantive interviews⁷ at Napier** since April 2021. These were conducted via video link. In some cases, **interviews were disrupted by sound quality issues** and/or **residents did not have access to legal advice** before doing the interview.
- The combination of **issues at Napier could lead to incorrect substantive interview outcomes**. This would likely create additional problems for the Home Office down the line including an increase in asylum appeals and fresh claims.
- **Some residents had been issued with Notices of Intent** under the inadmissibility process.⁸ Incorrect and insufficient information from the Home Office about what the Notices meant caused anxiety amongst residents.
- More generally, there was a **lack of accurate information provided to residents by the Home Office about the progress of their asylum claims**. This added to their sense of powerlessness and levels of stress.

⁷ The asylum substantive interview is a critical stage in the UK asylum process: it is the point at which the Home Office asks the applicant in detail about their history and reasons for claiming asylum. The interview can last for several hours and, given the topics discussed, be emotionally upsetting. Following the substantive interview, the Home Office makes the decision whether to grant the person asylum or not.

⁸ The inadmissibility process was introduced on 31 December 2020. For details, see: <https://righttoremain.org.uk/the-asylum-inadmissibility-rules-whats-happening/>. Issuing a person with a Notice of Intent is the first step in the inadmissibility process. It is not a decision in itself; rather it informs the person that the department is considering whether their claim is inadmissible or not.

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

Posters in English with information about accessing legal advice were visible around the site, though APPG Visit Members could not verify whether the information they contained (for example details of legal firms with capacity to take on new clients) was up-to-date.

While APPG Visit Members met several residents who had legal representatives, there were others who clearly did not understand the need for legal advice or how to access it. APPG Visit Members also heard reports of residents receiving poor quality legal advice and of not being able to visit their lawyer's office (in London) due to a lack of money for travel.

JRS UK reported that as far as they were aware, no legal representatives had ever visited the site. Communication with legal representatives therefore all took place by phone. However, as discussed at Section 3.2, poor Wi-Fi connectivity at the site was making such phone calls difficult at times.

Concerns persisted regarding asylum substantive interviews being conducted on-site. The Humans for Rights Network had heard reports from residents that the rooms in which interviews were conducted were not sound-proof. This made the disclosure of sensitive personal information (e.g. details of torture or trafficking) during the interview much more difficult, which in turn might affect the outcome of the resident's interview. They had also heard reports of poor quality video links, and of residents doing their interviews without having had access to legal advice.

As noted at Section 2, prior to their visit, APPG Visit Members requested to see the rooms where asylum substantive interviews were being conducted. However this was not included in the visit itinerary. APPG Visit Members met one resident whose substantive interview was taking place in 7 days' time; whilst he did have a legal representative, he reported not having heard from them for a long time, and did not know what the interview would involve or how he should prepare for it. He explained he was nervous about chasing the legal representative in case this further negatively affected how they dealt with his case. The distress and anxiety he was feeling as a result of this situation were very evident.

In term of Notices of Intent, JRS UK told APPG Visit Members that there was still considerable uncertainty around what was happening and that residents received little information. It appeared that some residents who were not being given their asylum substantive interview were now also not being issued with Notices of Intent. JRS UK were concerned that this lack of clarity meant vulnerable residents whose health was being negatively affected by staying at the site might not request a transfer away, in case they were eventually offered an interview. This put such residents' health further at risk.

3.6 Home Office engagement with external stakeholders

Previous evidence from APPG Inquiry (May - September 2021)

- There was a **lack of meaningful engagement by the Home Office and on-site contractors with relevant external stakeholders.**
- There was also a **resistance to scrutiny and information-sharing on the part of the Home Office**, including in relation to Covid-19 safety at the site.
- There was also a **resistance to scrutiny and information-sharing on the part of the Home Office**, including in relation to Covid-19 safety at the site.
- **More meaningful engagement and greater transparency by the Home Office could have reduced the problems experienced by residents.**

Additional information from APPG visit (February 2022)

As discussed at Section 3.2, JRS UK and the Humans for Rights Network had recently requested access to the site in order to distribute a donation of 300 coats for residents. Their request had been denied by the Home Office.

JRS UK pointed out that their requests for access were generally granted, and did not understand why access had been denied on this occasion. They had requested a copy of the Home Office's policy governing charities' access to the site, so that they could understand if and how their request did not comply. A copy had not so far been provided.

APPG Visit Members subsequently asked the Home Office to provide a copy of the Home Office's policy governing charities' access to the site by email. No copy has yet been received.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Following the visit to Napier, and the wider updates and information gathered in relation to it, the APPG Visit Members remain deeply concerned for the welfare of the men accommodated at the site.

Despite numerous and repeated warnings about Napier from a range of bodies, including the High Court, independent inspectors, parliamentarians, charities and residents themselves, the

changes introduced by the Home Office appear to be limited and do not address the fundamental problems at the site. Serious issues remain, for example, in relation to safeguarding, with vulnerable people including victims of torture and trafficking still being found at the site. The majority of residents are still being accommodated in 12-14 bed dormitories, suffering the associated lack of privacy, noise and sleep problems that this involves. The prison-like, criminalising atmosphere at the site was apparent from the moment of arrival, and the lack of autonomy, choice and control that residents have over their daily lives was stark. It was also obvious these and the other issues at the site would have extremely negative impacts on people's mental health.

Moreover, the site did not appear to APPG Visit Members to be serving any clear purpose, given the Home Office's policy to send residents on to dispersal accommodation afterwards (providing they do not request a transfer for vulnerability reasons). It therefore seems designed to simply add further disruption, suffering and hostility into the already difficult asylum accommodation journey.

Having seen and experienced the site for themselves, APPG Visit Members are firmly of the view that Napier and sites like it are fundamentally unsuitable for use as asylum accommodation, and do not allow a person to engage effectively with their asylum claim. They are extremely concerned that the government has extended its use of the site until at least 2026, and that it may be serving as a 'pilot' for the government's proposed new accommodation centres.

4.2 Recommendations

In light of the information gathered during their visit, the APPG Visit Members confirm their support for the recommendations contained in the APPG Inquiry Report of December 2021, including those highlighted below.

- 1) In relation to current or former quasi-detention sites, the government must ensure:
 - a) Napier Barracks is closed as asylum accommodation with immediate and permanent effect, and that people seeking asylum accommodated at Napier are moved directly to decent, safe housing in the community that allows them to live with dignity
- 2) In relation to asylum system more widely, the government must ensure:
 - a) People seeking asylum are housed in decent, safe accommodation in the community that supports their well-being and recovery from trauma, facilitates their engagement with the asylum process, and allows them to build links with their community
 - b) Key elements of the asylum process, including the substantive interview, are conducted promptly and in an environment that allows disclosure of sensitive information and access to legal and other necessary support

- 3) Like the APPG Inquiry Panel, the APPG Visit Members are strongly opposed to the introduction of ‘accommodation centres’ to house people seeking asylum, as proposed in the Nationality and Borders Bill. In the event that accommodation centres are introduced, however, the government must ensure:
- a) None of the shortcomings identified in the APPG Inquiry Report or this report are replicated at the new centre(s)
 - b) No centre is opened without the consent of the local authority and meaningful consultation with all relevant stakeholders
 - c) Effective safeguards are in place such that no vulnerable people are accommodated at the centre(s)
 - d) Residents are assured a safe environment that meets a minimum standard of decency,⁹ including protection from harassment and abuse
 - e) Residents are assured unimpeded access to healthcare, including mental healthcare
 - f) Residents are assured unimpeded access to legal advice and support, and access to an effective appeals process to challenge their placement in the centre
 - g) Residents are accommodated at the centre(s) for the minimum possible time
 - h) Robust and effective mechanisms are in place to monitor the performance of any private contractors
 - i) An independent statutory inspection regime is in place.

⁹ An example of what a minimum standard of decency might look like is the Scottish Housing Quality Standard: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-housing/improving-standards/>