



House of Commons  
Home Affairs Committee

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# Asylum accommodation

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**Twelfth Report of Session 2016–17**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed  
17 January 2017*

## Home Affairs Committee

The Home Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Home Office and its associated public bodies.

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### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom](http://www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Carol Oxborough (Clerk), Phil Jones (Second Clerk), Harriet Deane (Committee Specialist), Adrian Hitchins (Committee Specialist), Andy Boyd (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant) and Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Committee Media Officer).

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# 1 Introduction

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## Background to the COMPASS contracts

1. Individuals seeking asylum in the UK, and who can prove they are destitute, are eligible for support from the Home Office. Support can be financial—asylum seekers are entitled to receive £36.95 a week—and in the form of accommodation. Since 2012 accommodation has been provided to asylum seekers via six regional *Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services* contracts, known as COMPASS. COMPASS replaced a previous system of 22 separate contracts with 13 different suppliers (a mixture of private providers, local authorities and the voluntary sector). The COMPASS contracts also include transport services, which were previously covered by a separate contract.<sup>1</sup>

2. Three companies each won two of the six contracts: Serco (Scotland and Northern Ireland; North West England), G4S (North East England, Yorkshire and the Humber; Midlands and East of England), and Clearsprings Group<sup>2</sup> (Wales and South West England; London and South East England). Of these companies (hereafter referred to as Providers), only Clearsprings had any previous experience in providing accommodation to asylum seekers. G4S and Serco were however experienced in providing services to Government, having already held several major contracts in other areas of public sector delivery. Although the system of three Providers looks straightforward on the surface, below it lies a complex network of contractors, sub-contractors and hundreds of private landlords.

## The cost of COMPASS

3. The COMPASS contracts were originally for a five year period, from 2012 to 2017, with a possible two-year extension. Over this seven-year period the Government aimed to reduce the cost of providing accommodation to asylum seekers by an estimated £140 million. (In the last year before COMPASS was introduced, FY 2011–12, the annual cost of delivering the contracts was approximately £150 million.)<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether the Government will realise these savings. For two of the Providers, the contracts will result in significant losses as costs have been far higher than originally anticipated, because both the number of asylum seekers coming into the UK and the cost of accommodation have risen.

4. Two of the provider companies supplied information on the payments they receive from the Home Office. Serco stated that, in February 2016, its average income per month per service user was around £300, but that the average cost to Serco was around £450. For a full year, the average revenue Serco is paid per service user is around £3,600, and the loss per service user per year is around £1,850.<sup>4</sup> G4S told us that the average payment it receives is £9.35 per service user per night, which equates to £280 per month or £3,412

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1 National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, January 2014

2 The contract was originally won by Clearel, a joint venture between Clearsprings and Reliance, but Reliance later withdrew.

3 National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, January 2014.

4 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 26 February 2016 ([ACC0010](#))

per year.<sup>5</sup> In March 2016 Ashley Almanza, the Chief Executive of G4S, told the Daily Telegraph that “were this contract before us today we would not be entering into it”.<sup>6</sup> Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive of Serco, told us that one of the problems was that Serco under-bid when the contracts were originally let:

The price was too low. I have to say that a system of reverse Dutch auction conducted over the internet may not be the best way to establish pricing for a contract to provide care to tens of thousands of people, but that is up to us.<sup>7</sup>

G4S has previously warned that extending the contracts would cost it £57 million on top of estimated losses of £47 million, while Serco has said that an extension of the contract could see losses of up to £112 million by 2019.<sup>8</sup>

5. On 8 December 2016 the Government announced that the COMPASS contracts would be extended for two years until August 2019 and that work had started on putting in place new arrangements for the period following the extension.<sup>9</sup> The terms of the contracts have been revised as part of the extension process and G4S and Serco estimate that their losses will be reduced as a result. Serco expect that, while the contract will “continue to be heavily loss-making”, its expected losses could potentially be £20 million lower.<sup>10</sup> G4S do not expect to incur further losses beyond the £47 million already announced.<sup>11</sup>

## Our inquiry

6. In advance of the decision on the future of the COMPASS contracts we decided to assess whether they have been an effective means of providing accommodation and related support to those seeking asylum. Our inquiry was also prompted by concerns raised with us over the quality of the accommodation being used by Providers and reports of poor treatment of the asylum seekers that they house, and concerns that Providers were finding it difficult to make suitable and sufficient accommodation available within the constraints of the COMPASS contracts. We have reported on some of these issues previously as part of our regular examination of the work of the Home Office’s Immigration Directorates.<sup>12</sup>

7. In the course of almost a year’s work on this topic, we have taken evidence from all three COMPASS Providers and some of their sub-contractors; from the Local Government Association and organisations representing asylum seekers and refugees; and from Home Office Ministers. We have also received written evidence. We are grateful to all those who have contributed to this inquiry, and we note the willingness of Providers to engage

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5 Letter from Peter Neden, Regional President - G4S UK & Ireland, to the Chair of the Committee, 22 February 2016 ([ACC007](#))

6 Daily Telegraph, [G4S shares tumble as it warns of further losses from government contracts](#), 9 March 2016

7 Q224

8 Daily Telegraph, [G4S and Serco facing losses after Government extends asylum seeker contracts](#), 8 December 2016

9 Written Statement, 8 December 2016, [HCWS335](#)

10 Serco, [Extension of COMPASS contract for UK asylum seeker support services](#), 8 December 2016

11 Daily Telegraph, [G4S and Serco facing losses after Government extends asylum seeker contracts](#), 8 December 2016

12 See for example Sixth Report of Session 2015–16 [The work of the Immigration Directorates Q3 2015](#), HC 772, which highlighted concerns about the treatment of those in asylum accommodation, particularly with regard to residents being required to wear coloured wristbands (in Cardiff), and asylum accommodation being easily identifiable by means of red front doors (in Middlesbrough).

with us. We should particularly like to thank the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, St Chad's Sanctuary and G4S for facilitating our visit to Birmingham in November.

## **Our Report**

8. In this Report we examine the system of providing asylum accommodation and make recommendations to improve upon it. Some of our recommendations look to the long-term future of the asylum system and should be considered as part of the consultation on the successor to COMPASS; others however are more urgent. We acknowledge that the Home Office and Providers have agreed contracts to extend the COMPASS system for two years, but that should not prevent the Government and Providers from addressing the most pressing of our concerns.

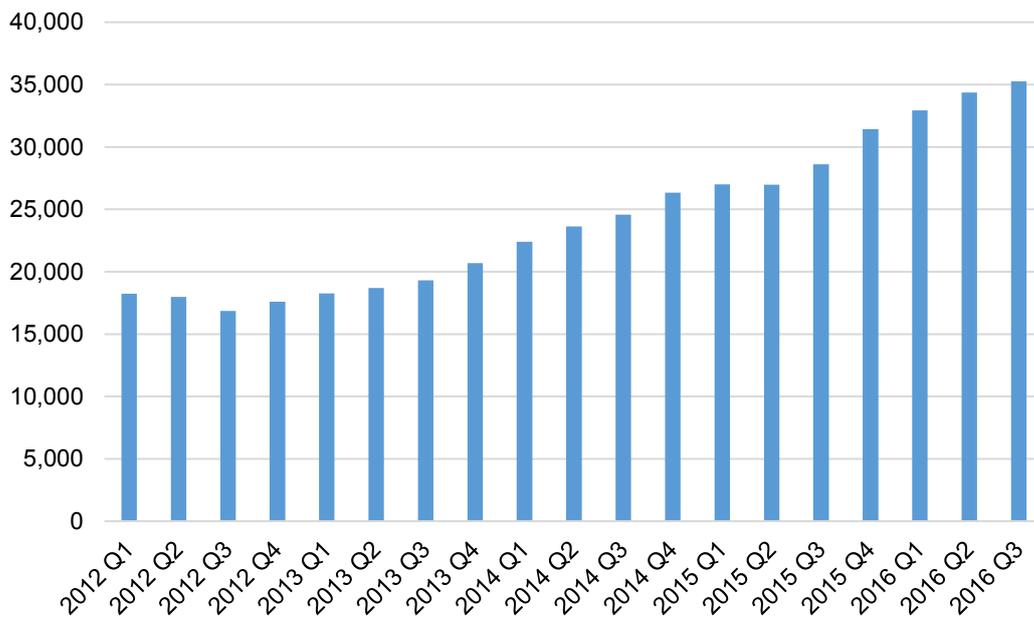
## 2 Demands of the asylum system

9. The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 sets out three circumstances under which asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation:

- while the Home Office is considering whether an individual is eligible for support (Section 98 of the Act)
- while the Home Office is assessing the application (Section 95), and
- when the application for asylum has been refused but the applicant has yet to leave the country (Section 4).<sup>13</sup>

The vast majority of people are housed under Section 95 and the number of people accommodated on this basis has almost doubled over the lifetime of the COMPASS contracts (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of people provided with dispersed accommodation under Section 95, by quarter**



Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS 17q

### Increase in applications and waiting time

10. When the COMPASS contracts were drawn up the Home Office forecast that the system would need to accommodate between 20,000 and 25,000 asylum seekers at any one time. This has proved to be a huge under-estimate. When we began this inquiry Providers told us they were accommodating over 38,000 people. (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Total number of asylum seekers accommodated by each Provider, February 2016**

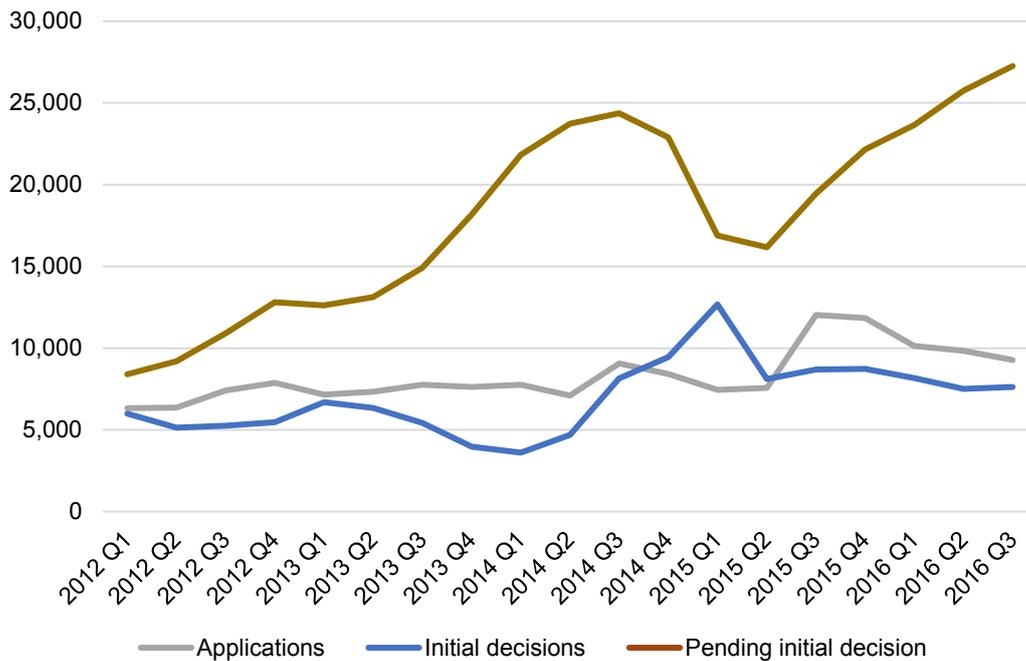
Provider	Asylum seekers accommodated
Serco	14,364
G4S	17,308
Clearsprings Group	6,769
TOTAL	38,441

Source: Written evidence received by the Committee

11. The main factors that affect demand for accommodation are the number of destitute people applying for asylum and the length of time they are accommodated. Since the start of the COMPASS contracts the demand for asylum has generally outstripped the number of applications the Home Office has been able to process (see Figure 2). This has meant more people requiring accommodation, and for longer, while they wait for a decision on their case. It has put considerable pressure on all parts of the asylum system including Providers, public services, third sector organisations and local communities. Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive of Serco, agreed that the pressure on asylum accommodation would reduce if the Home Office were able to speed up the time it took to process applications. He told us:

We have seen that the average time we are looking after people has increased. It is difficult for them [the Home Office] and it is leading to longer periods of time. I can hardly get my head around the idea that we are still looking after people who have been in properties four or five years and are doing nothing.<sup>14</sup>

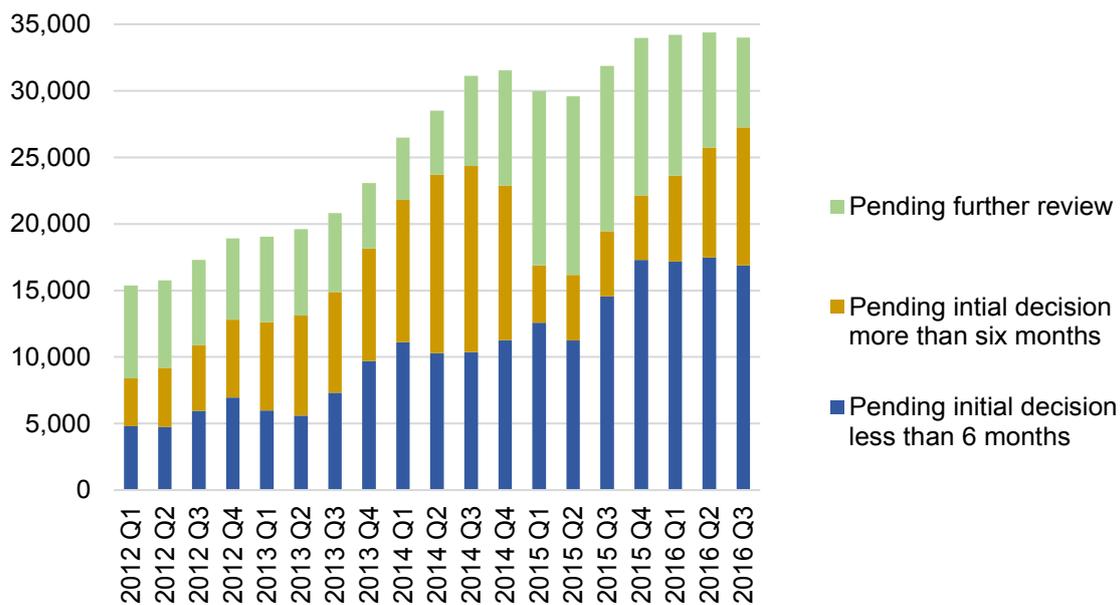
**Figure 2: Number of applications, decisions and pending decisions for main applicants and their dependants, by quarter**



Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_02q

12. The Government has committed to providing a decision within six months on all straightforward asylum claims and within a year for all cases considered to be ‘non-straightforward’. As of September 2016, 27,252 people were awaiting an initial decision on their application for asylum, the highest number since the start of the COMPASS contracts. Of these, 16,880 (62%) had been waiting less than six months and 10,372 (38%) had been waiting for more than six months; a further 6,745 cases were pending further review (see Figure 3 below).<sup>15</sup> Between 40–50% of applications for asylum are granted.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3: Asylum applications pending initial decision and further review**



Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_02q

13. In late 2014 and early 2015 the Government made significant improvements to its management of asylum casework and reduced the backlog in the asylum system.<sup>17</sup> As Figures 2 and 3 above show, the number of cases pending a decision for more than six months halved; the total number of cases waiting for a decision dropped; and increases in the number of people requiring accommodation slowed. The Government was also clearing all straightforward cases within its target time of six months. Unfortunately, this welcome progress did not continue.

14. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) warned in early 2016 that increasing asylum intake “posed a risk to efficiency and effectiveness in this area, and the Home Office needed to take care not to allow cases, and particularly non-straightforward cases, to build up to a level that meant performance against service standards began to deteriorate.”<sup>18</sup> In the second half of 2015, as the number of applications for asylum increased, a perhaps predictable outcome given the migration crisis engulfing Europe, the number of applications being processed by the Home Office failed to keep pace. As a result the asylum system is under greater pressure today than at any period

<sup>15</sup> Home Office, [Immigration statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_02q

<sup>16</sup> Home Office, [Immigration statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_01 and AS\_06

<sup>17</sup> Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of asylum casework, March-July 2015](#), February 2016

<sup>18</sup> Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of asylum casework, March-July 2015](#), February 2016

during the lifetime of the COMPASS contracts. Yet in the financial year 2015–16 there were 260 staff responsible for interviewing and deciding asylum claims, a significant reduction on the 409 staff in FY 2014–15.<sup>19</sup>

15. We have warned in previous reports that the asylum system is under strain and that a backlog in cases has been developing. Those warnings were not heeded and the consequences are now evident, with Providers struggling to source sufficient adequate accommodation to meet demand. Pressure on the asylum system, and on accommodation in particular, will not reduce unless the Government takes action to increase its capacity to process applications. The Home Office was successful in doing this, albeit for only a few quarters, by devoting more resources to the task, and it needs to do so again as a matter of urgency. There are clear benefits in applications being processed quickly and these far outweigh the cost of increasing capacity in the responsible section of the Home Office, UK Visas & Immigration. We need to see a marked fall in the number of applications awaiting a decision in the statistics covering the first half of 2017.

## Work in progress and appeals

16. The Home Office provides an annual snapshot of work in progress at a particular time. As Table 2 shows, a proportion of asylum seekers will be awaiting the outcome of an initial decision or appeal or be subject to removal action.

Table 2: Annual snapshot of asylum work in progress by stage of process

	2012 Q2	2013 Q2	2014 Q2	2015 Q2	2016 Q2
Awaiting initial decision	6,192	8,980	16,980	11,797	20,300
Appeal outstanding	4,706	4,328	3,317	8,966	12,333
Subject to removal action <sup>20</sup>	23,497	23,438	20,869	23,571	26,879
Further leave application outstanding	2,986	2,724	2,953	2,802	2,990
Post decision	-	-	1,432	2,083	2,950
On hold <sup>21</sup>	-	-	10,275	11,223	11,988
<b>Total work in progress</b>	<b>37,381</b>	<b>39,470</b>	<b>55,814</b>	<b>60,442</b>	<b>77,440</b>

Source: UK Visas and Immigration, [Asylum transparency data](#), August 2016, Table ASY\_3

19 Home Office, [Asylum transparency data](#), Table Asy\_04, November 2015 and 2016

20 The Subject to Removal Action figure demonstrates that the majority of cases in the work in progress caseload have been processed through the initial stages of the asylum system and are now 'subject to removal action'. Whilst some cases in this category await imminent removal, for many there will be significant barriers to removal which the department is still working to overcome. Such barriers include: difficulties in obtaining documents from national governments; dealing with last minute legal challenges; and logistical and practical challenges in removing families in a humane and dignified fashion.

21 The methodology for work in progress was amended in April 2014, to count reapplications and pre-decision absconders within the total work in progress numbers. Under the new methodology, the new 'On Hold' sub-category includes pre- and post-decision absconders (the latter was previously counted within other sub-categories; the former was not counted). The 'Post Decision' sub-category includes cases that have had a decision but have not appealed, are not 'appeal rights exhausted', and have not been removed.

**Table 3: Annual snapshot of asylum work in progress by age of case**

	2012 Q2	2013 Q2	2014 Q2	2015 Q2	2016 Q2
Case Age 0-12 months	11,516	12,659	16,922	17,403	28,544
Case Age 12-24 months	6,477	6,822	9,907	9,379	11,169
Case Age 24 -36 months	5,407	4,939	6,709	7,670	7,402
Case Age +36 months	13,981	15,050	22,276	25,990	30,325
<b>Total work in progress</b>	<b>37,381</b>	<b>39,470</b>	<b>55,814</b>	<b>60,442</b>	<b>77,440</b>

Source: UK Visas and Immigration, [Asylum transparency data](#), August 2016, Table ASY\_3

17. The Home Office also provides analysis of the recorded outcomes of the group of applicants at a particular time in any one year. Table 4 shows that around 40% of initial decisions are to grant asylum and around 30% of appeals are successful. In total, just under half of all applications for asylum will be granted. To put that into context, around 16,000 people currently housed in asylum accommodation under Section 95 will eventually be granted asylum.

**Table 4: Outcome analysis of asylum application, as of May 2016**

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Main applications</b>	<b>21,843</b>	<b>23,584</b>	<b>25,033</b>	<b>32,733</b>
Withdrawn or outcome not known	2,785	3,046	3,302	9,208
Initial decisions	19,058	20,538	21,731	23,525
Initial decision to grant some form of protection	6,989 (37%)	7,719 (38%)	9,678 (45%)	9,324 (40%)
Initial decision to refuse application	12,069 (63%)	12,819 (62%)	12,053 (55%)	14,201 (60%)
Appeals lodged	8,935	9,458	9,363	8,949
Appeals allowed	2,559	2,658	2,885	995
% of appeals allowed	29	28	31	11
<b>Total afforded some kind of protection</b>	<b>9,548 (44%)</b>	<b>10,377 (44%)</b>	<b>12,563 (50%)</b>	<b>10,319 (32%)</b>
<b>Total refused protection</b>	<b>11,783</b>	<b>12,178</b>	<b>9,941</b>	<b>9,168</b>
<b>No. of cases outstanding</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>1,029</b>	<b>2,529</b>	<b>13,246</b>

Source: Home Office, [Immigration statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_06

18. In our previous Reports we have drawn attention to the large number of appeals that are successful. Table 5 shows that the courts allowed 1,252 out of 1,442 (87%) appeals by Eritrean nationals in the period Q4 2015 to Q3 2016. During the same period over half the appeals by Afghan nationals were also successful.<sup>22</sup>

22 Home Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2015–16, [Work of the Immigration Directorates \(Q4 2015\)](#), HC 22

Table 5: Asylum appeal applications and determination by nationality, Q4 2015 to Q3 2016

Country of nationality	Appeals received	Total appeals determined	Appeals allowed	Success rate (%)
Afghanistan	893	593	300	51
Albania	641	666	216	32
Eritrea	885	1,442	1,252	87
Bangladesh	787	469	72	15
Iran	1,785	808	380	47
Iraq	1,502	532	208	39
Libya	213	264	121	46
Pakistan	1,181	922	280	30
Sudan	246	226	141	62
Syria	154	131	44	34

Source: Home Office, [Immigration statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS\_14q

19. In addition to increasing its capacity to process applications for asylum, the Government should do more to ensure that its initial decisions are correct. Around 30% of decisions to refuse asylum are overturned in the courts, and this figure is much higher for certain nationalities such as Eritreans and Iranians. This is an unacceptable rate of error on the part of the Home Office. Incorrect decisions, if appealed, mean that those affected will require asylum accommodation for longer, adding further pressure to an already stretched system. The Government needs to improve its decision-making and commit to regular reviews of its approach to those nationalities which the courts are consistently identifying as receiving incorrect decisions. We have highlighted specific nationalities, such as Eritreans and Afghans in this and previous Reports. We need to see progress in this area and for this to show in future quarterly immigration statistics.

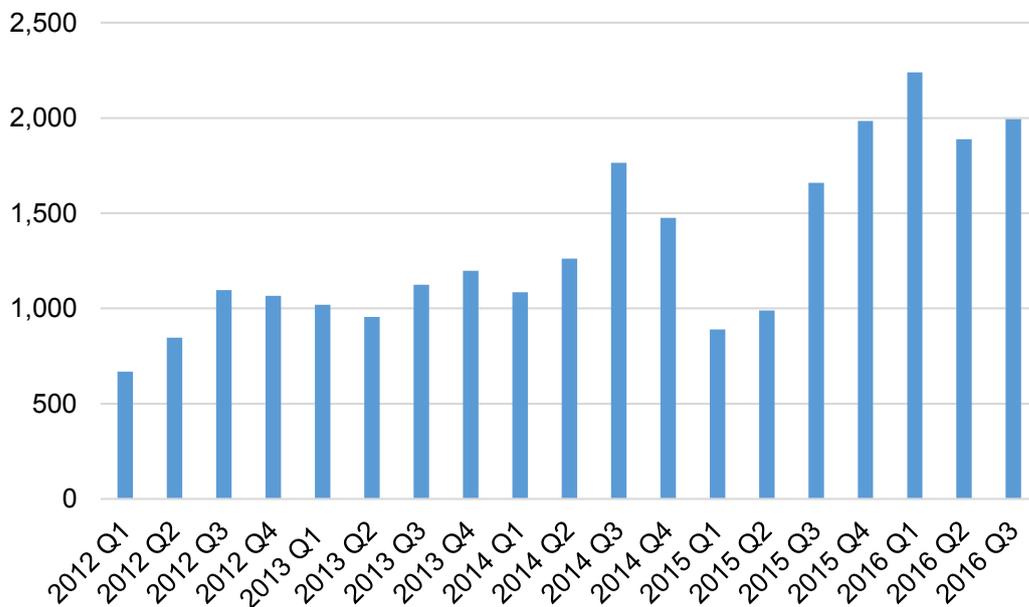
## 3 Initial Accommodation

### Initial Accommodation provision

20. Under Section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, if an individual can show they are destitute when they first apply for asylum, they will be provided with ‘Initial Accommodation’ (IA) while the Home Office assesses their eligibility for longer-term (Section 95) support. During this period asylum seekers are allocated to one of the six COMPASS regions and the Provider is responsible for making IA available. There are seven IA centres in the UK. They are typically large full-board hostels with shared bedrooms, living and social areas. Providers are contractually obliged to offer three meals a day, supply toiletries and bedding and provide transport to medical and related appointments. Many asylum seekers will arrive in IAs with little more than the clothes they are wearing. IA costs around three times more to provide than the dispersal accommodation that follows and it is not regarded as suitable for long stays.<sup>23</sup>

21. As part of the negotiations to extend the COMPASS contracts the Home Office has agreed to work with Providers to develop different contractual terms to ensure that there is sufficient IA available.<sup>24</sup> Currently, if no IA is available then asylum seekers will be housed in temporary ‘emergency’ accommodation, usually a hotel, hostel or bed and breakfast, until they can be dispersed. Figure 4 below shows the number of people in Initial Accommodation since 2012.

**Figure 4: Number of people provided with Initial Accommodation under Section 98, by quarter**



Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table AS 18q

23 For example, the Home Office payment rates to SERCO are £11.71 per person for Dispersed Accommodation (DA) and £30.28 for Initial Accommodation (IA).

24 Written Statement, 8 December 2016, [HCWS335](#)

## Concerns about Initial Accommodation

22. The Home Office aims to determine whether a person is destitute and eligible for Section 95 support within 19 days.<sup>25</sup> People can remain in IA much longer than this if there is a lack of available dispersal accommodation to move them to or if there are delays in the Home Office making an initial assessment of the application.<sup>26</sup> In November 2015 the European Council for Refugees and Exiles reported that stays over three weeks were common, while a 2014 inspection by the ICIBI found that, in 25 out of the 104 cases it examined, applicants had waited over a month for an initial assessment.<sup>27</sup> Although people in IA are entitled to receive meals, they receive no money and are therefore reliant on third sector support for anything else they may need. (Generally, asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are not eligible for mainstream benefits.)

23. Other concerns raised with us include that: some IA premises lack appropriate facilities and activities for children; local authorities may not be informed if children are present which gives rise to safeguarding issues; they often do not meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups such as some women and torture survivors; and there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for meeting health needs.<sup>28</sup> The European Council for Refugees and Exiles found that:

Showers and toilets are shared between six or seven people. They are designated for men or women by signs on the door but there is no security. The bathrooms were said to be dirty by women interviewed for the Refugee Council and Maternity Action research. There is a lack of women-only space, and no facilities for babies such as baby baths or access to boiling water for sterilising bottles. Women reported feeling unsafe.<sup>29</sup>

**24. Initial Accommodation is unsuitable for long term use, and indeed it is not provided for this purpose. However, the reality is that people have been housed in such accommodation for far longer than the target of 19 days. As longer stays are a common occurrence which does not seem likely to be addressed in the near future, the Government should take steps to ensure that people in Initial Accommodation are properly supported for the duration of their stay. As a minimum, this should include the provision of accommodation appropriate to an individual's needs; and ensuring that healthcare requirements are met and that there is clarity about who is responsible and accountable for them. The Government should also set out what different contractual arrangements it is seeking with the Providers for the provision of Initial Accommodation as part of the COMPASS contracts extension.**

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25 National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, Session 2013–14, January 2014

26 AIDA Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: United Kingdom](#), November 2015

27 AIDA Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: United Kingdom](#), November 2015; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of asylum casework, March-July 2015](#), February 2016

28 See for example, written evidence submitted by Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#)); Welsh Refugee Coalition ([ACC0012](#)), Freedom from Torture ([ACC0032](#)), Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#)), Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) ([ACC0014](#)), Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#)), South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#) and [ACC0024](#))

29 AIDA Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: United Kingdom](#), November 2015

### *Treatment of women and health and social care*

25. A number of third sector organisations have suggested that the current system of Initial Accommodation does not adequately support women, particularly those with a history of violence against them, and those who have been trafficked. We heard how vulnerable women were being placed in mixed-sex accommodation with no women-only or safe spaces and in accommodation that is well-known to traffickers, with little or no measures taken to mitigate risks posed by them.<sup>30</sup>

26. We also heard about a number of issues affecting pre- and post-natal women.<sup>31</sup> The Home Office has a policy of not dispersing women in the late stages of pregnancy or during early motherhood unless requested by the woman. There should be as little disturbance as possible to the routine of pregnant women and new mothers, particularly in terms of their relationship with health professionals but if this means a stay in IA is prolonged then that accommodation must provide the appropriate support. St Chad's Sanctuary described a mother who had just given birth and was struggling with the stairs to her room but who had her request to be moved to a downstairs room refused. The same individual was provided with a dirty cot, half the amount of bedlinen stipulated in the COMPASS contract and there was inadequate provision for the disposal of dirty nappies.<sup>32</sup>

27. Providers are required to ensure that the food they supply includes adequate provision for pregnant women. However, the Refugee Council reported that midwives treating asylum-seeking women in IA had expressed concern over whether their nutritional needs were being met. According to the Refugee Council, pregnant women and new mothers also find it difficult getting transport to attend same-day medical appointments and that requests for taxis to attend antenatal education and baby banks are routinely refused.<sup>33</sup> In some cases midwives have also found their patients have been moved at short notice and have then been unable to contact them.

28. When people arrive in Initial Accommodation they may have health issues which require medical attention. We were told that the system of recording a person's health needs is chaotic and that health assessments are not always carried out. A lack of assessment may mean health issues such as TB and mental health problems not being picked up, leading to preventable deterioration in an individual's condition.<sup>34</sup> Staff in an IA we visited told us that they were given no advance warning from the Home Office of any special needs asylum seekers might have.

29. During our visit to Birmingham we were told that the failure effectively to record and communicate a person's health needs can lead to people being allocated inappropriate dispersal accommodation. Examples of inappropriate treatment described to us included an elderly lady being collected from an IA, driven from one dispersal property to another, each of them unsuitable, until eventually she was returned to the IA, having not eaten for the whole day. We also heard about a wheelchair-bound individual being taken from the IA and placed in an upstairs room in a property with no lift; the person was relocated after several hours once complaints were raised.

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30 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#)); Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#))

31 Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#))

32 St Chad's Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#))

33 Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#))

34 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

30. It is vital that pregnant women and young mothers in Initial Accommodation receive the support they need. Women in the late stages of pregnancy should generally be provided with their own room; pregnant women and young mothers need access to transport for all medical appointments and related matters such as baby banks and ante-natal education; and safe areas should be provided for young children to play. The Home Office should review Initial Accommodation centres to ensure that provision is appropriate, including by taking advice from health professionals on whether the food available is sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of pregnant women. The review should also assess the treatment of women more broadly, to ensure that safety and privacy measures are in place (including for bathroom facilities), and assess the treatment of children, particularly that appropriate policies on safeguarding are being followed. Requiring health screenings to be carried out when people move to Initial Accommodation would also help to ensure that health conditions and special needs are identified and dealt with properly, including when asylum seekers move on to dispersal accommodation.

## 4 Dispersal accommodation

31. Once the Home Office has determined that an asylum seeker is eligible for support under Section 95, the Provider must make arrangements to move them into more permanent ‘dispersal’ accommodation. The policy of dispersal was first introduced under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 when the then Labour Government sought to alleviate the pressure on local authorities in London and the south-east of England where most asylum seekers were making their claims for asylum. Beyond the aim of relocating asylum seekers away from the southeast of England, the two main factors driving the distribution of asylum accommodation are availability and cost.

32. A key aim of the COMPASS project is to save money on the cost of supporting asylum seekers in the UK. It is perhaps inevitable therefore that parts of the UK where property is cheapest have been targeted for the dispersal of asylum seekers. Councillor David Simmonds, Chairman of the Local Government Association’s Asylum, Refugee and Migration Taskforce, told us that “it is inevitable, because of the contract price, that it will always be the absolutely rock bottom price accommodation that is available.”<sup>35</sup>

33. However, Providers challenged the view that cost was the overriding concern. Mr Soames accepted that it would be uneconomic for Serco to place asylum seekers in expensive areas, but he told us that the starting point for Serco was whether the prospective property met Home Office standards.<sup>36</sup> John Whitwam, Managing Director of G4S Immigration and Borders, took the view that “the overriding determining factor is, and always has been, access to properties approved by local authorities.”<sup>37</sup>

### Local authority consent

34. Under the terms of the COMPASS contracts dispersal accommodation can only be located in areas where the local authority has agreed to take asylum seekers, up to a defined “cluster limit” of no more than one asylum seeker per 200 residents (though there are examples of this limit being breached).<sup>38</sup> In proposing properties Providers must consider a range of social, housing and community cohesion factors and consult with the local authority. Local authorities have 72 hours to consider a request from a Provider and can withhold consent for properties to be used if they have specific concerns. If the local authority withholds consent to a specific property but has agreed to accept asylum accommodation in principle, then Providers can seek permission from the Home Office to override the local authority’s objections. Local authorities told us that the 72-hour window was too short, particularly if several properties were proposed at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

35. Not all local authorities are currently willing to accept asylum accommodation and, despite Government attempts to persuade more local authorities to participate, at the end of September 2016 just 121 local authorities out of a total of 453 (27%) had Section 95

35 Q173

36 Q223

37 Q263; Correspondence from John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration and Borders, October 2016 ([ACC0034](#))

38 1 to 200 ratio based on the 2001 census figures for population. For example, the limit was breached in Middlesbrough in 2015.

39 Discussions with stakeholders during Committee visit to Birmingham.

asylum accommodation within their boundaries.<sup>40</sup> (Details of the numbers of asylum seekers in each local authority are set out in the Annexes to this Report.) Some local authorities that do not participate will not have accommodation that is economically viable for Providers to acquire, but many do. Mr Whitwam told us:

The figures show that of the 135 local authority areas where G4S is contracted to provide housing for asylum seekers, only 37 local authorities currently do so. In August 2015, Sarah Rapson, Director General for UKVI, wrote to 79 local authorities in G4S's contract areas and asked for their support in widening the dispersal of asylum seekers. In the 14 months since, only 3 of these 79 local authorities have agreed to accommodate asylum seekers.<sup>41</sup>

36. Mr Whitwam explained that in September 2016 G4S found 248 properties in 22 areas but local authorities refused to allow G4S to house asylum seekers at 30 of the properties and failed to respond to requests to accommodate asylum seekers in a further 136. He described the unwillingness of local authorities to allow asylum seekers in G4S areas as “entrenched” and said that “compromise has become impossible”.<sup>42</sup> Mr Soames told us that since the start of COMPASS Serco had been “housing 8,000 more people in the same area essentially”.<sup>43</sup> He explained that part of the problem could be traced back to how the COMPASS contracts were originally let:

The fact is that the contract, when it was let, said that we should assume that the number of people for the life of the contract would be around 22,000 for the country, and it is now nigh on 36,000. [ ... ] The biggest strain and stress in the contract is around the additional numbers and the dispersal areas not having grown to take account of that.<sup>44</sup>

James Vyvyan-Robinson, Chief Executive of Clearsprings Group, said that he would be “hugely grateful” if more local authorities would come forward.<sup>45</sup>

37. The Government has the power to insist that local authorities take asylum seekers but to date has chosen not to exercise it; instead it has relied on persuasion. In the last 18 months, an additional 23 local authorities have agreed to take asylum seekers; over the same period the number of asylum seekers requiring accommodation has increased by over 8,000. The Government is currently asking local authorities to provide evidence on why they should not accept asylum seekers.<sup>46</sup>

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40 Some local authorities which do not participate in the scheme have taken asylum seekers under the funded Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme.

41 Correspondence from John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration and Borders, October 2016 ([ACC0034](#))

42 Correspondence from John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration and Borders, October 2016 ([ACC0034](#))

43 Q264

44 Q273

45 Home Affairs Committee, [The work of the Immigration Directorates Q3 2015](#), Sixth Report of Session 2015–16, HC 772, Q246

46 At the end of Q1 2015, 99 local authorities accepted asylum seekers; by the end of Q3 2016 this figure was 121. Over the same period the number of people requiring Section 95 accommodation increased from 27,137 to 35,254.

## Sharing the burden fairly between local authorities

38. The refusal of many local authorities to accept asylum accommodation is clearly putting pressure on those that do and the system as a whole. Tony Parkinson, Interim Chief Executive of Middlesbrough Council, told us how the propensity to place families in low value housing in the north of England was placing enormous strain on schools in already deprived areas.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, asylum accommodation is often not evenly dispersed within a local authority but clustered in a few wards. Mr Parkinson explained that the density of clustering of asylum seekers in Middlesbrough meant that schools were seeing an enormous turnover of pupils, “limiting the ability of schools to meet their performance targets and presenting challenges in terms of language and translation as well as socialisation and integration”.<sup>48</sup> Mr Parkinson also told us that dense clustering put additional challenges on local healthcare services which had required specialist GPs to be commissioned “to cope with the vulnerabilities and challenges of the populations”. He regarded this as an example of “the passing of costs to local areas from central Government contracting”.<sup>49</sup>

39. Under the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts to 2019 the Government has introduced “a new higher band for any increases in the number of asylum seekers requiring accommodation”. The Government claims that increasing the funding available to Providers will allow them to widen the areas in which they source asylum accommodation and thereby reduce the need to increase the number of asylum seekers accommodated in certain communities.<sup>50</sup>

40. When asylum seekers are granted asylum and become refugees, they are required to leave their dispersed accommodation and the local authority then has a responsibility to provide shelter. Local authorities which have accepted asylum seekers are therefore also likely to bear the additional cost of accommodating refugees, for which they receive no additional funding (unlike that which is available to local authorities who accommodate refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme—see below). Furthermore, many asylum seekers whose asylum application is refused will no longer be entitled to any central government support, and local authorities will often be required to step in.

## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme

41. While many local authorities have failed to accept asylum accommodation under Section 95, many have taken in refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (VPRP). At the end of Q3 2016, of the 175 local authorities that had accepted Syrian refugees under the VPRP, 121 did not have any asylum accommodation within their boundaries.<sup>51</sup> The Government set local authorities the target of accommodating 20,000 refugees under the Syrian programme by 2020. When a Syrian refugee arrives in the UK the Government works with regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs—see para 56) or directly with local authorities to identify a suitable resettlement offer. SMPs then work with local authorities to help manage the allocation of accommodation,

47 Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#))

48 Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#)). Some schools have more than 100 children joining a cohort during the primary years and a similar number leaving before the end of year 6.

49 Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#))

50 Written Statement, 8 December 2016, [HCWS335](#)

51 Home Office [Migration statistics](#) Q3 2016, Tables As\_16q and As\_20q

particularly with regard to pressure on local housing and school places. Councillor Simmonds explained that, one year into the scheme, local authorities had volunteered enough offers of accommodation to meet the Government's ambition.<sup>52</sup>

42. In the Syrian scheme additional funding is provided to facilitate extra help within schools and to reflect the challenges that delivering to a vulnerable client group brings. Glasgow Council told us that this meant that:

We are seeing a two tier system operating now, whereby, what we would describe as the Syrians coming through the VPR scheme are getting a gold standard of service from all the detailed pre-planning to the arrival and the ongoing support to assist with integration. This level of support is not available in the asylum system or indeed when people get leave to remain, and ask for our assistance with accommodation.<sup>53</sup>

43. **The policy of dispersal was introduced to deliver an equitable distribution of asylum seekers across the UK. It has failed to achieve this. Pressure on the south-east of England may have been alleviated, but it has been replaced by the clustering of asylum seekers in some of the most deprived parts of the country. This is clearly unfair and is putting considerable pressure on local authorities whose public services are already under immense strain. It is unacceptable that so many parts of the UK have no asylum accommodation at all, including areas where Providers have been able to source accommodation only for there to be a blanket refusal by the local authority to accept it.**

44. **To date the Government has had only limited success in persuading local authorities to accept asylum seekers. For the remainder of the COMPASS contract period the Government should revise its approach and give local authorities greater flexibility over where accommodation is provided within their area. For example, local authorities should be given more control over where asylum accommodation is located and a longer timeframe in which to consider Providers' requests. The option for local authorities to refuse requests should be maintained where there are genuine concerns over the quality or concentration of accommodation, the capacity of local health, education and other support services, and risks to social cohesion; and refusals should only be overturned on appeal in exceptional circumstances. The Government should also provide additional resources to local authorities which continue to bear the brunt of supporting the asylum system while broadening dispersal remains a challenge.**

45. **We believe these changes would encourage more local authorities to become involved in providing asylum accommodation on a voluntary basis. If, however, after these changes are implemented, local authorities continue unreasonably to refuse to become involved, the Government should, within 12 months, use its available powers to require those local authorities to take their fair share. It is clearly unfair that the brunt of the burden of accommodation and related asylum provision should be borne by many local authorities where there is recognised deprivation and hardship, while local authorities in undoubtedly far more prosperous areas continue to refuse to be party to the dispersal scheme. In using such powers, the Government should ensure that access to the necessary specialist services is available in the local authorities**

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52 Q202

53 Glasgow City Council ([ACC0030](#))

affected, including health care, legal representation and interpreters. Work should also be undertaken to ensure that host communities are informed and involved in plans for new areas to take on asylum seekers.

46. The holistic support which the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme has been designed to provide is a model that should be replicated for all those whose asylum applications are accepted. As well as providing a more holistic form of support, this would also help address local authorities' concerns that, in accepting asylum accommodation, they will face additional costs further down the line when the person seeking asylum has received a decision on their application and is accepted as a refugee, and may be transferred to the local authority's care.

47. The Syrian programme has been successful not just because of the additional resources, although they are an integral part, but also because local authorities have been consulted and engaged in the design of the scheme from very beginning. In comparison, the COMPASS system has corroded confidence in the asylum system for many local authorities because they have seen their influence marginalised while still having to carry many of the consequential costs. The result has been less participation, less holistic provision of support in the community, less integration planning, and more reliance on emergency and voluntary services. The Government should reflect on the success of the Syrian programme in attracting local authority support and engagement and the failure of the COMPASS scheme to do the same, and design a new approach which attracts (and, if necessary, requires) local authorities to participate, but gives them more flexibility and control.

48. Local authorities must be actively involved in developing the replacement to COMPASS and the Government should engage them on the provision of accommodation, support and integration and how a fair distribution of accommodation might be achieved. Commissioning of asylum accommodation should be devolved rather than being done centrally by the Home Office to give local authorities greater responsibility and flexibility about how and where accommodation and support are provided. The Home Office should consult on devolving the commissioning of asylum accommodation to regional Strategic Migration Partnerships. This would not preclude private sector provision of asylum accommodation but would allow local decision-making and responsibility, and make it easier to address community cohesion. In relation to asylum accommodation in the devolved nations, the devolved governments should be given a significant role in deciding the appropriate arrangements for decentralising commissioning and ensuring a fair distribution of accommodation.

### Temporary dispersal accommodation

49. Difficulty in securing sufficient accommodation is leading Providers to place asylum seekers in hotels and hostels. Dispersal or 'settled' accommodation is typically a furnished flat or shared house subject to strict criteria and inspection, but Providers are allowed to use hotels and hostels as 'temporary dispersal accommodation' (TDA) until settled accommodation can be found. As with Initial Accommodation, premises used as TDAs are considered unsuitable for long-term use.

50. The number of people housed in temporary accommodation varies depending on the pressure on the asylum system. For example, in spring 2016 there were 1,500 people in hotel accommodation across the UK, including 670 in the West Midlands and 400 in Glasgow.<sup>54</sup> These figures have since decreased significantly. Although the use of hotels is intended to be for very short periods, St Chad’s Sanctuary, a Birmingham-based voluntary sector organisation, and the Scottish Refugee Council, report instances of asylum seekers being in hotel accommodation for several months.<sup>55</sup>

### *Concerns about temporary accommodation*

51. People in hotel accommodation are essentially in limbo until more permanent accommodation can be found. They have little choice over what food is available, receive no financial support and can have difficulties accessing third sector and advocacy networks.<sup>56</sup> We were told that Providers did not always fulfil obligations to provide transport to medical appointments, that many people in hotel accommodation have no idea how they can get to see a GP and that they lack the HC2 certificates necessary to get free prescriptions, glasses or dental treatment.<sup>57</sup> People in hotels include survivors of torture and trafficking and mothers with infants.<sup>58</sup> The Welsh Refugee Coalition questioned whether some of the accommodation used in their area might contravene health and safety legislation:

Examples were given of a hotel in Cardiff where up to 3 women, including one with a 4 month-old child, shared a room. Another example was given where an invalid father, mother and 22-year-old son all had to share a basement room.<sup>59</sup>

The Scottish Refugee Council told us that shared rooms of 3–4 people were the norm in Glasgow.<sup>60</sup> During our visit to Birmingham we heard that local authorities were not always made aware of children being housed in temporary accommodation and were therefore unable to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. Children in temporary accommodation do not attend school, as enrolment occurs once a family is placed in settled accommodation.

52. We received many complaints about the quality of food in temporary accommodation. St Chad’s Sanctuary told us that, in response to complaints about the food at a local hotel used for temporary accommodation, a manager replied “if you are not happy it’s no problem—I can tell the Home Office to take you away”.<sup>61</sup> COMPASS contracts specifically stipulate that asylum seekers be treated with sensitivity. 70% of the people in hotel accommodation surveyed by St Chad’s Sanctuary stated they did not receive enough food and this issue was raised with us on our visit. We also heard that strict rules around mealtimes meant that people who might be absent due to an external appointment or for religious purposes missed out on meals. St Chad’s Sanctuary told us:

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54 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

55 St Chad’s Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#)), Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

56 People will be moved into temporary accommodation once the Government has decided they are eligible for Section 95 support but they will remain on Section 98 support while they remain in catered accommodation.

57 St Chad’s Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#))

58 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

59 Welsh Refugee Coalition ([ACC0012](#))

60 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

61 St Chad’s Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#))

As soon as hotels in the Birmingham area started being used for TDA the local VSOs started noticing a trickle of people who claimed they were: hungry, had no access to medical care, hygiene items, were cold and generally desperately unhappy. This trickle has become a torrent putting an untenable strain on local VSOs.<sup>62</sup>

We put these complaints to G4S who told us that they used hotels reluctantly and that, since the peak in April, they have reduced use of hotels in Birmingham to just one. On our visit to that hotel G4S reassured us that asylum seekers had access to some food and refreshments throughout the day and packed lunches were provided if meals were going to be missed.

53. As with dispersal accommodation, cost is key in determining which hotels are used as temporary accommodation. Customer reviews suggest some of the hotels are in very poor condition with one described as a ‘cesspit’, ‘disgusting’, ‘filthy’ and ‘needs to be condemned’. Sandwell Women’s Aid told us that they specifically request that their clients, victims of modern slavery, are not to be dispersed from their safe house into temporary accommodation as they believe this will cause further trauma. SWA report that the Home Office routinely ignores their requests and, if temporary accommodation is refused, proceeds to close the individual’s application for asylum support.<sup>63</sup>

**54. The evidence we have received suggests that some of the premises used by Providers as temporary accommodation are substandard and unfit to house anyone, let alone people who are vulnerable. Dispersal accommodation is subject to strict criteria and regular inspection yet it appears that the same rigorous standards are not being applied to temporary accommodation. We recommend that temporary accommodation is inspected before its use is sanctioned, and on a monthly basis thereafter. Such inspections should include: whether an individual’s health or special needs are being met; the quality and quantity of food available; the fabric of the building itself; and whether there are facilities which are appropriate for vulnerable people, including mothers and children and victims of torture and trafficking. We further recommend that asylum seekers in temporary accommodation receive some financial support, given that the Home Office will have already decided that they are entitled to this. The level of financial support should reflect the fact that meals are provided.**

**55. In order for us properly to assess the pressure on the asylum system the Government should include the number of asylum seekers in temporary accommodation in future quarterly statistical releases. In response to this Report the Government should also address the concerns raised with us by Sandwell Women’s Aid, specifically that the Home Office either ignores requests for vulnerable women to remain in SWA safe houses until dispersal accommodation is available, or considers such requests as detrimental to applications for asylum support.**

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62 St Chad’s Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#))

63 Sandwell Women’s Aid ([ACC0041](#))

## Strategic Migration Partnerships

56. We are aware that there is a tension between Providers' use of hotels and the expectations of the local authority as more people may be placed in the accommodation than originally envisaged and for longer. In his study of asylum accommodation, Dr Jonathan Darling, of the University of Manchester, found that, in the case of hotel use in the North West region, significant complaints had been made over the level of communication between COMPASS contractors and both the local authority and the local community.<sup>64</sup> A lack of communication will impact on the level of third sector support that is available and, as we have already noted, can also mean local authorities do not carry out important safeguarding responsibilities.

57. Dr Darling's concerns over a lack of coordination between the various tiers involved in the asylum system might be addressed by strengthening the role of and support for Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs). We have already discussed SMPs in the context of their role in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme. There are 12 regional Strategic Migration Partnerships in the UK. These are Home Office-funded, local authority-led partnerships set up to support the dispersal and integration of asylum seekers and provide a means for engagement between local and national government, and the private and voluntary sectors. Dr Darling argues that SMPs have enabled concerns to be raised around dispersal numbers, accommodation quality, and impacts on community cohesion from local authorities, but that their work is hampered by funding pressures due to insecure and short-term contracts.<sup>65</sup>

**58. Effective coordination and cooperation between key stakeholders is essential if the current system is to work effectively but we found it to be absent in too many parts of the country. As part of managing the remaining two years of the COMPASS contract the Government should insist on formal, regular meetings between Providers, local authorities and the third sector (and devolved governments). These meetings should be coordinated by the local Strategic Migration Partnership, which is well-placed to provide this necessary function. However, SMPs are currently poorly funded and overstretched. The Government should increase funding of SMPs to a more sustainable and consistent level so that they have the capacity to encourage communication and improve planning within the dispersal system, and are better able to negotiate tensions between its different levels. Over the longer term, we have already suggested that the Government consult on giving SMPs a central role in the regional allocation of asylum seekers and they will require more resources if they are to perform this function.**

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64 Dr Jonathan Darling ([ACC0018](#))

65 Dr Jonathan Darling ([ACC0018](#))

## 5 Standards in dispersal accommodation

59. Asylum accommodation is heavily inspected and Providers' performance in maintaining properties is subject to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). However, much of the evidence we received indicated that some accommodation is substandard, unsanitary and in some instances, unsafe to live in. The four KPIs relevant to the standard of accommodation are set out in Table 6 below. The COMPASS contracts specify the furnishings, equipment and facilities that should be provided in the different types of accommodation according to different sets of needs, such as for those with young children.<sup>66</sup> Overall the standards of asylum accommodation should comply with the Housing Act 2004 and the social housing 'decent homes standard'.<sup>67</sup>

**Table 6: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to accommodation**

Key Performance Indicator	Obligation
KPI 4: Accommodation standards (safe)	Contractors place all asylum seekers in accommodation that is not assessed as being unsafe, as set out in the contract, and respond to any emergency action required within the specified response time.
KPI 5: Habitable accommodation	Contractors place all asylum seekers in accommodation that is not assessed as having severe defects, as set out in the contract, and contractors maintain housing within the specified response time.
KPI 6: Fit for purpose accommodation	Contractors place all asylum seekers in accommodation that is assessed as being fit for purpose, as set out in the contract, and contractors maintain housing within the specified response time. (This indicator relates to the number of service users, not the number of units of accommodation). No more than ten failures in one payment period.
KPI 7: Complaints management	Contractors provide the ways and means for asylum seekers to raise complaints, and seek to resolve any complaints within five working days.

Source: National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, Session 2013–14, January 2014

66 Redacted versions of the COMPASS contracts are available at [https://data.gov.uk/data/contracts-finder-archive/search/?buying\\_org=UK%20Border%20Agency](https://data.gov.uk/data/contracts-finder-archive/search/?buying_org=UK%20Border%20Agency)

67 Evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee, Session 2013–14, [COMPASS, Provision of asylum accommodation](#), HC 1000, Q40

## Maintenance

60. There are strict time limits within which Providers are required to carry out repairs. These vary from a matter of hours for emergencies to 28 days for more routine maintenance issues (see Tables 7 and 8 below).

**Table 7: Response times for reactive maintenance**

Classification	Meaning	Response Time
Immediate	Works (which are not Emergency, Urgent or Routine) which are necessary where the condition of the accommodation is such that there has been a material adverse effect on a Service User's health, safety or security or disruption or loss of a fundamental service or facility to the accommodation.	Continuous call out facility to investigate and restore or provide temporary alternative accommodation within 2 hours of notification by the Service User or the Provider becoming aware of the defect.
Emergency	Works (which are not Immediate, Urgent or Routine) which are necessary where the condition of the accommodation is such that there may be a material adverse effect on a Service User's health, safety or security or disruption or loss of a fundamental service of facility to the accommodation	Continuous call out facility to investigate and restore or provide temporary alternative accommodation within 24 hours of notification by the Service User or the Provider becoming aware of the defect
Urgent	Works (which are not Immediate, Emergency or Routine) which are necessary where the condition of the accommodation is such that there has been an adverse effect on the comfort of a Service User or is likely to lead to serious damage	Investigate and make safe within the 1 Working Day after notification by the Service User or the Provider becoming aware of the defect and to affect a permanent repair or remedy within 7 Working Days of such a time
Routine	Works (which are not Immediate, Emergency or Urgent) which are necessary to rectify the condition of the accommodation where the condition of the accommodation is such that, although defective having regard to the Provider's obligations, the works can be deferred without causing serious discomfort or inconvenience to the Service User, or damage	To be carried out within 28 Working Days of notification by the Service User or the Provider becoming aware of the defect

Source: Taken from Table B.11.1, [Schedule 2](#), COMPASS contract for the Midlands and East of England Region

**Table 8: Examples and classification of the applicability of response times, as set out in a COMPASS contract**

Classification	Example of Fault, Failure, Defect or Incident	
Immediate	Gas leak	Flooding or free standing water within the accommodation
	Structural instability	Water penetration through the structure of the accommodation
	Fire damage	Damaged or friable asbestos linings or insulation products
Emergency	Failing or unstable ceiling fabric	Blocked drainage either inside or outside the accommodation that affects the accommodation
	Hole in or weakened floor	Plumbing leaks that give rise to potential flooding within the accommodation of an adjacent, other property
	Bare or exposed electrical wiring	Partial loss of mains water or electrical services
	No operational hot water supply	No operational smoke or fire alarm
	No operational space heating system	Ground floor windows and any entrance doors are not capable of being closed and locked etc
	Complete loss of mains water or electrical services, gas supply, etc	
Urgent	Taps requiring new washers	Minor blockages and leaks in roof damage
	Door and windows requiring easing	No valid gas and/or electrical certification
	Broken glazing	
Routine	Requirement for cleaning etc	Glazing repairs etc
	External repairs etc	

Source: Taken from Table B.11.1, [Schedule 2](#), COMPASS contract for the Midlands and East of England Region

We have received evidence that people are being placed in accommodation that is unfit for habitation or which ends up in such a condition due to poor maintenance. With thousands of properties on their stocks, most of which will be old, it is inevitable that there will be some problems but the breadth of the evidence submitted to us suggests that the issue goes beyond a handful of isolated cases. We outline some of the more common problems below.

### **Vermin**

61. A particular concern drawn to our attention was the presence of vermin in some accommodation and delays in the problem being addressed. Migrant Voice told us that infestations of mice, rats and bedbugs were the second biggest source of complaint for people in dispersed accommodation. Examples of complaints include:

- I went to see Jane in her upstairs flat in Sheffield. She was anxious and panicky. “I put anything I can under the doors”. She said “The rats run up the stairs, and out of the store cupboard into the living room. I am frightened for the children [ ... ] twice they said they were sending pest control—nobody arrived.”<sup>68</sup>
- The second house was horrible. The house was very dirty. The carpet was very smelly and dusty. The kitchen was full of mice; they even ran across the dining table while we were eating.<sup>69</sup>
- Having to live with vermin infestations causes anxiety and distress. One client noted that the presence and noise of rats triggered flashbacks as he shared a cell with rats when he was detained and tortured in his country of origin. This trigger led to a significant deterioration in his mental health and the re-emergence of suicidal ideation.<sup>70</sup>
- The biggest challenge we had was a problem of insects. Since we had moved into this house, all of my children had bites on their skin. The GP said that it was due to insect bites. I complained to G4S to deal with the insects; they did not do anything immediately. After two months, they fixed an insecticide chip but it did not work. After 3–4 months, finally G4S came to spray the entire house and the situation got better.<sup>71</sup>

Under the terms of the COMPASS contract accommodation must be free of pests to be considered ‘fit for purpose’. G4S told us that a vermin infestation would constitute a “seven day defect” which means treatment would have to begin within seven days of being alerted.<sup>72</sup>

### **Health and safety issues**

62. Providers have a duty to place people in accommodation that is safe. We were made aware of one claimant being placed by G4S in a house with a known asbestos risk and the issue not being addressed despite numerous letters from doctors about related health issues.<sup>73</sup> Anne McLaughlin MP contacted us to highlight the case of a family in her constituency in which a health visitor reported to Orchard & Shipman (a sub-contractor of Serco) that a family was living in housing conditions which were affecting their child’s growth and development. She had raised the matter with Orchard & Shipman, Serco and the Home Office. Orchard & Shipman acknowledged that the family required a move to a two-bedroom property which was scheduled for the following day. The Home Office sent an initial response stating that: “Additional pressures were placed on our housing stock due to increased asylum intake (requiring supported accommodation) arising from world events.” Anne McLaughlin notes that a year passed from the accommodation first being raised as unsuitable to raise a child to the family finally being moved.<sup>74</sup> Bethan Jenkins

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68 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#))

69 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

70 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

71 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

72 Letter from John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration and Borders, 1 December 2016 ([ACC0039](#))

73 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#))

74 Anne McLaughlin MP ([ACC0028](#))

AM described another case to us concerning a property provided by Clearsprings where a hole in the ceiling of a toddler's bedroom allowed water to flow on to the floor and the child could not sleep in the bedroom because it was so damp.<sup>75</sup>

### Cleanliness

63. Providers are obliged to ensure that “internal and external aspects of the accommodation are clean prior to the service-user taking up occupancy” and that common areas in “self-accommodation occupied by a number of service users” are kept clean.<sup>76</sup> The COMPASS contracts do not require Providers to supply cleaning products or vacuum cleaners though in many cases they do so. Many witnesses were critical of the cleanliness of properties and the lack of availability of cleaning products, including vacuum cleaners. G4S told us they clean around 700 properties per month. However, the examples below seem to cast doubt on whether all properties are cleaned before new people are moved in.

- The carpet was so unclean and dusty. I talked to G4S but they have never changed it. My son has asthma but the condition got worse since I moved into the house.<sup>77</sup>
- One woman had a blanket on the floor. I asked why and she said that the carpet was dirty and smelt of urine when she moved in. She had tried hard to wash it, but could not get rid of the smell, so she had had to buy a blanket to cover the floor to put her baby on.<sup>78</sup>
- Families tell me they cannot put their children down to play on the carpets as they are dirty, and that when they have complained about rotting and damp sofas, they have been told to go to a charity shop to buy a throw to place over the sofa.<sup>79</sup>

### Furnishings and facilities

64. The COMPASS contracts set out in detail the furnishings, equipment and facilities that Providers are obliged to supply and deadlines by which any repairs must be made.<sup>80</sup> G4S summarised those required for a House in Multiple Occupancy (HMO).<sup>81</sup> However, we heard repeatedly that people in the properties are unaware of what should be provided and in many cases have sought items from charities or purchased items themselves that should have been provided, exacerbating their financial poverty.<sup>82</sup> During our visit to St Chad's Sanctuary we saw the piles of sheets and blankets that the Sanctuary staff hand out to asylum seekers because G4S have not fulfilled their obligation to provide a change of bedding. G4S disputed that this problem had been raised with them.

65. The examples below are further indications that Providers are not consistently meeting the terms of the COMPASS contract in respect of furnishings and equipment.

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75 Bethan Jenkins AM, Plaid Cymru Shadow Minister for Housing, Poverty and Steel ([ACC0036](#))

76 See Schedule 2 of the [COMPASS contracts](#)

77 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

78 Letter from Suzanne Fletcher to G4S, 6 February 2013 ([ACC0002](#))

79 Bethan Jenkins AM, Plaid Cymru Shadow Minister for Housing, Poverty and Steel ([ACC0036](#))

80 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#)) and Letter from John Whitwam, Managing Director G4S Immigration and Borders, 1 December 2016 ([ACC0039](#))

81 Letter from John Whitwam, Managing Director G4S Immigration and Borders, 1 December 2016 ([ACC0039](#))

82 Dorothy Ismail ([ACC0004](#))

- We were not given a mattress for a child but only a bed frame. The legs of the dining table were broken, so we were eating on the floor. Even though we called G4S many times to share this problem, it was only acted on after 2 months.<sup>83</sup>
- Broken bed, so woman slept on the floor until G4S responded after 3 to 4 weeks.<sup>84</sup>
- When I first moved into the G4S house, I was not given any furniture except one bed mattress and a frame. Dining table, chairs, wardrobe, kitchen materials, iron, and bedding were never provided. [ ... ] The washing machine did not work for three months but I never received a laundry voucher. [ ... ] We still do not have an additional bed. I am sharing a bed with my son, which is culturally inappropriate. I complained about the dining table and chairs but they had never done anything. I am very exhausted from calling them repeatedly and explaining the condition over and over again.<sup>85</sup>
- A family comprising a lone mother and four children from the Middle East in a Sheffield S9 house with water coming in front and back doors when it rained, and with not even a working cooker. For the past three months other asylum seekers had taken cooked food to the house. [ ... ] G4S admitted that the water issue should have made the house unsuitable for the contract—but they went ahead anyway.<sup>86</sup>

66. Several organisations told us that the problems with some properties were so bad that it affected the health of the residents.<sup>87</sup> Particular attention was drawn to the impact of failing heating systems and delays in reported problems being addressed. A failure of heating or hot water is defined by the COMPASS contract as a ‘severe defect’ which renders a property uninhabitable under the terms of the contract—in this instance the faults must be resolved within 24 hours and re-inspected after one calendar week.<sup>88</sup> G4S provided us with a breakdown of calls about property defects (see Table 10). In December 2016, the Government announced that it would increase the amount of money it makes available for the provision of ‘staff property management’ as part of the agreement to extend COMPASS for a further two years.<sup>89</sup>

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83 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

84 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0024](#))

85 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

86 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#))

87 NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#)); Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#)); Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

88 G4S explained that if it is an issue with a single radiator, such as it needs bleeding, it is a seven day defect. Where boilers cannot be repaired, G4S provide temporary electric fan heaters and kettles/boiling vessels pending replacement. See evidence from Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#)) for further examples

89 Written Statement, 8 December 2016, [HCWS335](#)

Table 10: Details of calls G4S received in relation to defects in October 2016

Defect type	Total	% of total raised in Service Centre
Immediate (2hrs)	5	<1
Emergency (24hrs)	858	33
Urgent (7 w/days)	1033	40
Routine (28 w/days)	524	20
Inventory	159	6
	Total calls: 2,579	

Source: Letter from John Whitwam, Managing Director G4S Immigration and Borders, 1 December 2016 ([ACC0039](#))

67. The state of properties and their fixtures is not always the fault of Providers though they are responsible for making good any problems. Asylum seekers may accidentally damage equipment such as cookers or washing machines because they are unfamiliar with how they work. G4S also told us that “a minority of asylum seekers display violent and destructive tendencies. That behaviour at times manifests itself in attacks on our staff and damage to properties”.<sup>90</sup> Where asylum seekers cause deliberate damage to properties there is little sanction Providers can impose. They can issue warning letters, and refer more serious issues to the Home Office and asylum case workers, but this does not always result in action being taken.<sup>91</sup>

68. **The poor standard of asylum accommodation was the most significant issue identified in the evidence we received, which focused largely on contracts administered by G4S and Serco. It is clear that in too many cases Providers are placing people in accommodation that is substandard, poorly maintained and, at times, unsafe. Some of this accommodation is a disgrace and it is shameful that some very vulnerable people have been placed in such conditions. Urgent action must be taken by the Home Office and Providers to deal with this issue. Even when significant concerns have been raised, a lack of alternative accommodation has led to vulnerable people remaining in housing that is unfit or unsuitable for many months until they are moved. Providers are also failing to ensure that items they are obliged to provide are present and in working order when a person is placed in a property. We acknowledge the financial constraints of the COMPASS contracts and the systemic problems in the dispersal system but, nonetheless, Providers have a clear obligation to provide safe, habitable accommodation and it is beyond doubt that this obligation is not being met in a significant minority of cases. We request that the Government now set out the details of the additional resources it has pledged to make available for staff property management purposes as part of the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts.**

69. **Providers will no doubt point to a low number of fines under the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) system to suggest they are fulfilling their obligations. We also accept that asylum seekers and third sector organisations may not be fully aware of Providers’ contractual obligations and deadlines for rectifying faults. However, the weight of evidence that we have received suggests that the compliance and inspection system is failing. We address the inspection regime later in this Report.**

90 Briefing provided by G4S ([ACC0037](#))

91 National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, Session 2013–14, January 2014

70. **The COMPASS contracts lack sufficient detail regarding response times for reactive maintenance. The ‘Performance Regime’ schedule, which sets out how performance should be measured against the Key Performance Indicators, has been redacted from the published contracts, which may partly explain the disconnect between people’s expectations and what Providers are obliged to deliver. We recommend the schedule be placed in the public domain.**

71. **We also recommend that any future frameworks and contracts governing the provision of asylum accommodation provide more extensive guidance on compliance standards and include examples of the most common complaints and deadlines for expected resolution. Such guidance should be made available to asylum seekers in a form they can understand, and to those who advocate on their behalf, so that they are clear about the standards they are entitled to expect; and it should also be made available to local authorities.**

### *Welcome packs*

72. When asylum seekers are placed in dispersal accommodation they are given a welcome pack and an occupancy agreement in English, irrespective of whether or not English is their first language. The Helen Bamber Foundation expressed concerns that people were being made to sign documents without providing informed consent or even knowing what they are consenting to.<sup>92</sup> Mr Soames agreed that “It sounds like a no-brainer: you should have a welcome pack in the language of the person who is going to use it.” But he went on to explain that “the trouble is there are 51 languages [ ... ] It is not ideal and we are working with the Foreign Office to come up with a multilingual way of doing it.”<sup>93</sup> A dial-up translation service is available to asylum seekers.

73. **The majority of people moving into asylum accommodation will not have English as their first language yet crucial documents are only made available in English, a language which the people who need to use them do not understand. It is unacceptable that such a situation should have been allowed to occur in the first place and we fail to understand why, after four years of the COMPASS contract, it has still not been addressed despite it being raised as a problem on multiple occasions. Welcome packs and tenancy agreements should be made available in the most common languages spoken by asylum seekers as a matter of urgency. We welcome a commitment by Serco to make their occupancy agreements available in five languages, and other Providers should do the same.**

### **Complaints mechanism**

74. Asylum seekers are able to raise problems about their accommodation with Providers via their housing officer, via a call-centre, at times of inspection and in some cases via third sector organisations. Problems with the handling of maintenance requests and complaints has been a recurring theme throughout our inquiry. Common frustrations include problems in getting through on contact lines, difficulty in determining who was responsible between the landlord, housing officer, sub-contractor, Home Office and Provider; and complainants being passed between each of them over the most mundane of

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92 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

93 Q278

issues. The NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Psychological Trauma Service noted that there was a lack of sensitivity to English not being the first language, specifically Providers' staff not adapting their speech to facilitate understanding or using interpreters.<sup>94</sup> Bradford City of Sanctuary told us that one of the largest frustrations of many asylum seekers was the slow response of G4S to their complaints. It cited the example of a client who, when he first called G4S was told he would need to wait 28 days for action but found when he called again at the end of that period that the call had not been logged on the system and so the whole process had to begin again, with a further 28-day wait.<sup>95</sup>

75. Problems raised with housing officers not subsequently being logged was a common source of frustration.<sup>96</sup> The evidence we received from Anne McLaughlin MP included an example in which regular reports from a health visitor to Orchard & Shipman and Serco about problems with a property occupied by a person with brain injuries were not responded to.<sup>97</sup> During our visit to Birmingham, G4S were adamant that all complaints were logged. Serco told us that, "For the avoidance of doubt all our service users are given clear instructions on how to report maintenance issues."<sup>98</sup>

**76. People seeking asylum generally have a low awareness of their rights and entitlements and need support with this. The roles and responsibilities of landlords, and Providers' housing officers and contact centre staff, should be clearly explained to asylum seekers when they first arrive in their property. This should also be set out in the welcome pack, together with the housing specification and other entitlements defined in the COMPASS contract, the complaints procedure and what asylum seekers can legitimately expect of the Provider, including turnaround times for addressing common problems. This may help reduce frustrations on both sides.**

### *Dealing with complaints*

77. We heard that complaints are frequently treated with dismissiveness by those responsible for dealing with them.<sup>99</sup> Housing4all, a Northern Ireland based group, explained that they had worked with many individuals "who have told us that when they tried to report any of the issues with their accommodation they are met with disbelief, hostility, or they are ignored."<sup>100</sup> Examples we received included:

- He threatened me that if I complained I would be moved to shared accommodation.<sup>101</sup>
- Always an excuse, "oh you are calling again" almost as if we are bothering them.<sup>102</sup>
- The housing officer appears to be very patronising. (By saying such things as "You should count yourself lucky living in the accommodation").<sup>103</sup>

94 NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))

95 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

96 See for example Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

97 Anne McLaughlin MP ([ACC0028](#))

98 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

99 NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#)); Bethan Jenkins AM, Plaid Cymru Shadow Minister for Housing, Poverty and Steel ([ACC0036](#))

100 Housing4All ([ACC0027](#))

101 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

102 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

103 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

- Told by G4S worker if they complained: “If you do this it will backfire.” People are afraid if they say something they will be deported. One G4S worker said: “I want to quit this job because they are teaching me to be cruel”.<sup>104</sup>

78. The Helen Bamber Foundation report that asylum seekers often lack the confidence and assertiveness necessary to make a complaint, for example if doing so is not part of their culture or their ability to engage with figures in authority is affected by their traumatic past experiences.<sup>105</sup> There is also evidence that some asylum seekers fear complaining will affect their asylum application or may result in them being moved out of the area, a particular concern if children have settled into a nursery or school.<sup>106</sup> Where asylum seekers feel their complaints are not being addressed they will often turn to third sector organisations to raise complaints on their behalf. We were told that this had meant an increasing amount of charities’ time being diverted from advocacy work and providing other forms of social, material and emotional support to asylum seekers, at a time when many charities are facing an acutely challenging funding environment.<sup>107</sup>

### **Number of complaints**

79. The number of complaints about accommodation issues varied enormously between Providers. G4S told us that it received 42,783 calls via its telephone line in 2015, of which 40% were requests for maintenance and 40% for inventory replacement (and we also heard that many people could not get through).<sup>108</sup> During the same period Serco received 127 complaints about accommodation and Clearsprings Group just 25.<sup>109</sup> Serco told us that the number of complaints was so low because repair tasks were picked up through the monthly inspections of each property by housing officers. They explained that in the year ending July 2015, 21,930 faults or repairs were logged across all properties in Scotland. Within that period Serco failed to rectify the fault within the time stipulated in the contract on just 57 occasions.<sup>110</sup>

80. Mr Soames told us that he believed the number of complaints to be artificially low, reflecting cultural issues around complaining and people being worried about doing so. He admitted that Serco needed to do better to “tease out people’s concerns and complaints” and wanted this addressed in any future contract.<sup>111</sup> In its 2014 Report, the NAO drew attention to Providers not recording complaints consistently and the lack of a consistent definition, which may also explain the disparity between the figures of G4S and those of Clearsprings and Serco.<sup>112</sup>

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104 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0024](#))

105 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

106 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#)); NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))

107 Dr Jonathan Darling ([ACC0018](#)); Freedom from Torture ([ACC0032](#))

108 Letter from John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration & Borders to the Chair of the Committee, 29 January 2016 ([ACC0001](#))

109 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#)); letter from James Vyvyan-Robinson, Managing Director, Clearsprings Group, to the Chair of the Committee, 19 February 2016 ([ACC0011](#))

110 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

111 Q253

112 National Audit Office, [COMPASS contracts for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers](#), HC 880, Session 2013–14, January 2014

81. **There needs to be more transparency around the complaints regime. We do not believe that the low level of complaints reported by Clearsprings and Serco are a true reflection of the number made by their service users; this is more likely to reflect a lack of consistency around how complaints are defined and recorded. The Home Office should ensure that there is a consistent definition of a complaint that has to be recorded. Housing officers should log all complaints and requests for maintenance. Calls to contact centres are already logged but should also be recorded.**

82. **For a complaints system to work people must feel able to complain without threat of negative repercussions. Providers should make it explicit in the welcome pack, and in oral introductions when someone is first placed in accommodation, that raising concerns about accommodation will not affect their application for asylum. This should also be set out in the guidance on compliance standards to which we have referred. If the complaint is about a member of staff then the asylum seeker should be advised to raise it directly with the local authority, if responsibility is transferred to local authorities as we recommend later in this report. Concern was also expressed to us that Provider contact numbers were often engaged or calls went unanswered. We recommend that the Home Office investigate this issue.**

## Inspection

83. COMPASS Providers' housing inspectors are required to visit each property at least once a month and when asylum seekers first arrive at, or depart from, a property. The Home Office also inspects properties and will inspect one third of the properties in a contract area over the course of a financial year. Local authorities can also undertake inspections. Rupert Soames referred to dispersal accommodation as being the "most inspected accommodation in the UK."<sup>113</sup> Serco undertakes around 62,000 property inspections a year.<sup>114</sup>

84. Where Home Office inspections find that accommodation does not conform to the required standards, contractors have strict time limits to remedy the defects. The Home Office is able to impose a fine or 'service credit' if performance indicators are breached. Mr Soames described the inspection regime as 'draconian' and 'counterproductive':

By way of example, failing to fix a boiler within eight hours in one property with two occupants attracted a penalty of £74,000; another failure to fix a blocked drain in time for a property with five service users resulted in a penalty of £98,895. [ ... ] The penalty regime means that the average penalty applied per user affected for KPI failures was over £4,000, which is more than the total annual revenue we receive for a user. I personally believe that having such high penalties is counter-productive.<sup>115</sup>

Clearsprings Group have never incurred service credits since the COMPASS contracts began. G4S has incurred none in the last two years. Serco incurred credits to the value of £1,974 in 2014–15, and none in 2015–16 in the north-west of England; and £156,156 in 2014–15 and £443,545 in 2015–16 for Northern Ireland and Scotland.<sup>116</sup> Chris Shipman,

113 Q223

114 Q249

115 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

116 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

Chairman of Orchard & Shipman (a sub-contractor to Serco), told us that he was “not aware of any endemic or frequent problem with the condition of the properties” but that he would welcome an independent inspection: “from my perspective it then takes it out of this arena”.<sup>117</sup>

85. During this inquiry we have received a mixed picture on the inspection regime, with many questioning whether it is effective. Freedom from Torture drew our attention to the 2016 Home Office audit of asylum seeker accommodation in Middlesbrough. G4S inspections conducted by its subcontractor Jomast found urgent defects in 14% of properties, but the more recent Home Office inspection found urgent defects in 91% of properties. The Home Office found emergency defects (which must be resolved in 24 hours) in six properties. The Home Office stated that KPIs would be considered unmet if defects were not remedied.<sup>118</sup> Bradford City Council told us that checks by their Housing Standards Team “indicated a lack of routine maintenance especially with the HMO properties with common parts falling below expected standards.”<sup>119</sup> The Council explained that:

A joint visit between the Council’s Housing Standards Team and Home Office inspector indicated that the two agencies may have different priorities when assessing a property and the Home Office inspector may not be familiar with the Council’s adopted standards for HMOs, in particular those relating to fire safety. Therefore to be certain of compliance the Council could not rely solely on Home Office inspections.<sup>120</sup>

After some delay, the Home Office responded to concerns over the condition of asylum property and has increased its number of inspections. However, the Scottish Refugee Council told us that they had “not picked up any noticeable improvement in the actual quality of the dispersal housing, especially at the point when someone is moved in.”<sup>121</sup>

86. A lack of confidence in the Home Office inspection regime prompted several witnesses to call for an independent inspectorate for asylum accommodation. Freedom from Torture explained that:

The evidence suggests that when housing providers undertake inspections into their own practices they under-report on problems, whilst the Home Office is not prepared to hold providers to account despite its own evidence of non-compliance.<sup>122</sup>

**87. Although standards have improved since 2012, the poor condition of a significant minority of properties leads us to conclude that the current compliance regime is not fit for purpose. Those it is meant to help safeguard have little confidence in it and we do not find that it acts as an adequate deterrent to poor compliance. Home Office inspections are infrequent and the low number of penalties appear at odds with the persistent criticisms of the standard of asylum accommodation.**

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117 Qs 244 and 275

118 Home Office, [Asylum seeker accommodation in Middleborough: audit](#), January 2016

119 City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([ACC0015](#))

120 City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([ACC0015](#))

121 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

122 Freedom from Torture ([ACC0032](#))

88. We recommend that the inspection duties currently carried out by the Home Office are transferred to local authorities, along with the necessary resources to carry out this function effectively. Local authorities have a crucial role in the asylum system but their ability to influence standards seems to have been eroded since COMPASS contracts were introduced. Giving local authorities responsibility for inspection, monitoring compliance and imposing sanctions will increase their influence in the system to the benefit of those supported by it. They already have experience in property inspection and are likely to have a better knowledge of asylum properties in their areas than the Home Office, having already been consulted on their use.

89. Where an asylum seeker has a complaint against a member of Providers' staff, this should be raised directly with the local authority inspectorate and guidance to this effect should be included in welcome packs. Local authorities should be given the necessary powers to investigate such complaints, given that they are independent of the asylum application process and the system for allocating an individual's accommodation, and vulnerable people are therefore likely to be more comfortable raising concerns with them.

90. We recommend that property standards be aligned with local authority housing standards and that Providers' Key Performance Indicators are appropriately adjusted. Local authorities should have the power to conduct routine, proactive and unannounced visits and to report publicly on their findings to address the current lack of transparency. Placing the Performance Management regime for the contracts in the public domain would also boost transparency and accountability, and this should include specific information about the failures which generate a penalty and the scale of penalties. In relation to asylum accommodation in the devolved nations, the devolved governments should have a significant role in deciding the appropriate arrangements, including, for example, a possible role for the national housing regulator. Periodic inspections by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration across the UK could also complement and build upon this inspection regime by providing a country-wide overview of the system

91. The COMPASS penalty system contains inconsistencies. Disproportionate sums are imposed for routine failures while Providers avoid meaningful sanctions for more severe breaches. Any future system reliant on the private sector must better balance penalties for breach of contract with the severity of the complaint.

## 6 Wellbeing of asylum seekers

92. The Scottish Refugee Council and other agencies suggest that because the current system for providing asylum accommodation is driven foremost by the need to provide accommodation of a minimum standard within a set deadline the needs of individuals and families have become a secondary consideration. It is argued that this housing-led approach has meant that Providers can place individuals in accommodation that is inappropriate for them while still meeting their performance targets.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the wellbeing of the individual is not captured by the existing KPI regime to any great extent. We set out some of the common problems below. Many of them could likely have been avoided if there was more capacity in the system and greater communication and better organisation on the part of those who work within it, but some result from a demonstrable lack of respect and empathy on the part of staff.

### Allocation of accommodation

#### *Mix of people and overcrowding*

93. Accommodation is provided on a ‘no-choice’ basis with single adults generally having to share rooms. The majority of people in the asylum system will be required to share accommodation with people they do not know, often from different countries, ethnicities and religions. Insensitive allocation of shared accommodation can cause additional anxiety, depression, frustration and irritation to people who are already under severe stress and sometimes in fragile health and can lead to tensions within accommodation.<sup>124</sup> Some of the problems raised with us include individuals from ethnic and caste groups who are in conflict being housed together, a transgender woman being made to share a bedroom, and families with young children being placed in shared accommodation leading to concerns around safeguarding and child protection.<sup>125</sup> Asylum Seeker Housing Project suggest that people are being put in overcrowded conditions, with small bedrooms being classified as doubles and that families are being placed in cramped accommodation.<sup>126</sup> As one might expect tensions between people are most apparent in large Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). At the end of March 2016 there were 2,804 HMOs being used partly or wholly to house asylum seekers; by the end of June this had increased by 10% to 3,073.<sup>127</sup>

94. Some councils have taken steps to prevent room sharing. In Leeds, Hull, and Bradford council areas G4S is not allowed to require asylum seekers to share bedrooms. We were told that Sheffield City Council had also banned forced bedroom-sharing in its protocol with G4S but according to the South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group, the company ignored the Council’s rules, with the support of the Home Office.<sup>128</sup> Serco explained that, in deciding the mix of people that will occupy any property, they try to take into account their religion, race and language and endeavour to match people sensitively

123 Q179 [Gary Christie]; Welsh Refugee Coalition ([ACC0012](#)); Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

124 Birmingham Asylum and Refugee Association; NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))

125 Dr Jonathan Darling ([ACC0018](#)); South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#)); NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))

126 Asylum Seeker Housing project ([ACC0031](#))

127 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))

128 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#))

wherever practical. However, the sheer number of people and the constant churn, together with limitations on dispersal areas, made it “completely impractical to house people only in accommodation shared by others of the same background and language”.<sup>129</sup>

### *Inappropriate accommodation for vulnerable people*

95. In addition to concerns over the mix of people sharing accommodation, Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) told us that an individual’s particular circumstances or vulnerabilities were seldom considered by staff in charge of providing accommodation. This is a charge repeated by organisations working across the asylum system. We received evidence of women in the late stages of pregnancy being placed in rooms up several flights of stairs or being made to share a bedroom, advice from health visitors being ignored and examples of people with mobility difficulties being placed in accommodation that was not accessible to them.<sup>130</sup>

96. Home Office policy states that torture survivors undergoing treatment by Freedom from Torture or the Helen Bamber Foundation should not be required to share a bedroom. This is a welcome development but a lack of available accommodation can mean delays in individuals being housed appropriately which can put them under considerable strain.<sup>131</sup> The Helen Bamber Foundation explained that, despite their requests, individuals diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and significant mental health problems were, by default, accommodated in shared bedrooms. They set out the problems this can cause:

Symptoms such as hypervigilance, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, fear and the inability to trust others are common in people who have suffered torture and/or human trafficking. This has led to some of our clients putting themselves at risk by sleeping outside their accommodation on the streets or in parks rather than sharing a room. Those with whom they are sharing the room do not understand what the person has been through and may be puzzled, angered or frightened by their behaviour.<sup>132</sup>

The Foundation pointed out that difficulties in housing people with mental health problems were not resolved by putting two vulnerable people with mental health problems in the same room, which they believe has been one practice used.<sup>133</sup>

**97. When allocating accommodation Providers should do much more to address the needs of particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, such as expectant mothers, those living with mental health needs and victims of trafficking, rape and torture. At the very least people in these circumstances should not have to share a room or be placed in large-scale Houses of Multiple Occupancy. Indeed, we recommend that forced bedroom sharing be phased out across the asylum estate as a whole and that the use of large scale HMOs be reduced.**

129 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

130 Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) ([ACC0014](#)); South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#)); Anne McLaughlin MP ([ACC0028](#))

131 Freedom from Torture ([ACC0032](#))

132 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

133 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

98. We note that until this point there has been no evidence of an equality statement in relation to the COMPASS contracts, nor has an equality impact assessment or any equality monitoring been undertaken. The Immigration Minister stated last October that the Home Office was “considering any equality impacts as part of the wider consideration as to whether to extend the asylum support and accommodation contracts”.<sup>134</sup>

**99. The Public Sector Equality Duty should act as an essential means of ensuring that the Home Office and Providers understand how the COMPASS contracts affect different groups and that there is no discrimination in delivery of the contracts. Many of the issues identified in this report could have been avoided had the needs of different groups of asylum seekers been more clearly identified. We recommend that the Government publish the outcome of its consideration of the equality impacts of the COMPASS contracts which the Minister for Immigration has indicated the Home Office was undertaking.**

### *Moving people between properties*

100. Providers are permitted to move asylum seekers without their consent a maximum of twice a year. We received evidence of people being moved three or more times within a year, with some examples of individuals being moved from a property within a week of arriving there.<sup>135</sup> Movements often take place at very short notice and can often affect support networks that may have been built up. The Helen Bamber Foundation told us they had clients who had lost vital access to Community Mental Health Team care as a result of the lack of effective onward referral.<sup>136</sup> We also heard that support organisations were often not told where the clients were being moved to.<sup>137</sup> Children’s school or nursery education can also be disrupted by moves, a particular concern given that children of asylum seekers may be in receipt of additional pastoral care.<sup>138</sup>

101. Women in the late stages of pregnancy and new mothers are particularly vulnerable. This is reflected in UKVI’s Healthcare Needs and Pregnancy Dispersal policy which states that “any dispersal property must be suitable not just for a pregnant woman (including mobility issues), but for a mother and baby, post birth”.<sup>139</sup> Despite, clear guidance from the Government we have received many examples of pregnant women and new mothers being moved at short notice, on some occasions directly upon leaving hospital.<sup>140</sup> Such movements may leave women feeling isolated and cause emotional stress as they lose hospital antenatal care where they had formed relationships with specific midwives, including safeguarding midwives, and are cut off from other support that may have been put in place such as a relationship with the local Children’s Centre, or Home Start. Bradford City of Sanctuary told us that “Relocation requests asking that women be moved before the birth of their baby have been routinely ignored.”<sup>141</sup>

134 Answer to [Written Question 47816](#) on COMPASS contracts (tabled by Ian Murray MP), 13 October 2016

135 Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) ([ACC0014](#)); South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0005](#))

136 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))

137 Sandwell Women’s Aid ([ACC0041](#))

138 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#)); Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#)); NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))

139 UKVI, [Healthcare Needs and Pregnancy Dispersal Guidance v3](#)

140 Letter from Suzanne Fletcher MBE, to the Chair of the Committee, 25 January 2016 ([ACC0009](#)); Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) ([ACC0014](#))

141 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))

102. Moving people around the asylum system without their consent can disrupt vital support networks and can cause emotional distress to the individual. The system of allocating properties strikes us as chaotic. Too often people are moved because they have been housed in unsuitable or unfit accommodation in the first instance or because it suits the Provider to do so. Movement without consent should be limited, and for those individuals engaged with local services, such as schools or specific welfare support, it should be used only in exceptional circumstances. Where movement is unavoidable the Provider should first ensure that the destination location fully meets the needs of the individual, including by liaising with the local Strategic Migration Partnership, local authority and, where relevant, third sector organisations.

103. Under the current system the condition of asylum accommodation is covered by inspections but not the wellbeing of those inside it. This needs to change so that the voices of those in the accommodation are heard. The monitoring and inspection process should be reformed to capture the experience of vulnerable people, such as victims of torture and trafficking, and issues relating to gender, including women who are pregnant and new mothers. An obligation should be placed on Providers to have regard for the wellbeing of those they house and, under certain circumstances, Providers should face sanction if they fail in this duty. For example, Providers should ensure that pregnant women are relocated to accommodation suitable and appropriate for their needs by 28 weeks of pregnancy and should face penalties where this target is not met. There should also be stricter limits on how often people are moved against their will. The wellbeing of the individual, particularly those who are most vulnerable, has to be at the heart of a reformed asylum system.

104. The Government has accepted that improvements need to be made to the welfare support that asylum seekers receive and has pledged to pay for more welfare officers as part of the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts to 2019.<sup>142</sup>

105. In response to this report we request that the Government set out how much extra financial support it will make available to pay for more welfare supports officers, as part of the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts, and how many more welfare officers it expects will be employed as a result.

## Privacy, dignity and respect

106. As we have already noted in relation to dealing with complaints, a significant concern raised with us was the way in which asylum seekers are treated by Providers' staff. Asylum seekers are vulnerable individuals yet, in some of the examples we received, the standard of behaviour of Providers' staff fell far short of the duty to treat people with dignity and respect. Asylum seekers reported being treated with hostility and being made to feel 'sub-human' or 'like animals'.<sup>143</sup> Others reported they felt bullied and that staff could be intimidating and aggressive:

- He threatened me that if I complained I would be moved to shared accommodation.<sup>144</sup>

142 Written Statement, 8 December 2016, [HCWS335](#)

143 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#)); Birmingham Asylum and Refugee Association ([ACC0020](#)); Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) ([ACC0014](#))

144 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

- I was made to feel very uncomfortable and unsafe. There was an occasion the area manager visited me unexpectedly. He was very rude, intimidating and abusive. I had to report that to the police. Then on the same day, he switched off the boiler so we had no heating or hot water [ ... ] I genuinely feared for my safety.<sup>145</sup>
- I feel like I can complain about normal things like broken furniture but I cannot complain about how I am treated.<sup>146</sup>

107. Unannounced visits and ‘invasive behaviour’ came in for particular criticism.<sup>147</sup> Asylum seekers have reported instances of housing officers going through belongings without permission; one person said, “I walked in to him with my phone, going through my phone, I was worried he was going to take it”.<sup>148</sup> Another complaint was about entering property without advance warning. Examples included: “They come in at any moment and [your] dignity and privacy are compromised”; and “As a person who has been trafficked, [this causes] me to panic and relive traumatizing experiences of the past.”<sup>149</sup> SYMAAG told us about one case where G4S knew an asylum seeker was severely traumatized but still continued to come unannounced to the house and “enter with their keys without waiting to be let in.”<sup>150</sup> Serco told us that, if they receive claims of poor behaviour that appear to have substance, “we investigate them immediately and thoroughly”<sup>151</sup> and we have heard of instances where Providers’ staff have been dismissed for inappropriate behaviour of this kind.

108. It has been drawn to our attention that G4S are in the process of rolling out body-worn cameras to their welfare officers, having recently concluded a six-week pilot in the Midlands and parts of Yorkshire. The move is in response to an increase in aggression against Providers’ staff (see para 67) but there appears to have been no consultation and it is not clear what precautions are going to be taken with regard to the filming of women and children. We have already discussed the problem of Providers’ staff entering properties unannounced, particularly men entering women-only properties. Concern has been raised with us that the use of cameras will affect the relationship between asylum seekers and Providers’ employees, and that people who are traumatized, as many asylum seekers are, may be even less likely to raise problems if they are being filmed. It is also not clear whether asylum seekers will be explicitly asked for their consent to be filmed or whether they will be able to request the recording if they have a complaint about an employee’s behaviour towards them.

**109. We acknowledge that many staff working in the asylum system act professionally and respectfully but we are concerned by reports of staff who do not come up to this standard. Bullying behaviour is completely unacceptable, particularly against vulnerable people. We recommend that Providers work with local third sector organisations to improve staff training and increase staff understanding of the experiences and anxieties of people seeking asylum. Staff seeking entry into asylum**

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145 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

146 United for Change ([ACC0022](#))

147 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#)); Sandwell Women’s Aid; Bethan Jenkins AM, Plaid Cymru Shadow Minister for Housing, Poverty and Steel ([ACC0036](#))

148 United for Change ([ACC0022](#))

149 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))

150 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0024](#))

151 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

accommodation should provide appropriate notice; they should not enter a property which is unoccupied without permission from the resident; and they should wear identification. All employees who make harassing or discriminatory remarks should be held accountable by Providers. Staff likely to have regular direct contact with asylum seekers should be subject to the highest standards of disclosure checks.

110. We are concerned by reports that one of the Providers will be equipping its staff with body-worn cameras, apparently without any proper consultation having taken place or any policy being published. Such an action raises issues of consent, safeguarding and privacy that need to be considered, as well as questions about whether it is appropriate for a system which supports vulnerable individuals. The Home Office should publish its policy on the use of body-worn cameras by Providers' employees as a matter of urgency.

## 7 After the asylum claim

111. Local authorities, third sector organisations and Providers have all raised concerns with us about the end of the asylum application process. Under the current system, once an asylum seeker receives a positive decision on their application, they have 28 days to secure housing and a means to support themselves before their entitlements under Section 95 are stopped. However, they face multiple bureaucratic hurdles. We heard that there were often delays in refugees receiving their Biometric Residence Permit and National Insurance numbers which are essential for accessing benefits and the job market; that advice and signposting were inadequate; and that local authorities were not immediately being notified when people in their area had been granted asylum and were therefore unprepared to provide support.<sup>152</sup> According to the Refugee Council, such problems can leave people facing destitution.<sup>153</sup> We note that in a report on benefit delivery published in December 2015, the Work and Pensions Committee questioned “why the ‘move-on’ period for new refugees is only 28 days, when it is clear from research conducted by charities and the Government that it is in many cases insufficient”.<sup>154</sup>

112. In relation to certain asylum seekers on whose claims a decision has been made, Rupert Soames of Serco felt that Providers were being faced with an impossible dilemma; either to “evict people who have no alternative provision, or continue to pay at our expense for their accommodation, rates and utilities.”<sup>155</sup> He told us in April that Serco was then housing 137 people whom the Home Office had stopped funding, at an annual cost of £5,000. The longest over-stayer had been in Serco accommodation for over two years. Many of these people would be tied to accommodation in that area due to welfare considerations or may have children at school. Mr Soames admitted that in a tiny number of cases where there were no welfare considerations and the individual was refusing to leave then the locks on the property would be changed while the person was out. Third sector organisations told us that, in these circumstances, people often had difficulties reclaiming their possessions.<sup>156</sup>

**113. The Government is currently reviewing the 28-day grace period for people granted refugee status and the Department of Work and Pensions’ ability to manage applications for support from people transferring out of the asylum system. The evidence we have received demonstrates to us that a 28-day period is not sufficient to enable a smooth transition from asylum seeker to refugee status, and we recommend that the period be extended.**

### A two-tier system

114. There has been a reduction in move-on support with the introduction of the COMPASS contracts. In 2011 the Government abolished the Refugee Integration and Employment Service. This was designed to help people transfer out of the asylum system once they had been given refugee status. Leeds City Council told us that the integration

152 Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#)); Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#)), [Briefing on Asylum Support amendments to the Immigration Bill, Committee Stage](#), February 2015

153 Refugee Council, [Briefing on Asylum Support amendments](#), February 2015; Refugee Council, [28 days later: experiences of new refugees in the UK](#), May 2014

154 Work and Pensions Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2015–16, , [Benefit delivery](#), HC 372

155 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

156 Letter from Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc, to the Chair of the Committee, 6 April 2016 ([ACC0013](#))

of refugees through the system has been de-prioritised, and urged a rethink to enable successful integration, while Chris Shipman of the sub-contractor Orchard & Shipman called for appropriate funding and mechanisms to deal with the end of the process.<sup>157</sup>

115. Support is available to refugees who arrive in the UK via specific schemes such as the Syrian VPR Programme. Under such schemes individuals are provided with housing and specialist support to help them access education, the job market and mainstream services. A ‘fast track’ system is available for Syrians resettled through the VPRP, to allocate an NI number and ensure benefits are paid as swiftly as possible.<sup>158</sup> Additional funding is also provided to facilitate extra help within schools and reflect the challenges that delivering to a vulnerable client group brings. Middlesbrough Council told us that “the assumption that asylum seeker children come with any less needs is one we would seek to challenge.” Leeds City Council argued that, where support existed for refugees, it had proved effective at helping their integration into society.<sup>159</sup>

**116. The introduction of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme means that the UK now has a system which differentiates between refugees in terms of the services they receive based on the country of origin and the process through which they arrived in the country. We believe that this is inappropriate and that the same support should be available for refugees who transfer from the asylum system as those who arrive under a resettlement programme. Schemes like the Syrian programme and bespoke council-run services are extremely successful, including in contributing to integration, which is critical for social cohesion, successful re-settlement and entering the employment market. The challenge for the Government is now to bring the level of support available to all refugees up to the standard set by the Syrian scheme, with the prospective benefits of a reduction in overall costs through reduced reliance on welfare and other support services. The Government should introduce a service along the lines of the discontinued Refugee Integration and Employment Service, or other models currently in operation in some parts of the UK, as part of this improvement.**

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157 Leeds City Council ([ACC0017](#)) ; Q280

158 Welsh Refugee Coalition ([ACC0012](#))

159 Leeds City Council ([ACC0017](#)), Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#))

## 8 The future of COMPASS contracts

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117. The COMPASS project was designed to save around £140 million over the lifetime of the contracts but we are sceptical about whether it will deliver anywhere near this level of savings and there is evidence that costs and responsibilities have simply been passed from the Government to local authorities, third sector organisations and in some cases Providers.

**118. We recommend that the National Audit Office undertake a further review of COMPASS, following up their previous report, to determine whether it will achieve the savings the Government expects and whether there has been a wider displacement of responsibilities and costs.**

**119. Given the significant problems we have identified, we believe that the COMPASS contracts should have been reviewed sooner, so that they could have been replaced with a better approach when the term of the contracts ended this year. It is disappointing that the Home Office did not do this and as a result has had to extend the existing COMPASS contracts while wider changes to the system are now considered. We recognise, however, that the fundamental changes required to these complex contracts need time to be properly developed and negotiated. In this Report we have made recommendations that look to the long-term future of the asylum system and should be considered as part of the process of putting together a successor to COMPASS. However, many of our recommendations, which would bring real improvements to the service asylum seekers receive, do not require further renegotiation, and should be implemented within six months.**

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Demands of the asylum system

1. We have warned in previous reports that the asylum system is under strain and that a backlog in cases has been developing. Those warnings were not heeded and the consequences are now evident, with Providers struggling to source sufficient adequate accommodation to meet demand. Pressure on the asylum system, and on accommodation in particular, will not reduce unless the Government takes action to increase its capacity to process applications. The Home Office was successful in doing this, albeit for only a few quarters, by devoting more resources to the task, and it needs to do so again as a matter of urgency. There are clear benefits in applications being processed quickly and these far outweigh the cost of increasing capacity in the responsible section of the Home Office, UK Visas & Immigration. We need to see a marked fall in the number of applications awaiting a decision in the statistics covering the first half of 2017. (Paragraph 15)
2. In addition to increasing its capacity to process applications for asylum, the Government should do more to ensure that its initial decisions are correct. Around 30% of decisions to refuse asylum are overturned in the courts, and this figure is much higher for certain nationalities such as Eritreans and Iranians. This is an unacceptable rate of error on the part of the Home Office. Incorrect decisions, if appealed, mean that those affected will require asylum accommodation for longer, adding further pressure to an already stretched system. The Government needs to improve its decision-making and commit to regular reviews of its approach to those nationalities which the courts are consistently identifying as receiving incorrect decisions. We have highlighted specific nationalities, such as Eritreans and Afghans in this and previous Reports. We need to see progress in this area and for this to show in future quarterly immigration statistics. (Paragraph 19)

### Initial Accommodation

3. Initial Accommodation is unsuitable for long term use, and indeed it is not provided for this purpose. However, the reality is that people have been housed in such accommodation for far longer than the target of 19 days. As longer stays are a common occurrence which does not seem likely to be addressed in the near future, the Government should take steps to ensure that people in Initial Accommodation are properly supported for the duration of their stay. As a minimum, this should include the provision of accommodation appropriate to an individual's needs; and ensuring that healthcare requirements are met and that there is clarity about who is responsible and accountable for them. The Government should also set out what different contractual arrangements it is seeking with the Providers for the provision of Initial Accommodation as part of the COMPASS contracts extension. (Paragraph 24)
4. It is vital that pregnant women and young mothers in Initial Accommodation receive the support they need. Women in the late stages of pregnancy should generally be provided with their own room; pregnant women and young mothers need access

to transport for all medical appointments and related matters such as baby banks and ante-natal education; and safe areas should be provided for young children to play. The Home Office should review Initial Accommodation centres to ensure that provision is appropriate, including by taking advice from health professionals on whether the food available is sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of pregnant women. The review should also assess the treatment of women more broadly, to ensure that safety and privacy measures are in place (including for bathroom facilities), and assess the treatment of children, particularly that appropriate policies on safeguarding are being followed. Requiring health screenings to be carried out when people move to Initial Accommodation would also help to ensure that health conditions and special needs are identified and dealt with properly, including when asylum seekers move on to dispersal accommodation. (Paragraph 30)

### Dispersal accommodation

5. The policy of dispersal was introduced to deliver an equitable distribution of asylum seekers across the UK. It has failed to achieve this. Pressure on the south-east of England may have been alleviated, but it has been replaced by the clustering of asylum seekers in some of the most deprived parts of the country. This is clearly unfair and is putting considerable pressure on local authorities whose public services are already under immense strain. It is unacceptable that so many parts of the UK have no asylum accommodation at all, including areas where Providers have been able to source accommodation only for there to be a blanket refusal by the local authority to accept it. (Paragraph 43)
6. To date the Government has had only limited success in persuading local authorities to accept asylum seekers. For the remainder of the COMPASS contract period the Government should revise its approach and give local authorities greater flexibility over where accommodation is provided within their area. For example, local authorities should be given more control over where asylum accommodation is located and a longer timeframe in which to consider Providers' requests. The option for local authorities to refuse requests should be maintained where there are genuine concerns over the quality or concentration of accommodation, the capacity of local health, education and other support services, and risks to social cohesion; and refusals should only be overturned on appeal in exceptional circumstances. The Government should also provide additional resources to local authorities which continue to bear the brunt of supporting the asylum system while broadening dispersal remains a challenge. (Paragraph 44)
7. We believe these changes would encourage more local authorities to become involved in providing asylum accommodation on a voluntary basis. If, however, after these changes are implemented, local authorities continue unreasonably to refuse to become involved, the Government should, within 12 months, use its available powers to require those local authorities to take their fair share. It is clearly unfair that the brunt of the burden of accommodation and related asylum provision should be borne by many local authorities where there is recognised deprivation and hardship, while local authorities in undoubtedly far more prosperous areas continue to refuse to be party to the dispersal scheme. In using such powers, the Government should ensure that access to the necessary specialist services is available in the local

authorities affected, including health care, legal representation and interpreters. Work should also be undertaken to ensure that host communities are informed and involved in plans for new areas to take on asylum seekers. (Paragraph 45)

8. The holistic support which the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme has been designed to provide is a model that should be replicated for all those whose asylum applications are accepted. As well as providing a more holistic form of support, this would also help address local authorities' concerns that, in accepting asylum accommodation, they will face additional costs further down the line when the person seeking asylum has received a decision on their application and is accepted as a refugee, and may be transferred to the local authority's care. (Paragraph 46)
9. The Syrian programme has been successful not just because of the additional resources, although they are an integral part, but also because local authorities have been consulted and engaged in the design of the scheme from very beginning. In comparison, the COMPASS system has corroded confidence in the asylum system for many local authorities because they have seen their influence marginalised while still having to carry many of the consequential costs. The result has been less participation, less holistic provision of support in the community, less integration planning, and more reliance on emergency and voluntary services. The Government should reflect on the success of the Syrian programme in attracting local authority support and engagement and the failure of the COMPASS scheme to do the same, and design a new approach which attracts (and, if necessary, requires) local authorities to participate, but gives them more flexibility and control. (Paragraph 47)
10. Local authorities must be actively involved in developing the replacement to COMPASS and the Government should engage them on the provision of accommodation, support and integration and how a fair distribution of accommodation might be achieved. Commissioning of asylum accommodation should be devolved rather than being done centrally by the Home Office to give local authorities greater responsibility and flexibility about how and where accommodation and support are provided. The Home Office should consult on devolving the commissioning of asylum accommodation to regional Strategic Migration Partnerships. This would not preclude private sector provision of asylum accommodation but would allow local decision-making and responsibility, and make it easier to address community cohesion. In relation to asylum accommodation in the devolved nations, the devolved governments should be given a significant role in deciding the appropriate arrangements for decentralising commissioning and ensuring a fair distribution of accommodation. (Paragraph 48)

### Temporary dispersal accommodation

11. The evidence we have received suggests that some of the premises used by Providers as temporary accommodation are substandard and unfit to house anyone, let alone people who are vulnerable. Dispersal accommodation is subject to strict criteria and regular inspection yet it appears that the same rigorous standards are not being applied to temporary accommodation. We recommend that temporary accommodation is inspected before its use is sanctioned, and on a monthly basis

thereafter. Such inspections should include: whether an individual's health or special needs are being met; the quality and quantity of food available; the fabric of the building itself; and whether there are facilities which are appropriate for vulnerable people, including mothers and children and victims of torture and trafficking. We further recommend that asylum seekers in temporary accommodation receive some financial support, given that the Home Office will have already decided that they are entitled to this. The level of financial support should reflect the fact that meals are provided. (Paragraph 54)

12. In order for us properly to assess the pressure on the asylum system the Government should include the number of asylum seekers in temporary accommodation in future quarterly statistical releases. In response to this Report the Government should also address the concerns raised with us by Sandwell Women's Aid, specifically that the Home Office either ignores requests for vulnerable women to remain in SWA safe houses until dispersal accommodation is available, or considers such requests as detrimental to applications for asylum support. (Paragraph 55)

### Strategic Migration Partnerships

13. Effective coordination and cooperation between key stakeholders is essential if the current system is to work effectively but we found it to be absent in too many parts of the country. As part of managing the remaining two years of the COMPASS contract the Government should insist on formal, regular meetings between Providers, local authorities and the third sector (and devolved governments). These meetings should be coordinated by the local Strategic Migration Partnership, which is well-placed to provide this necessary function. However, SMPs are currently poorly funded and overstretched. The Government should increase funding of SMPs to a more sustainable and consistent level so that they have the capacity to encourage communication and improve planning within the dispersal system, and are better able to negotiate tensions between its different levels. Over the longer term, we have already suggested that the Government consult on giving SMPs a central role in the regional allocation of asylum seekers and they will require more resources if they are to perform this function. (Paragraph 58)

### Standards in dispersal accommodation

14. The poor standard of asylum accommodation was the most significant issue identified in the evidence we received, which focused largely on contracts administered by G4S and Serco. It is clear that in too many cases Providers are placing people in accommodation that is substandard, poorly maintained and, at times, unsafe. Some of this accommodation is a disgrace and it is shameful that some very vulnerable people have been placed in such conditions. Urgent action must be taken by the Home Office and Providers to deal with this issue. Even when significant concerns have been raised, a lack of alternative accommodation has led to vulnerable people remaining in housing that is unfit or unsuitable for many months until they are moved. Providers are also failing to ensure that items they are obliged to provide are present and in working order when a person is placed in a property. We acknowledge the financial constraints of the COMPASS contracts and the systemic problems in the dispersal system but, nonetheless, Providers have a clear obligation to provide

safe, habitable accommodation and it is beyond doubt that this obligation is not being met in a significant minority of cases. We request that the Government now set out the details of the additional resources it has pledged to make available for staff property management purposes as part of the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts. (Paragraph 68)

15. Providers will no doubt point to a low number of fines under the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) system to suggest they are fulfilling their obligations. We also accept that asylum seekers and third sector organisations may not be fully aware of Providers' contractual obligations and deadlines for rectifying faults. However, the weight of evidence that we have received suggests that the compliance and inspection system is failing. We address the inspection regime later in this Report. (Paragraph 69)
16. The COMPASS contracts lack sufficient detail regarding response times for reactive maintenance. The 'Performance Regime' schedule, which sets out how performance should be measured against the Key Performance Indicators, has been redacted from the published contracts, which may partly explain the disconnect between people's expectations and what Providers are obliged to deliver. We recommend the schedule be placed in the public domain. (Paragraph 70)
17. We also recommend that any future frameworks and contracts governing the provision of asylum accommodation provide more extensive guidance on compliance standards and include examples of the most common complaints and deadlines for expected resolution. Such guidance should be made available to asylum seekers in a form they can understand, and to those who advocate on their behalf, so that they are clear about the standards they are entitled to expect; and it should also be made available to local authorities. (Paragraph 71)
18. The majority of people moving into asylum accommodation will not have English as their first language yet crucial documents are only made available in English, a language which the people who need to use them do not understand. It is unacceptable that such a situation should have been allowed to occur in the first place and we fail to understand why, after four years of the COMPASS contract, it has still not been addressed despite it being raised as a problem on multiple occasions. Welcome packs and tenancy agreements should be made available in the most common languages spoken by asylum seekers as a matter of urgency. We welcome a commitment by Serco to make their occupancy agreements available in five languages, and other Providers should do the same. (Paragraph 73)

### Complaints mechanism

19. People seeking asylum generally have a low awareness of their rights and entitlements and need support with this. The roles and responsibilities of landlords, and Providers' housing officers and contact centre staff, should be clearly explained to asylum seekers when they first arrive in their property. This should also be set out in the welcome pack, together with the housing specification and other entitlements defined in the COMPASS contract, the complaints procedure and what asylum

seekers can legitimately expect of the Provider, including turnaround times for addressing common problems. This may help reduce frustrations on both sides. (Paragraph 76)

20. There needs to be more transparency around the complaints regime. We do not believe that the low level of complaints reported by Clearsprings and Serco are a true reflection of the number made by their service users; this is more likely to reflect a lack of consistency around how complaints are defined and recorded. The Home Office should ensure that there is a consistent definition of a complaint that has to be recorded. Housing officers should log all complaints and requests for maintenance. Calls to contact centres are already logged but should also be recorded. (Paragraph 81)
21. For a complaints system to work people must feel able to complain without threat of negative repercussions. Providers should make it explicit in the welcome pack, and in oral introductions when someone is first placed in accommodation, that raising concerns about accommodation will not affect their application for asylum. This should also be set out in the guidance on compliance standards to which we have referred. If the complaint is about a member of staff then the asylum seeker should be advised to raise it directly with the local authority, if responsibility is transferred to local authorities as we recommend later in this report. Concern was also expressed to us that Provider contact numbers were often engaged or calls went unanswered. We recommend that the Home Office investigate this issue. (Paragraph 82)

### Inspection

22. Although standards have improved since 2012, the poor condition of a significant minority of properties leads us to conclude that the current compliance regime is not fit for purpose. Those it is meant to help safeguard have little confidence in it and we do not find that it acts as an adequate deterrent to poor compliance. Home Office inspections are infrequent and the low number of penalties appear at odds with the persistent criticisms of the standard of asylum accommodation. (Paragraph 87)
23. We recommend that the inspection duties currently carried out by the Home Office are transferred to local authorities, along with the necessary resources to carry out this function effectively. Local authorities have a crucial role in the asylum system but their ability to influence standards seems to have been eroded since COMPASS contracts were introduced. Giving local authorities responsibility for inspection, monitoring compliance and imposing sanctions will increase their influence in the system to the benefit of those supported by it. They already have experience in property inspection and are likely to have a better knowledge of asylum properties in their areas than the Home Office, having already been consulted on their use. (Paragraph 88)
24. Where an asylum seeker has a complaint against a member of Providers' staff, this should be raised directly with the local authority inspectorate and guidance to this effect should be included in welcome packs. Local authorities should be given the necessary powers to investigate such complaints, given that they are independent

of the asylum application process and the system for allocating an individual's accommodation, and vulnerable people are therefore likely to be more comfortable raising concerns with them. (Paragraph 89)

25. We recommend that property standards be aligned with local authority housing standards and that Providers' Key Performance Indicators are appropriately adjusted. Local authorities should have the power to conduct routine, proactive and unannounced visits and to report publicly on their findings to address the current lack of transparency. Placing the Performance Management regime for the contracts in the public domain would also boost transparency and accountability, and this should include specific information about the failures which generate a penalty and the scale of penalties. In relation to asylum accommodation in the devolved nations, the devolved governments should have a significant role in deciding the appropriate arrangements, including, for example, a possible role for the national housing regulator. Periodic inspections by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration across the UK could also complement and build upon this inspection regime by providing a country-wide overview of the system (Paragraph 90)
26. The COMPASS penalty system contains inconsistencies. Disproportionate sums are imposed for routine failures while Providers avoid meaningful sanctions for more severe breaches. Any future system reliant on the private sector must better balance penalties for breach of contract with the severity of the complaint. (Paragraph 91)

### Wellbeing of asylum seekers

27. When allocating accommodation Providers should do much more to address the needs of particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, such as expectant mothers, those living with mental health needs and victims of trafficking, rape and torture. At the very least people in these circumstances should not have to share a room or be placed in large-scale Houses of Multiple Occupancy. Indeed, we recommend that forced bedroom sharing be phased out across the asylum estate as a whole and that the use of large scale HMOs be reduced. (Paragraph 97)
28. The Public Sector Equality Duty should act as an essential means of ensuring that the Home Office and Providers understand how the COMPASS contracts affect different groups and that there is no discrimination in delivery of the contracts. Many of the issues identified in this report could have been avoided had the needs of different groups of asylum seekers been more clearly identified. We recommend that the Government publish the outcome of its consideration of the equality impacts of the COMPASS contracts which the Minister for Immigration has indicated the Home Office was undertaking. (Paragraph 99)
29. Moving people around the asylum system without their consent can disrupt vital support networks and can cause emotional distress to the individual. The system of allocating properties strikes us as chaotic. Too often people are moved because they have been housed in unsuitable or unfit accommodation in the first instance or because it suits the Provider to do so. Movement without consent should be limited, and for those individuals engaged with local services, such as schools or specific welfare support, it should be used only in exceptional circumstances. Where movement is unavoidable the Provider should first ensure that the destination

location fully meets the needs of the individual, including by liaising with the local Strategic Migration Partnership, local authority and, where relevant, third sector organisations. (Paragraph 102)

30. Under the current system the condition of asylum accommodation is covered by inspections but not the wellbeing of those inside it. This needs to change so that the voices of those in the accommodation are heard. The monitoring and inspection process should be reformed to capture the experience of vulnerable people, such as victims of torture and trafficking, and issues relating to gender, including women who are pregnant and new mothers. An obligation should be placed on Providers to have regard for the wellbeing of those they house and, under certain circumstances, Providers should face sanction if they fail in this duty. For example, Providers should ensure that pregnant women are relocated to accommodation suitable and appropriate for their needs by 28 weeks of pregnancy and should face penalties where this target is not met. There should also be stricter limits on how often people are moved against their will. The wellbeing of the individual, particularly those who are most vulnerable, has to be at the heart of a reformed asylum system. (Paragraph 103)
31. In response to this report we request that the Government set out how much extra financial support it will make available to pay for more welfare supports officers, as part of the agreement to extend the COMPASS contracts, and how many more welfare officers it expects will be employed as a result. (Paragraph 105)
32. We acknowledge that many staff working in the asylum system act professionally and respectfully but we are concerned by reports of staff who do not come up to this standard. Bullying behaviour is completely unacceptable, particularly against vulnerable people. We recommend that Providers work with local third sector organisations to improve staff training and increase staff understanding of the experiences and anxieties of people seeking asylum. Staff seeking entry into asylum accommodation should provide appropriate notice; they should not enter a property which is unoccupied without permission from the resident; and they should wear identification. All employees who make harassing or discriminatory remarks should be held accountable by Providers. Staff likely to have regular direct contact with asylum seekers should be subject to the highest standards of disclosure checks. (Paragraph 109)
33. We are concerned by reports that one of the Providers will be equipping its staff with body-worn cameras, apparently without any proper consultation having taken place or any policy being published. Such an action raises issues of consent, safeguarding and privacy that need to be considered, as well as questions about whether it is appropriate for a system which supports vulnerable individuals. The Home Office should publish its policy on the use of body-worn cameras by Providers' employees as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 110)

### After the asylum claim

34. The Government is currently reviewing the 28-day grace period for people granted refugee status and the Department of Work and Pensions' ability to manage applications for support from people transferring out of the asylum system. The

evidence we have received demonstrates to us that a 28-day period is not sufficient to enable a smooth transition from asylum seeker to refugee status, and we recommend that the period be extended. (Paragraph 113)

35. The introduction of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme means that the UK now has a system which differentiates between refugees in terms of the services they receive based on the country of origin and the process through which they arrived in the country. We believe that this is inappropriate and that the same support should be available for refugees who transfer from the asylum system as those who arrive under a resettlement programme. Schemes like the Syrian programme and bespoke council-run services are extremely successful, including in contributing to integration, which is critical for social cohesion, successful resettlement and entering the employment market. The challenge for the Government is now to bring the level of support available to all refugees up to the standard set by the Syrian scheme, with the prospective benefits of a reduction in overall costs through reduced reliance on welfare and other support services. The Government should introduce a service along the lines of the discontinued Refugee Integration and Employment Service, or other models currently in operation in some parts of the UK, as part of this improvement. (Paragraph 116)

### The future of COMPASS contracts

36. We recommend that the National Audit Office undertake a further review of COMPASS, following up their previous report, to determine whether it will achieve the savings the Government expects and whether there has been a wider displacement of responsibilities and costs. (Paragraph 118)
37. Given the significant problems we have identified, we believe that the COMPASS contracts should have been reviewed sooner, so that they could have been replaced with a better approach when the term of the contracts ended this year. It is disappointing that the Home Office did not do this and as a result has had to extend the existing COMPASS contracts while wider changes to the system are now considered. We recognise, however, that the fundamental changes required to these complex contracts need time to be properly developed and negotiated. In this Report we have made recommendations that look to the long-term future of the asylum system and should be considered as part of the process of putting together a successor to COMPASS. However, many of our recommendations, which would bring real improvements to the service asylum seekers receive, do not require further renegotiation, and should be implemented within six months. (Paragraph 119)

## Annex 1

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### Asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation, by local authority, as at end of Quarter 3, 2016 (alphabetical order)

Local authority	Number of asylum seekers
Aberdeen	0
Aberdeenshire	0
Adur	0
Allerdale	0
Amber Valley	0
Angus	0
Antrim and Newtownabbey	0
Argyll and Bute	0
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	0
Arun	0
Ashfield	0
Ashford	0
Aylesbury Vale	0
Babergh	0
Barking and Dagenham	418
Barnet	18
Barnsley	461
Barrow-in-Furness	0
Basildon	11
Basingstoke and Deane	0
Bassetlaw	0
Bath and North East Somerset	0
Bedford	0
Belfast	566
Bexley	15
Birmingham	1480
Blaby	0
Blackburn with Darwen	329
Blackpool	0
Blaenau Gwent	0
Bolsover	0
Bolton	1049
Boston	0
Bournemouth	0
Bracknell Forest	0
Bradford	772
Braintree	0
Breckland	0

Brent	123
Brentwood	0
Bridgend	0
Brighton and Hove	0
Bristol	292
Broadland	4
Bromley	11
Bromsgrove	0
Broxbourne	3
Broxtowe	17
Burnley	25
Bury	509
Caerphilly	0
Calderdale	328
Cambridge	0
Camden	2
Cannock Chase	0
Canterbury	0
Cardiff	1365
Carlisle	0
Carmarthenshire	0
Castle Point	0
Causeway Coast and Glens	0
Central Bedfordshire	0
Ceredigion	0
Charnwood	0
Chelmsford	1
Cheltenham	0
Cherwell	0
Cheshire East	0
Cheshire West and Chester	14
Chesterfield	0
Chichester	0
Chiltern	0
Chorley	15
Christchurch	0
City of London	0
Clackmannanshire	0
Colchester	0
Conwy	0
Copeland	0
Corby	0
Cornwall	0
Cotswold	0
County Durham	0

Coventry	499
Craven	0
Crawley	0
Croydon	66
Dacorum	0
Darlington	0
Dartford	0
Daventry	0
Denbighshire	0
Derby	726
Derbyshire Dales	0
Derry and Strabane	0
Doncaster	311
Dover	0
Dudley	232
Dumfries and Galloway	0
Dundee	0
Ealing	124
East Ayrshire	0
East Cambridgeshire	0
East Devon	0
East Dorset	0
East Dunbartonshire	0
East Hampshire	0
East Hertfordshire	0
East Lindsey	0
East Lothian	0
East Northamptonshire	0
East Renfrewshire	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	0
East Staffordshire	0
Eastbourne	2
Eastleigh	0
Eden	0
Edinburgh	0
Eilean Siar	0
Elmbridge	0
Enfield	50
Epping Forest	12
Epsom and Ewell	0
Erewash	0
Exeter	0
Falkirk	0
Fareham	0
Fenland	0

Fermanagh and Omagh	0
Fife	0
Flintshire	0
Forest Heath	0
Forest of Dean	0
Fylde	4
Gateshead	320
Gedling	0
Glasgow	3176
Gloucester	116
Gosport	0
Gravesham	0
Great Yarmouth	0
Greenwich	92
Guildford	0
Gwynedd	0
Hackney	13
Halton	0
Hambleton	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0
Harborough	0
Haringey	87
Harlow	0
Harrogate	0
Harrow	8
Hart	0
Hartlepool	181
Hastings	88
Havant	0
Havering	162
Herefordshire	0
Hertsmere	2
High Peak	0
Highland	0
Hillingdon	203
Hinckley and Bosworth	0
Horsham	0
Hounslow	39
Huntingdonshire	0
Hyndburn	11
Inverclyde	0
Ipswich	71
Isle of Anglesey	0
Isle of Wight	0
Isles of Scilly	0

Islington	0
Kensington and Chelsea	1
Kettering	0
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	0
Kingston upon Hull	336
Kingston upon Thames	0
Kirklees	581
Knowsley	24
Lambeth	1
Lancaster	17
Leeds	647
Leicester	899
Lewes	0
Lewisham	42
Lichfield	0
Lincoln	0
Lisburn and Castlereagh	0
Liverpool	1487
Luton	33
Maidstone	0
Maldon	0
Malvern Hills	0
Manchester	994
Mansfield	0
Medway	0
Melton	0
Mendip	0
Merthyr Tydfil	0
Merton	5
Mid Devon	0
Mid Suffolk	0
Mid Sussex	0
Mid Ulster	0
Mid and East Antrim	0
Middlesbrough	638
Midlothian	0
Milton Keynes	0
Mole Valley	0
Monmouthshire	0
Moray	0
Neath Port Talbot	0
New Forest	0
Newark and Sherwood	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	712
Newcastle-under-Lyme	0

Newham	332
Newport	511
Newry, Mourne and Down	0
North Ayrshire	0
North Devon	0
North Dorset	0
North Down and Ards	0
North East Derbyshire	0
North East Lincolnshire	0
North Hertfordshire	0
North Kesteven	0
North Lanarkshire	0
North Lincolnshire	0
North Norfolk	0
North Somerset	0
North Tyneside	123
North Warwickshire	0
North West Leicestershire	0
Northampton	0
Northumberland	3
Norwich	119
Nottingham	952
Nuneaton and Bedworth	0
Oadby and Wigston	55
Oldham	661
Orkney Islands	0
Other and Unknown	165
Oxford	0
Pembrokeshire	0
Pendle	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Peterborough	135
Plymouth	247
Poole	0
Portsmouth	144
Powys	0
Preston	136
Purbeck	0
Reading	0
Redbridge	582
Redcar and Cleveland	41
Redditch	0
Reigate and Banstead	0
Renfrewshire	0

Rhondda Cynon Taf	0
Ribble Valley	10
Richmond upon Thames	0
Richmondshire	0
Rochdale	1029
Rochford	0
Rossendale	43
Rother	0
Rotherham	401
Rugby	0
Runnymede	0
Rushcliffe	0
Rushmoor	1
Rutland	0
Ryedale	0
Salford	728
Sandwell	844
Scarborough	0
Scottish Borders	0
Sedgemoor	0
Sefton	18
Selby	0
Sevenoaks	0
Sheffield	822
Shepway	0
Shetland Islands	0
Shropshire	0
Slough	3
Solihull	0
South Ayrshire	0
South Bucks	0
South Cambridgeshire	0
South Derbyshire	0
South Gloucestershire	49
South Hams	0
South Holland	0
South Kesteven	0
South Lakeland	0
South Lanarkshire	4
South Norfolk	0
South Northamptonshire	0
South Oxfordshire	0
South Ribble	8
South Somerset	2
South Staffordshire	0

South Tyneside	78
Southampton	90
Southend-on-Sea	7
Southwark	8
Spelthorne	0
St. Albans	0
St. Edmundsbury	0
St. Helens	86
Stafford	0
Staffordshire Moorlands	0
Stevenage	0
Stirling	0
Stockport	139
Stockton-on-Tees	851
Stoke-on-Trent	788
Stratford-on-Avon	0
Stroud	0
Suffolk Coastal	3
Sunderland	259
Surrey Heath	0
Sutton	4
Swale	0
Swansea	901
Swindon	172
Tameside	385
Tamworth	0
Tandridge	0
Taunton Deane	0
Teignbridge	0
Telford and Wrekin	0
Tendring	0
Test Valley	0
Tewkesbury	4
Thanet	0
The Vale of Glamorgan	0
Three Rivers	0
Thurrock	29
Tonbridge and Malling	0
Torbay	0
Torfaen	0
Torridge	0
Tower Hamlets	0
Trafford	118
Tunbridge Wells	0
Uttlesford	0

Vale of White Horse	2
Wakefield	41
Walsall	307
Waltham Forest	140
Wandsworth	0
Warrington	0
Warwick	0
Watford	0
Waveney	0
Waverley	0
Wealden	0
Wellingborough	0
Welwyn Hatfield	1
West Berkshire	0
West Devon	0
West Dorset	0
West Dunbartonshire	0
West Lancashire	81
West Lindsey	0
West Lothian	0
West Oxfordshire	0
West Somerset	0
Westminster	0
Weymouth and Portland	0
Wigan	857
Wiltshire	0
Winchester	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	0
Wirral	28
Woking	0
Wokingham	0
Wolverhampton	703
Worcester	0
Worthing	0
Wrexham	139
Wychavon	0
Wycombe	25
Wyre	0
Wyre Forest	0
York	0

Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table as\_16\_q

## Annex 2

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**Asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation, by local authority, as at end of Quarter 3, 2016 (in descending order of number accommodated)**

Local authority	Number of asylum seekers
Glasgow	3176
Liverpool	1487
Birmingham	1480
Cardiff	1365
Bolton	1049
Rochdale	1029
Manchester	994
Nottingham	952
Swansea	901
Leicester	899
Wigan	857
Stockton-on-Tees	851
Sandwell	844
Sheffield	822
Stoke-on-Trent	788
Bradford	772
Salford	728
Derby	726
Newcastle upon Tyne	712
Wolverhampton	703
Oldham	661
Leeds	647
Middlesbrough	638
Redbridge	582
Kirklees	581
Belfast	566
Newport	511
Bury	509
Coventry	499
Barnsley	461
Barking and Dagenham	418
Rotherham	401
Tameside	385
Kingston upon Hull	336
Newham	332
Blackburn with Darwen	329
Calderdale	328
Gateshead	320

Doncaster	311
Walsall	307
Bristol	292
Sunderland	259
Plymouth	247
Dudley	232
Hillingdon	203
Hartlepool	181
Swindon	172
Other and Unknown	165
Havering	162
Portsmouth	144
Waltham Forest	140
Stockport	139
Wrexham	139
Preston	136
Peterborough	135
Ealing	124
Brent	123
North Tyneside	123
Norwich	119
Trafford	118
Gloucester	116
Greenwich	92
Southampton	90
Hastings	88
Haringey	87
St. Helens	86
West Lancashire	81
South Tyneside	78
Ipswich	71
Croydon	66
Oadby and Wigston	55
Enfield	50
South Gloucestershire	49
Rossendale	43
Lewisham	42
Redcar and Cleveland	41
Wakefield	41
Hounslow	39
Luton	33
Thurrock	29
Wirral	28
Burnley	25
Wycombe	25

Knowsley	24
Barnet	18
Sefton	18
Broxtowe	17
Lancaster	17
Bexley	15
Chorley	15
Cheshire West and Chester	14
Hackney	13
Epping Forest	12
Basildon	11
Bromley	11
Hyndburn	11
Ribble Valley	10
Harrow	8
South Ribble	8
Southwark	8
Southend-on-Sea	7
Merton	5
Broadland	4
Fylde	4
South Lanarkshire	4
Sutton	4
Tewkesbury	4
Broxbourne	3
Northumberland	3
Slough	3
Suffolk Coastal	3
Camden	2
Eastbourne	2
Hertsmere	2
South Somerset	2
Vale of White Horse	2
Chelmsford	1
Kensington and Chelsea	1
Lambeth	1
Rushmoor	1
Welwyn Hatfield	1
Aberdeen	0
Aberdeenshire	0
Adur	0
Allerdale	0
Amber Valley	0
Angus	0
Antrim and Newtownabbey	0

Argyll and Bute	0
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	0
Arun	0
Ashfield	0
Ashford	0
Aylesbury Vale	0
Babergh	0
Barrow-in-Furness	0
Basingstoke and Deane	0
Bassetlaw	0
Bath and North East Somerset	0
Bedford	0
Blaby	0
Blackpool	0
Blaenau Gwent	0
Bolsover	0
Boston	0
Bournemouth	0
Bracknell Forest	0
Braintree	0
Breckland	0
Brentwood	0
Bridgend	0
Brighton and Hove	0
Bromsgrove	0
Caerphilly	0
Cambridge	0
Cannock Chase	0
Canterbury	0
Carlisle	0
Carmarthenshire	0
Castle Point	0
Causeway Coast and Glens	0
Central Bedfordshire	0
Ceredigion	0
Charnwood	0
Cheltenham	0
Cherwell	0
Cheshire East	0
Chesterfield	0
Chichester	0
Chiltern	0
Christchurch	0
City of London	0
Clackmannanshire	0

Colchester	0
Conwy	0
Copeland	0
Corby	0
Cornwall	0
Cotswold	0
County Durham	0
Craven	0
Crawley	0
Dacorum	0
Darlington	0
Dartford	0
Daventry	0
Denbighshire	0
Derbyshire Dales	0
Derry and Strabane	0
Dover	0
Dumfries and Galloway	0
Dundee	0
East Ayrshire	0
East Cambridgeshire	0
East Devon	0
East Dorset	0
East Dunbartonshire	0
East Hampshire	0
East Hertfordshire	0
East Lindsey	0
East Lothian	0
East Northamptonshire	0
East Renfrewshire	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	0
East Staffordshire	0
Eastleigh	0
Eden	0
Edinburgh	0
Eilean Siar	0
Elmbridge	0
Epsom and Ewell	0
Erewash	0
Exeter	0
Falkirk	0
Fareham	0
Fenland	0
Fermanagh and Omagh	0
Fife	0

Flintshire	0
Forest Heath	0
Forest of Dean	0
Gedling	0
Gosport	0
Gravesham	0
Great Yarmouth	0
Guildford	0
Gwynedd	0
Halton	0
Hambleton	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0
Harborough	0
Harlow	0
Harrogate	0
Hart	0
Havant	0
Herefordshire	0
High Peak	0
Highland	0
Hinckley and Bosworth	0
Horsham	0
Huntingdonshire	0
Inverclyde	0
Isle of Anglesey	0
Isle of Wight	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Islington	0
Kettering	0
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	0
Kingston upon Thames	0
Lewes	0
Lichfield	0
Lincoln	0
Lisburn and Castlereagh	0
Maidstone	0
Maldon	0
Malvern Hills	0
Mansfield	0
Medway	0
Melton	0
Mendip	0
Merthyr Tydfil	0
Mid Devon	0
Mid Suffolk	0

Mid Sussex	0
Mid Ulster	0
Mid and East Antrim	0
Midlothian	0
Milton Keynes	0
Mole Valley	0
Monmouthshire	0
Moray	0
Neath Port Talbot	0
New Forest	0
Newark and Sherwood	0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	0
Newry, Mourne and Down	0
North Ayrshire	0
North Devon	0
North Dorset	0
North Down and Ards	0
North East Derbyshire	0
North East Lincolnshire	0
North Hertfordshire	0
North Kesteven	0
North Lanarkshire	0
North Lincolnshire	0
North Norfolk	0
North Somerset	0
North Warwickshire	0
North West Leicestershire	0
Northampton	0
Nuneaton and Bedworth	0
Orkney Islands	0
Oxford	0
Pembrokeshire	0
Pendle	0
Perth and Kinross	0
Poole	0
Powys	0
Purbeck	0
Reading	0
Redditch	0
Reigate and Banstead	0
Renfrewshire	0
Rhondda Cynon Taf	0
Richmond upon Thames	0
Richmondshire	0
Rochford	0

Rother	0
Rugby	0
Runnymede	0
Rushcliffe	0
Rutland	0
Ryedale	0
Scarborough	0
Scottish Borders	0
Sedgemoor	0
Selby	0
Sevenoaks	0
Shepway	0
Shetland Islands	0
Shropshire	0
Solihull	0
South Ayrshire	0
South Bucks	0
South Cambridgeshire	0
South Derbyshire	0
South Hams	0
South Holland	0
South Kesteven	0
South Lakeland	0
South Norfolk	0
South Northamptonshire	0
South Oxfordshire	0
South Staffordshire	0
Spelthorne	0
St. Albans	0
St. Edmundsbury	0
Stafford	0
Staffordshire Moorlands	0
Stevenage	0
Stirling	0
Stratford-on-Avon	0
Stroud	0
Surrey Heath	0
Swale	0
Tamworth	0
Tandridge	0
Taunton Deane	0
Teignbridge	0
Telford and Wrekin	0
Tendring	0
Test Valley	0

Thanet	0
The Vale of Glamorgan	0
Three Rivers	0
Tonbridge and Malling	0
Torbay	0
Torfaen	0
Torridge	0
Tower Hamlets	0
Tunbridge Wells	0
Uttlesford	0
Wandsworth	0
Warrington	0
Warwick	0
Watford	0
Waveney	0
Waverley	0
Wealden	0
Wellingborough	0
West Berkshire	0
West Devon	0
West Dorset	0
West Dunbartonshire	0
West Lindsey	0
West Lothian	0
West Oxfordshire	0
West Somerset	0
Westminster	0
Weymouth and Portland	0
Wiltshire	0
Winchester	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	0
Woking	0
Wokingham	0
Worcester	0
Worthing	0
Wychavon	0
Wyre	0
Wyre Forest	0
York	0

Source: Home Office, [Immigration Statistics](#), November 2016, Table as\_16\_q

# Formal Minutes

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**Tuesday 17 January 2017**

Members present:

Yvette Cooper, in the Chair

Nusrat Ghani	Naz Shah
Tim Loughton	Mr Chuka Umunna
Stuart C McDonald	Mr David Winnick

Draft Report (*Asylum Accommodation*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 119 read and agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Twelfth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 24 January at 2.00 pm.]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 26 January 2016

*Question number*

**Peter Neden**, Regional President UK and Ireland, G4S, **John Whitwam**, Managing Director, Immigration and Borders, G4S, and **Stuart Monk**, Owner and Managing Director, Jomast

[Q1–170](#)

### Tuesday 13 September 2016

**Gary Christie**, Head of Policy and Communications, Scottish Refugee Council, **Susan Munroe**, Chief Executive Officer, Freedom from Torture, and **Councillor David Simmonds**, Chairman, Asylum, Refugee and Migration Taskforce, Local Government Association

[Q171–222](#)

**Chris Shipman**, Chairman, Orchard & Shipman, and **Rupert Soames OBE**, Chief Executive, Serco Group plc.

[Q223–281](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ACC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anne McLaughlin MP ([ACC0028](#))
- 2 Asylum Seeker Housing Project ([ACC0031](#))
- 3 Bethan Jenkins AM ([ACC0036](#))
- 4 Birmingham Asylum and Refugee Association ([ACC0020](#))
- 5 Bradford City of Sanctuary ([ACC0015](#))
- 6 City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([ACC0016](#))
- 7 Dorothy Ismail ([ACC0004](#))
- 8 Dr Jonathan Darling, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Manchester ([ACC0018](#))
- 9 Freedom from Torture ([ACC0032](#))
- 10 G4S ([ACC0034](#))
- 11 G4S - Briefing note for Committee visit to Birmingham, 21 November 2016 ([ACC0037](#))
- 12 G4S supplementary ([ACC0039](#))
- 13 Glasgow City Council ([ACC0030](#))
- 14 Govan & Craigton Integration Network ([ACC0038](#))
- 15 Helen Bamber Foundation ([ACC0021](#))
- 16 Housing4All ([ACC0027](#))
- 17 James Vyvyan-Robinson, Managing Director, Clearsprings Group ([ACC0006](#))
- 18 James Vyvyan-Robinson, Managing Director, Clearsprings Group ([ACC0011](#))
- 19 John Grayson, on behalf of SYMAAG ([ACC0005](#))
- 20 John Whitwam, Managing Director, G4S Immigration & Borders ([ACC0001](#))
- 21 Leeds City Council ([ACC0017](#))
- 22 Liverpool Asylum Seekers and Refugee Association ([ACC0023](#))
- 23 Middlesbrough Council ([ACC0025](#))
- 24 Migrant Voice ([ACC0019](#))
- 25 NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Psychological Trauma Service ([ACC0042](#))
- 26 Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers ([ACC0014](#))
- 27 Peter Neden, Regional President, G4S UK & Ireland ([ACC0007](#))
- 28 Refugee Council ([ACC0033](#))
- 29 Revd Dominic Black ([ACC0003](#))
- 30 Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc ([ACC0008](#))
- 31 Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc ([ACC0010](#))
- 32 Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc ([ACC0013](#))

- 33 Rupert Soames OBE, Chief Executive, Serco Group Plc ([ACC0026](#))
- 34 Sandwell Women's Aid ([ACC0041](#))
- 35 Scottish Refugee Council ([ACC0035](#))
- 36 South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group ([ACC0024](#))
- 37 St Chad's Sanctuary ([ACC0040](#))
- 38 Stuart Monk, Managing Director, Jomast ([ACC0002](#))
- 39 Suzanne Fletcher MBE ([ACC0009](#))
- 40 United for Change ([ACC0022](#))
- 41 Waverley Care ([ACC0029](#))
- 42 Welsh Refugee Coalition ([ACC0012](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2015–16

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Third Report	Police investigations and the role of the Crown Prosecution Service	HC 534
Fourth Report	Reform of the Police Funding Formula	HC 476
Fifth Report	Immigration: skill shortages	HC 429 (HC 857)
Sixth Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q3 2015)	HC 772 (HC 213)
Seventh Report	Police and Crime Commissioners: here to stay	HC 844 (HC 822)
First Special Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates: Calais: Government Response to the Committee's Eighteenth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 380
Second Special Report	Out-of-court Disposals: Government Response to the Committee's Fourteenth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 379
Third Special Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q2 2015): Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16	HC 693
Fourth Special Report	Psychoactive substances: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 755
Fifth Special Report	Immigration: skill shortages: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2015–16	HC 857

### Session 2016–17

First Report	Police diversity	HC 27 (HC 612)
Second Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q4 2015)	HC 22 (HC 675)
Third Report	Prostitution	HC 26 (Cm 9361)

Fourth Report	College of Policing: three years on	HC 23 (HC 678)
Fifth Report	Proceeds of crime	HC 25 (HC 805)
Sixth Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q1 2016)	HC 151
Seventh Report	Migration Crisis	HC 24
Eighth Report	Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point	HC 135
Ninth Report	Female genital mutilation: abuse unchecked	HC 390 (Cm 9375)
Tenth Report	Antisemitism in the UK	HC 136 (Cm 9386)
Eleventh Report	The work of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse	HC 636
First Special Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q3 2015): Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2015–16	HC 213
Second Special Report	Police diversity: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2016–17	HC 612
Third Special Report	The work of the Immigration Directorates (Q4 2015): Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 675
Fourth Special Report	College of Policing: three years on: Government and College of Policing responses to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 678
Fifth Special Report	Proceeds of crime: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 805
Sixth Special Report	Police and Crime Commissioners: here to stay: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2015–16	HC 822