



27 March 2020

Dear Chief Executives,

As you know, we are currently facing an unprecedented global health emergency.

This crisis has had a significant impact on the asylum system, particularly in ensuring we have enough accommodation to meet the current needs of asylum seekers who require housing, as well as safeguarding the people we care for and the communities in which they live.

The Prime Minister was clear on Monday 23 March that we must do all we can to ensure that people remain in their homes and do not travel or move around unnecessarily, adding additional measures to support that. To that end, I have taken the decision that for the next three months we will not be requiring people to leave our accommodation because their asylum claim or appeal has been finally decided (as would normally be the case). This decision will be reviewed ahead of the end of June 2020.

The practical outcome is that those who would ordinarily have their support stopped because their asylum claim or appeal has been rejected, will remain accommodated. All those who would ordinarily be required to make their own support arrangements because they have been granted refugee status and can therefore access mainstream services, including local authority housing assistance, will, similarly, be able to remain in their current accommodation. I expect this decision to considerably relieve pressures on local authorities.

However, the decision will mean the supported asylum population will grow, as new asylum seekers enter the system and require housing. In order to meet that growth, my officials have asked our accommodation providers to source additional capacity across the United Kingdom. It is likely that this additional capacity will be in the form of sole-use, self-contained facilities.

Normally, and although this is not a legislative requirement, we would not allow our Providers to procure accommodation within a Local Authority unless that Local Authority had agreed in advance that it is appropriate to house asylum seekers in their area (become a “dispersal area”). In order to ensure we have access to as wide a pool of accommodation as possible, I am pausing this requirement and have, instead, authorised Providers to identify any suitable properties that they consider appropriate. Our obligation to house people is a statutory duty and I am sure you will understand that in the current crisis it is essential that we meet our obligations.

We will, nonetheless, continue to consult and work closely with Local Authorities on any potential sites identified. I would ask for your support to do so. We will also continue to make every effort to keep the use of this contingency accommodation to a minimum and we are applying a number of measures in conjunction with our Providers to manage asylum intake and the associated impacts on dispersal during the current crisis.

I am sure you will appreciate the huge amount of work involved in putting these measures in place. We continue to prioritise the safety of our Service Users and the communities they live in, but we may need to change the way we normally would work further and make some difficult decisions at very short notice. We would ask that you support us in that.

Rest assured that we remain committed to working in partnership with Local Authorities and Non-Government Organisations, through the use of the Strategic Migration Partnerships and Voluntary Sector network, to ensure the views of Local Authorities are included when forward planning.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Philp', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Immigration Compliance and the Courts