



E: AFraser@redcross.org.uk

27 March 2020

Dear Alex,

I am writing to you in your role as the single point of contact for the Non-Government Organisation sector on asylum matters related to Covid-19. I am very grateful to you for stepping into this role, which is supporting us in communicating as effectively as possible at this difficult time.

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.

My decision is likely to mean that 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.

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. In particular, I hope you will appreciate that some hard choices have to be made and that we will not always be able to accommodate new asylum seekers entering the system in the areas that might in other circumstances best fit their needs. In particular, it is unlikely that we will be able to accommodate these cases in London or some of our other large cities. Similarly, we are unlikely to be able to agree to relocation requests from those already being accommodated. I would hope that the NGO sector recognises these factors and can help us to manage expectations.

Rest assured that we remain committed to working in partnership with Local Authorities and NGOs, through the use of 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 'C. Philp', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

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