



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

16 April 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

We write in our capacity as Chair and Members of the APPG on Immigration Detention. As you will know, the group comprises over 40 parliamentarians from across the political spectrum who share concerns about the use of immigration detention in the UK.

On 17 March 2021, fourteen members of the APPG, representing all the main political parties, met with David Bolt, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI), and Hindpal Singh Bhui, Inspection Team Leader at HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the key findings from their recent site visits to Penally Camp and Napier Barracks. The inspectors' key findings were published online on 8 March 2021.¹

You will be aware that the site visits formed part of ICIBI's current inspection of asylum contingency accommodation, and that HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) is providing additional expertise to that inspection in relation to Penally Camp and Napier Barracks specifically. We gather that a full report on the site visits was subsequently written by HMIP and sent to ICIBI on 19 March, and that ICIBI then sent this report with an accompanying cover letter to the Home Office on 20 March.

During our meeting, Mr Bolt told the APPG that he thought it had been a "serious error of judgement to think that the barracks could ever be made suitable for asylum accommodation". We agree entirely with the Chief Inspector's view. Indeed, we have written to you previously (in December 2020) highlighting our concerns regarding the use of Penally Camp and Napier Barracks as accommodation for people seeking asylum. We do not believe that such sites provide the type of safe, stable accommodation that people seeking asylum - many of whom have histories of torture, trafficking and other serious trauma - need in order to recover and begin rebuilding their lives.

The evidence presented to us by ICIBI and HMIP has served to reinforce this view. They described conditions at the sites that were in our view utterly unacceptable and highlighted serious failings on the part of the Home Office in terms of leadership, planning and accountability. This included inadequate Home Office oversight of commercial providers, to whom the department has outsourced the provision of many services at the sites.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-key-findings-from-site-visits-to-penally-camp-and-napier-barracks>.

Other key problems included:

- Ineffective safeguarding of residents who may be children, and of vulnerable adults, including those with mental health issues
- A high level of depression and other reported mental health issues amongst residents and serious incidents of self-harm at Napier Barracks. For example, in the inspectors' survey of residents, one third of respondents at Napier barracks said they had felt suicidal.
- Inadequate Covid-19 safety measures and cramped conditions that made social distancing difficult, despite reduced numbers at both sites. At Napier, an outbreak of Covid-19 was "virtually inevitable" in the inspectors' view once one person became infected.² This was evidenced by the large-scale outbreak that occurred in January and February this year, when 197 people tested positive.³ We note that Public Health England (PHE) advised the Home Office that opening multi-occupancy dormitory-style accommodation during a pandemic was not supported by their guidance and that both they and Public Health Wales were concerned about Covid safety at each site.⁴
- Levels of cleanliness that were "variable at best", with some areas described as "filthy".
- A high number of residents at each site who described feeling that the Home Office was not keeping them safe.
- A lack of information provided to residents by the Home Office, including about how long they would be kept at the sites, the progression of their asylum claims, and the negative mental health impacts of this.

In light of this evidence, we welcomed your decision to close Penally Camp, announced on 16 March 2021.⁵ However, we cannot agree with your assertion that the camp provided "safe and secure accommodation" for the people seeking asylum who were housed there.⁶ Given the serious concerns raised by the inspectors about the site, we would ask you to provide an assurance that you will not seek to use the site as asylum accommodation again in the future.

We also remain extremely concerned by the Home Office's decision to continue operating Napier Barracks, and by reports last week of new residents being sent there, having received notification that they will be accommodated at the site for at least 60 to 90 days.⁷ We believe this decision places the residents, many of whom may already be vulnerable, at very serious risk of harm.

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/feb/24/covid-cases-among-asylum-seekers-at-napier-barracks-higher-than-thought>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-key-findings-from-site-visits-to-penally-camp-and-napier-barracks>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-56418361>

⁶ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5348/documents/53233/default/>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/08/asylum-seekers-told-stay-napier-barracks-for-months>



We urge you to reverse the decision and to close Napier Barracks with immediate effect, ensuring that all those currently housed there are provided with appropriate accommodation and support in the community.

We would also ask that you provide specific details of what changes, if any, were made at Napier Barracks prior to new residents arriving, and how these changes address the concerns raised by inspectors, in particular with regard to:

- The safeguarding of vulnerable people, including those who may be children and those with mental health issues
- Covid-19 safety, including whether you consulted PHE on the decision to continue operating Napier Barracks at this time, and whether the decision is supported by their guidance
- Home Office leadership, planning and accountability, including with regard to the department's oversight of commercial providers.

We also ask you to confirm the basis upon which the Home Office has decided to house residents at Napier for periods of at least 60 to 90 days, given the inspectors' finding that the site was "unsuitable for long-term accommodation".⁸

Finally, we ask you to confirm:

- When you will publish the full HMIP report on the inspection of Penally Camp and Napier Barracks, and the accompanying letter sent by ICIBI to the Home Office on 20 March?
- How the Home Office will ensure that the errors highlighted by the inspectors in relation to the two sites will not be repeated in respect of any future new forms of accommodation for people seeking asylum?

We look forward to receiving your response at the earliest possible opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Thewliss MP – SNP; Chair, APPG on Immigration Detention

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP – Labour; Vice-Chair, APPG on Immigration Detention

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle – Green Party

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-key-findings-from-site-visits-to-penally-camp-and-napier-barracks>.

Paul Blomfield MP – Labour

Sir Peter Bottomley MP – Conservative

Deidre Brock MP – SNP

Lord Dubs – Labour

Helen Hayes MP – Labour

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb – Green Party

Baroness Lister of Burtersett – Labour

Baroness Ludford – Liberal Democrat

Angus B. MacNeil MP – SNP

Stuart C. McDonald MP – SNP

Rt Hon. John McDonnell MP – Labour

Anne McLaughlin MP – SNP

Carol Monaghan MP – SNP

Kate Osamor MP – Labour

Rt Hon. Liz Saville Roberts MP – Plaid Cymru

Rt Hon. Stephen Timms MP – Labour

Hywel Williams MP – Plaid Cymru

Mohammad Yasin MP – Labour