

New asylum accommodation contracts awarded

The new Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC), which were designed following engagement with local authorities, potential providers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have been awarded today, following an open and fair procurement exercise.

The new contracts offer a range of improvements, with a particular focus on assisting individuals through the asylum system. They will ensure that vulnerable asylum seekers have access to the support they need and set clear requirements on the standard and condition of accommodation.

Under the new contracts, providers will be required to have proactive maintenance plans, to make sure that they regularly inspect properties and report back to the Home Office on the findings of these inspections. When issues are identified, providers will be expected to resolve them within set timescales.

The Home Office formally awarded contracts to the following providers:

- Midlands and East of England: Serco
- North East, Yorkshire and Humberside: Mears Group
- North West: Serco
- Northern Ireland: Mears Group
- Scotland: Mears Group
- South: Clearsprings Ready Homes
- Wales: Clearsprings Ready Homes

Migrant Help have also been awarded the contract for the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Assistance services (AIRE), which will be a single integrated and national service for asylum seekers.

The AIRE service will provide advice and guidance to service users on the asylum process, their rights and signposting different services.

It will also provide asylum seekers with a single point of contact, independent from the accommodation providers and the Home Office, to report issues.

Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes said:

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it and these new contracts will make sure that asylum seekers are treated with dignity and respect in safe, secure and suitable accommodation.

They will deliver compassionate support through a new integrated service and make the asylum system more accessible and easier to navigate.

We consulted extensively with local authorities and NGOs to make sure that the contracts not only protect vulnerable asylum seekers but also deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

The contracts also require accommodation providers to develop and maintain close working relationships with local authorities, and include the need to consult and liaise with them on the location of properties in the area.

The AASC contracts, which will replace the existing COMPASS contracts, have an approximate value of £4 billion and are for 10 years.

The new contracts will commence in September 2019 and the Home Office will continue to work closely with the new providers, COMPASS providers and local authorities to ensure a smooth transition.