



Ms Zoë Metcalfe
North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
12 Granby Road
Harrogate
HG1 4ST

DECS Reference: MIN/0296146/22

15 June 2022

Dear Ms Metcalfe,

Thank you for your letters of 28 April, 13 May and 17 May to the Home Secretary in connection with our proposed use of RAF Linton-on-Ouse as an asylum accommodation centre. I am replying as the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration.

I recognise you have concerns about the appropriateness of the site for its intended purpose. However, my officials and I are keen to maintain regular dialogue and work with you to help alleviate your concerns and enable you to fulfil your responsibilities for policing, crime and fire for the local community.

The unprecedented and unacceptable rise in dangerous small boat crossings continues to put huge pressure on the asylum system. Following extensive work with the Ministry of Defence, the decommissioned RAF base at Linton-on-Ouse was identified as a potential location where it was feasible to develop an accommodation centre. The site offers several established accommodation units. Indeed, these existing facilities would allow us to swiftly address the urgent requirements of the UK's asylum programme.

In your letter of 17 May, you request we consider the timescales for occupying the proposed site at Linton to provide more time for community engagement, ensure more facilities are available on site and address the additional demands on the police and fire and rescue services. We will not accommodate asylum seekers at the RAF Linton-on-Ouse site until it is safe and conforms to all legal and statutory requirements, including planning. Only once all requirements are in place will we make a formal decision on whether to use the site for asylum accommodation. We will work with you to ensure you have all the information relevant to support your planning, and we are committed to sharing this information as soon as it is available.

It is our intention, should it be decided to use RAF Linton-on-Ouse as an asylum accommodation centre, to provide Hambleton District Council with seven days' written notice before we move any residents onto the site. We then plan to slowly increase the occupancy of the site. The initial number of asylum seekers will be low but will grow steadily over the coming year as the site establishes itself as an accommodation centre. There will be no sudden large influx of people.

The accommodation will be for single adult males who have low vulnerabilities and who have gone through a screening process consisting of mandatory checks, which include the

capture of biographic and biometric data, involving fingerprints and cross checking across several systems to verify their identity. This cohort makes up a significant proportion of the UK's asylum intake and they have the lowest level of additional needs. It is entirely appropriate they are accommodated in accommodation centres. Any asylum seekers accommodated at the asylum accommodation centre in RAF Linton-on-Ouse would not be detained and would be free to move on and off the site. They would, however, be subject to a 10:00pm safeguarding call if they had not returned by this time.

We are committed to work closely with the local community and local leaders, including you and leaders in the police, fire and health services, and the local authority, to discuss and inform the developments at Linton-on-Ouse and to communicate our plans at the earliest opportunity. We are currently engaging in proactive and valuable discussions within the established multi-agency forum with key stakeholders including health, the voluntary sector and local officials.

In addition to the ongoing site visits and strategic engagement, there are also weekly meetings with the senior responsible officer (SRO) of the project, the Director General and local politicians. There is also a weekly multi-agency forum led by the Project Director. Furthermore, there are weekly meetings with Public Health England, local resilience forums and the local authority. We are also exploring plans to mobilise a drop-in centre for residents of Linton-on-Ouse.

I understand your concerns about the rural nature of the site and the lack of local amenities and resources to serve the needs of any additional residents. To mitigate this, our intention will be for the site to be self-contained to ensure asylum seekers are able to access services onsite, with negligible need to use services and facilities available in the village which the community currently benefits from.

To expand upon this, it means within the site our plan is to create spaces and technology to support access to the voluntary sector, Migrant Help, legal representation and relevant caseworking activities. Furthermore, full board meals will be provided, along with communal and exercise spaces, retail and/or café facilities, an area where asylum seekers can practice religious activities, as well as on-site healthcare provisions.

Transport services will also be available to provide access to off-site services, where required. By designing Linton-on-Ouse to be as self-sufficient as possible, we aim to minimise the impact on the local community. As our proposal develops, we will determine how we can improve, enhance, and support local services.

We recognise our anticipated use of Linton-on-Ouse will create additional police requirements. I agree the costs associated with this should be met by the department and my officials will support the North Yorkshire Police Force to access funding from the exceptional fund. I note your point around mitigating the lead time on fire response. We will work with your team, through the multi-agency forums, to take this forward.

With my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Foster', with a large flourish at the end.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Safe and Legal Migration