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Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
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By email: SJSS.committee@parliament.scot

17th July 2024

Date: 17/07/2024

Dear Ms Stevenson

Re: Processes following the determination of asylum seekers claims

Thank you for your letter requesting information on Mears Group processes following the determination of asylum seekers claims.

Mears provides accommodation on behalf of the Home Office for people while they are in the process of claiming asylum. When a decision has been reached on their claim by the Home Office, Mears is contractually required to give notice to the service user to leave our accommodation.

We follow the legal process and Home Office requirements, respecting all rights of review and appeal. We make sure that Service Users have access to advice and support, from the Home Office's AIRE contract provider Migrant Help, and we work with the local authority to enable the move on process.

On your specific questions:

Step by step overview of Mears Group policies and processes following the determination of claims / How quickly are people moved on?

- It is important to note that the policies and processes are determined by the Home Office and set out in their contract.
- When the Home Office makes a decision on a claim, the applicant (our Service User) is informed, Mears is informed, and the relevant local authority is informed.
- Mears visit the service user to discuss the next steps and notice period, and provide a letter with this information. The letter signposts the service user to support available from Migrant Help.
- Where the claim decision is positive, and right to remain is granted, 28 days notice is given, for the service user to move on. Most service users present to the local authority as homeless at this point, and the local authority arranges accommodation.
- In some cases, where there are more complex housing needs, this may take longer, and Mears remains in close contact with the local authority, while arrangements are made.



- Where the asylum claim decision is negative, service users are given 21 days notice to leave the accommodation.
- If a service user does not move on from the property voluntarily in the agreed timelines, we seek to take lawful possession of the property so that it can be made ready to accommodate others seeking asylum.
- While there is no legal or contractual obligation for Mears to use the court system, in some circumstances we will apply to the Sheriff Court to regain lawful possession. The Sheriff Court process and action is determined by them and set down in-law. It involves giving a further period of notice, after which Sheriff Officers visit and take lawful possession.
- Current overstayers who are subject to court action are taking 7 months on average to leave Mears accommodation.

How many people who have had refugee status granted / rejected have been moved on?

- In the past 12 months, 3311 AASC service users in Scotland have had a positive decision on their claim and given the right to remain, and moved on from Mears accommodation
- In the past 12 months, 343 AASC service users in Scotland have had a negative decision on their claim and been required to move on from our accommodation, although some have not done so.

How many accommodation facilities Mears Group manage, how many people they house, and the size of these facilities

- Mears manage 2126 accommodation units in communities, residential properties that are primarily used for 'Dispersed Accommodation', accommodating currently around 4000 service users. These vary in type and size, and service users are matched to appropriate accommodation, such as suitability for families or single persons.
- We manage 15 hotels in Scotland, accommodating 1450 service users
- We have an Initial Accommodation centre in Glasgow for new arrivals, with a capacity of 240, along with a centre for vulnerable women with a capacity of 38 beds in Glasgow.

What work on future potential housing options does Mears Group carry out with individuals and families awaiting asylum decisions; and how does this assist with homelessness prevention?

- In the Home Office contractual arrangements, move on support services are provided by Migrant Help rather than Mears as the accommodation provider.
- In the case of positive decisions, Mears staff do provide additional support by liaising with the local authority to discuss the requirement for move on accommodation. We allocate a welfare officer to each case, sign post service users to move on support services, and to local authorities for homeless support. We also provide up to 28 days free storage of personal belongings to allow people options to relocate
- In the case of negative decisions, we signpost to organisation who support destitute asylum seekers. Mears also work in partnership with these organisations to ensure pathways for support are maintained

Does Mears Group or the UK Government make any financial contribution to local authorities or others to support the housing transitions of those moving from the asylum system following a positive decision?

- Mears Group fulfils the requirements of the Home Office contract to provide accommodation and support for those making an asylum claim. We do not have a role or funding beyond this.
- Contractually Mears cease to receive any funding for an Asylum Seeker with a positive or negative decision after the 28 and 21 day notice period. Legally Mears can repossess the home at that point. However, recognising the pressure on local authority homeless services and the needs of the people affected, Mears has not strictly enforced our right to repossess. This means Mears has paid for all rent, utilities and maintenance at our own cost. For the past 12 months Mears has incurred a £5 million loss for accommodating overstayers. This reflects a very significant financial contribution from Mears to the housing transition process for Asylum Seekers.
- Mears works in partnership with local authorities to support transitions and we have also offered to support with an additional more joined up housing solution by establishing an RSL in Scotland so that Mears can provide new accommodation for homeless families in Glasgow. This was supported by Glasgow City Council but unfortunately the Regulator rejected our application so we have been unable to assist. Mears owns and operates a Not For Profit RSL in England and provides some 3,500 homeless families with housing.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee and I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

John Taylor
Chief Operating Officer