



# An inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

March – May 2022

**David Neal**

Independent Chief Inspector of  
Borders and Immigration



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# Foreword

The position the Home Office finds itself in, running unregistered children's homes, is one that staff and stakeholders alike have found uncomfortable. This is clearly not a space the Home Office wants, or should be operating in.

The need to house these young people and the speed at which the hotels have been 'stood up', has led to gaps in services and inconsistencies across contracts. The most concerning of which is, in 2 hotels, staff living onsite who have not been Disclosure and Barring Service cleared.

I see clear parallels for the Home Office with this report, with my recent small boats inspection and our return inspection of Napier Barracks. The key issue in all 3 areas is moving beyond the initial crisis response and bringing the provision of services into 'core'. Nine months after the hotels first opened, the Home Office must assess the needs of the young people and mature an operation which can keep them safe and promote their wellbeing. There is an urgent need for the Home Office to consider how this requirement will be delivered.

This inspection has found that unanimously, young people reported feeling safe and happy in the hotels, which is a relief. Keeping young people safe was, according to all staff, of paramount importance to the Home Office. However, in all the hotels, meals were provided in take-away boxes and only one had a fully operational kitchen; educational provision was limited to informal English classes run by care workers; nurses couldn't prescribe basic medication (such as paracetamol), nor did they have emergency bags. No one would see this as a long-term answer.

Overall, my inspectors found an operation marked by a fundamental tension between slow progress in developing viable alternatives to house these young people and the need to improve the current operational model. This emphasis on the temporary inhibits the development of improvements to the operation. I have made 4 recommendations.



**David Neal**  
**Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration**



# 1. Background

## Definition of a child

- 1.1** The term ‘child’ is defined in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.<sup>1</sup>

## Definition of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child

- 1.2** The Home Office describes children who are separated from an adult who is responsible for caring for them as unaccompanied. An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) is defined by paragraph 352ZD of the Immigration Rules<sup>2</sup> as a person who “a) is under 18 years of age when the asylum application is submitted b) is applying for asylum in their own right and c) is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so”.
- 1.3** For the purposes of this report, recognising that children are not solely defined by their immigration status, this report does not use the term UASC except where it is referenced in official documentation, and accepting that all the young people in this report are seeking asylum. This report covers children from the ages of 10 to 18. The ICIBI notes the term ‘young people’ is commonly used to denote older children, usually over the age of 14, who represent the majority of children housed in hotels. As a result, this report refers to the children housed in hotels as young people.

## Applications for asylum by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

- 1.4** There were 3,762 asylum applications submitted by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 2021, an increase of 989 applications (36%) from 2020, including those made by the young people housed in hotels.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/4d9474b49.pdf?msclid=172b19cca5f911ecb3fab0e836b6a4f6> The UK ratified the Convention in December 1991 but it has not been incorporated into domestic law.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules?msclid=0c960ab7a5fa11ec882941feae6e1d6f>

Figure 1:

**UASC applications (including those from young people housed in hotels) in 2021 by age<sup>3</sup>**

Age	Count
Under 14	88
14–15	637
16–17	2,605
18+ <sup>4</sup>	432
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,762</b>

- 1.5** When a young person is housed in a hotel, no action is taken on their asylum claim; the process is effectively ‘paused’ until a young person is placed with a local authority or, if they turn 18 during this period, move to an adult hotel.
- 1.6** Where an application for asylum is made and the claimant is under the age of 18, the Home Office must treat them as a child. Once the claimant turns 18, child-specific policies and procedures no longer apply, and where a decision is made on their asylum claim and is refused, a child cannot be granted UASC leave.<sup>5</sup>

## Key legislation

- 1.7** Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 requires the Secretary of State (Home Secretary) to make arrangements to ensure that immigration, asylum, nationality and customs functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- 1.8** Section 55 is intended to achieve the same effect on the Home Office as Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.<sup>6</sup> This places duties on a range of organisations, agencies and individuals, including local authorities, to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## Guidance

- 1.9** Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined in 3 pieces of statutory guidance relevant in this context:
- ‘Every Child Matters – Change for Children’<sup>7</sup> published in November 2009, is the statutory guidance for Home Office staff on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

<sup>3</sup> Home Office data for UASC provide a count of asylum applications received from main applicants who are treated as an accompanied child for at least one day from the date of application, up until the initial decision (where applicable), even if they are later found to be an adult following an age dispute. As a result, some UASC cases relate to persons over 18.

<sup>4</sup> The data is caveated by “In some cases a UASC applicant is recorded as being ‘18+’. These relate to age dispute cases, where the applicant was subsequently found to be 18 or over.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>

<sup>5</sup> UASC leave is granted for a period of 30 months or until the child turns 17 ½ years old, whichever is soonest.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents?msclid=c26a39f0a61511ec803e76e762d8bb53>

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/257876/change-for-children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257876/change-for-children.pdf)

The inspection team notes this guidance was published in 2009 and refers to the UK Border Agency which no longer exists. However, this guidance is still in use and referred to in all recent and relevant guidance published by the Home Office.

- ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’,<sup>8</sup> published in July 2018, is the statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- ‘Safeguarding Strategy: unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children’,<sup>9</sup> published in November 2017, sets out the Government’s vision and commitment for caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children.

## The National Transfer Scheme

- 1.10** The National Transfer Scheme (NTS)<sup>10</sup> was launched by the Home Office in July 2016, in recognition of the increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in the UK, and the pressure this brought to bear on some local authorities who held the responsibility for caring for them. The NTS enabled local authorities which had reached 0.07% of their child population to transfer UASC to another local authority on a voluntary basis. Legislation was amended in 2018 to extend the scheme to local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 1.11** In November 2021, children’s services across the United Kingdom were informed by the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, and the Children and Families Minister, that the scheme was to become mandatory (temporarily) for all local authorities from December 2021.<sup>11</sup>

## Role of the Home Office

- 1.12** After 14 June 2021, when Kent County Council (KCC) stated it would no longer be able to accept statutory responsibility for children and young people arriving in the county<sup>12</sup> to seek asylum in the UK, the Home Office took the decision to house those children in hotels, “to ensure no individual was left destitute or without support whilst local authority placements were found”. The first hotel came into operation on 16 July 2021. From 10 September 2021, KCC committed to provide a Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS) of 120 available beds to function as temporary accommodation for those awaiting transfer under the NTS.
- 1.13** Correspondence between more than 60 charities and the Education Secretary between July and November 2021 confirmed that the use of hotels did not constitute a permanent local authority placement but were provided on a ‘short-term interim basis’, and it fell to local authorities to provide services under Part III of the Children Act 1989. No agency or government department has statutory responsibility for these children. The Home Office has not assumed this statutory responsibility and is not operating as the ‘corporate parent’. The local authorities of the areas where these hotels are located do not have statutory responsibility for these young people as they are not considered to be ‘Looked After’.<sup>13</sup>

8 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/942454/Working\\_together\\_to\\_safeguard\\_children\\_inter\\_agency\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf)

9 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/656425/UASC\\_Safeguarding\\_Strategy\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656425/UASC_Safeguarding_Strategy_2017.pdf)

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-national-transfer-scheme-for-migrant-children>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-transfer-scheme-to-become-mandatory-for-all-local-authorities>

12 [Kent ‘days away’ from being unable to care for more asylum-seeking children | CYP Now](#) and [Border Force to care for migrant children as Kent ‘reaches capacity’, Home Office confirms | CYP Now](#).

13 A child is looked after by a local authority if s/he is in their care by reason of a care order or is being provided with accommodation under section 20 of the 1989 Act for more than 24 hours with the agreement of the parents, or of the child if s/he is aged 16 or over (section 22(1) and (2) of the 1989 Act).

## Hotels

- 1.14** Since July 2021, the Home Office has used 6 hotels to accommodate young people:<sup>14</sup>
- Hythe (44 rooms)
  - Folkestone (60 rooms)
  - Hove 1 (58 rooms)
  - Eastbourne (50 rooms)
  - Hounslow (up to 125 rooms available) – this hotel was used to accommodate Covid positive young people on one floor during their isolation period until January 2022
  - Hove 2 (36 bedrooms) – has not housed young people since January 2022<sup>15</sup>
- 1.15** The hotels flex their accommodation to match the gender and age needs of arriving children; for example, housing females on a separate floor from males. The hotel in Hounslow housed young people with COVID-19 and was managed by Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH) through the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts (AASC). CRH also provided wraparound support to the young people. The procurement and operation of Hove 2 was not directed by the Home Office but was a commercial arrangement with CRH, also under the AASC. CRH provided the same staff as found in the other hotels, apart from one social worker, who was provided by the Home Office.
- 1.16** The Home Office contracted all the hotels on a rolling monthly basis, and their Contracting Venue Specification notice for ‘hotels for adults and children seeking asylum’ required:
- the Home Office be provided with exclusive use
  - the hotel should be ready to be stood up with 24 hours’ notice
  - the hotel should comply with relevant safety legislation
  - the hotel should be subject to insurance and a risk assessment

## Staffing

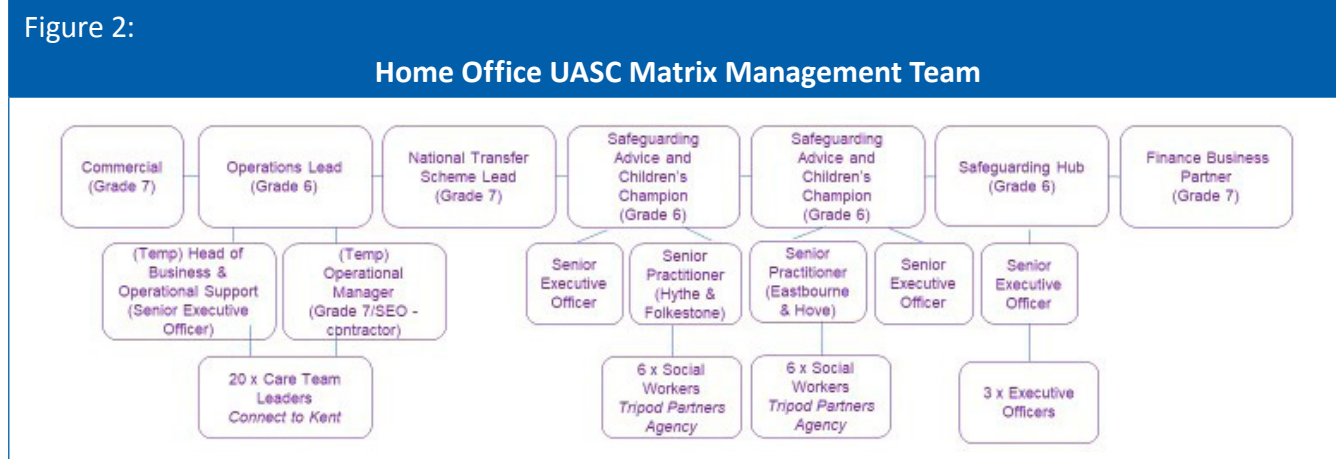
- 1.17** The operation of the hotels is delivered by the Temporary UASC Accommodation Team, comprising:
- Home Office UASC Matrix Management Team, as set out at Figure 2, is part of Resettlement, Asylum Support & Integration (RASI), and is divided into 2 areas of responsibility: safeguarding and operational delivery

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<sup>14</sup> For security reasons, the ICIBI does not name the hotels in this report.

<sup>15</sup> At the factual accuracy stage, the Home Office commented “The room numbers reflect the number of funded bedrooms paid for by the Home Office under the contracts – they do not reflect occupancy capacity”. Further, “The Hounslow hotel was not part of the UASC hotel operation but was operated under contract by CRH [Clearsprings Ready Homes] as a Covid isolation hotel for migrants testing positive for Covid 19 and entering the UK via an irregular route. It was not exclusively used to accommodate UASC but understood to have done so on a designated floor with care staff.”

- Contracted staff:
  - team leaders and care workers (C2K)
  - senior practitioners and social workers (Tripod)
  - COVID-19 track and trace teams<sup>16</sup>
  - nurses (Sanctuary)
  - security (Mitie)



## Cohorts – young people in hotels

**1.18** The number of young people arriving in the UK to seek asylum increased significantly during the latter half of 2021, but this number had begun to reduce in early 2022, as set out in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Young people arrivals (unaccompanied), July 2021 – February 2022

Month/year	Number of young people arrivals (unaccompanied) (various methods of entry)	Total number of small boats (only) adult and child arrivals <sup>17</sup>
July 2021	91	3,512
August 2021	191	3,053
September 2021	196	4,602
October 2021	148	2,701
November 2021	329	6,971
December 2021	194	1,770
January 2022	102	Figures not yet available
February 2022	30	Figures not yet available
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>22,609</b>

<sup>16</sup> At the time of the inspection, the role of these teams was in flux due to broader changes to public health requirements in relation to COVID-19.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2021/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2021>

**1.19** The majority of young people housed in hotels between July 2021 and February 2022 were aged 15 and over, comprising 1,146 (89.5%) of all children; almost all were male, with only 42 female (3.28%), as set out at Figure 4.<sup>18</sup> There was, however, one child as young as 10, and one baby who arrived with its mother, who was herself under the age of 18.

Figure 4:

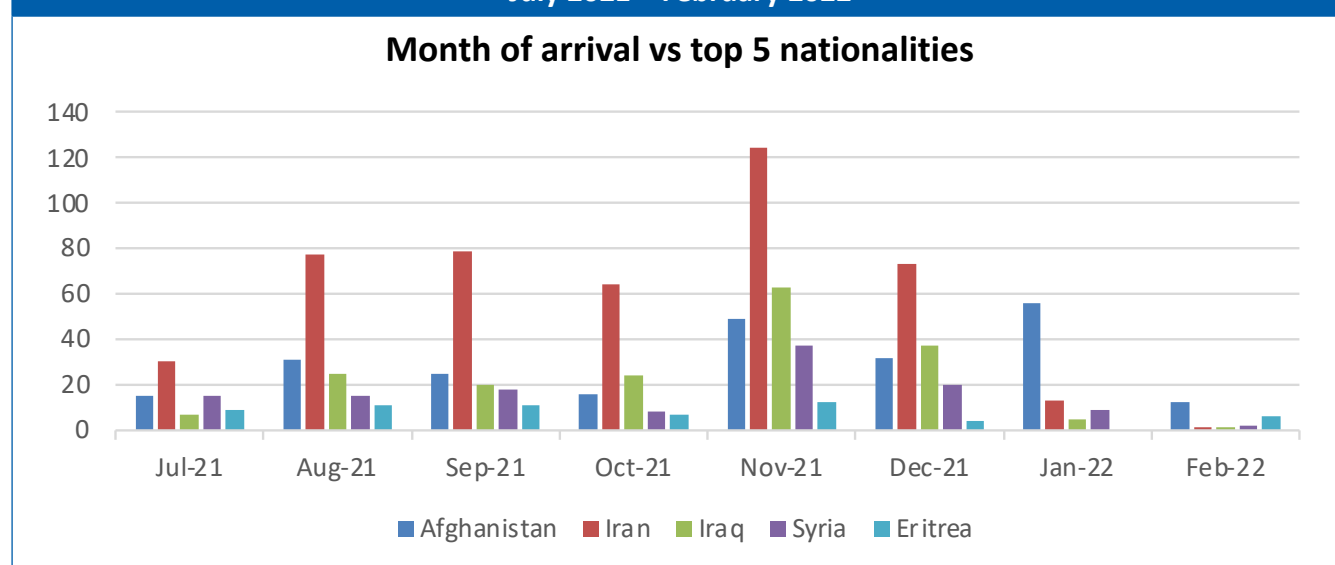
**Age and gender of child, July 2021 – February 2022**

Age of child on arrival	Total	Male	Female
0 <sup>19</sup>	1	1	0
10	1	1	0
11	3	3	0
12	5	4	1
13	33	32	1
14	92	92	0
15	217	210	7
16	482	472	10
17	447	424	23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>1,239</b>	<b>42</b>

**1.20** Iranians made up the largest number from a single nationality of arrivals (461), with Afghans (236), Iraqis (182), Syrians (124) and Eritreans (60) comprising the top 5 nationalities. In total, young people arrived from 28 countries including Yemen, Chad, Egypt and Albania, as set out at Figure 5.

Figure 5:

**Top 5 nationalities of young people housed in hotels by month of arrival, July 2021 – February 2022**



<sup>18</sup> The data is caveated by “Please note, for those who arrived in July 2021, we are missing some data as this was pre-safeguarding. The data above only contains those who were present in UASC hotels when safeguarding took over”.

<sup>19</sup> Arrived as a family unit with mother who was also a minor.

## Length of stay

1.21 Figures 6a and 6b set out Home Office data on the average length of stay for young people stratified by age and gender.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 6a:

**Average length of stay, broken down by gender, July 2021 – February 2022**

Month of arrival	Total young people	Count: male	Average length of stay (days)	Count: female	Average length of stay (days)
July 2021	91	87	10.8	4	15.5
Aug. 2021	191	182	9.5	9	7.2
Sep. 2021	196	184	10.4	12	6.1
Oct. 2021	148	143	14	5	3
Nov. 2021	329	320	22.1	9	8
Dec. 2021	194	194	28	0	N/A
Jan. 2022	102	102	20.6*	0	N/A
Feb. 2022	30	27	3.2	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>1,239</b>		<b>42</b>	

Figure 6b:

**Average length of stay, broken down by age, July 2021 – February 2022**

Month of arrival	Total young people	Count: under 16	Average length of stay (days)	Count: age 16–18	Average length of stay (days)
July 2021	91	30	10	61	11.5
Aug. 2021	191	41	10.2	150	9.2
Sep. 2021	196	43	9.5	153	10.4
Oct. 2021	148	26	11.3	122	14.1
Nov. 2021	329	100	19.6	229	22.7
Dec. 2021	194	50	21.2	144	30.3
Jan. 2022	102	51	23.2*	51	17.9
Feb. 2022	30	11	3.4	19	3.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,281</b>	<b>352</b>		<b>929</b>	

1.22 Subsequent data provided by the Home Office showed that, between July 2021 and February 2022, 188 young people (14.7%) spent 30 days or more in hotels, with 18 spending more than 60 days. Of these 188 young people, all but one were male, and they had an average age of 16.4. However, 5 were aged 14 and one of these young people had a referral made on their behalf to the National Referral Mechanism (the framework for identifying and referring

20 The data was caveated by the Home Office: “\*Average Stay figure includes 1 UASC still in contingency hotels – this may change for future data as the UASC leaves the hotel” and “Please note, for those who arrived in July 2021, we are missing some data as this was pre-safeguarding. The data above only contains those who were present in UASC hotels when safeguarding took over”.

potential victims of modern slavery). For the 78 children aged 14 and under, the average length of stay was 11.6 days. Between July and December 2021, 172 (15%) young people spent 30 or more days in hotels, while between January and February, after the mandating of the NTS, 16 young people, representing 12% of the total housed during the same period, spent 30 days in hotels.

## Stakeholders

- 1.23** Inspectors took views from attendees at the ICIBI’s Refugee and Asylum and Strategic Migration Partnership Forums, and consulted other interested, relevant parties. Consistently, stakeholders raised concerns with:
- absence of statutory responsibility for these young people
  - suitability of hotels for housing young people
  - limited/non-existent access to legal advice, support, education and medical services while residing in hotels
  - approach taken by the Home Office to engaging with local authorities and police prior to the opening of the hotels
  - quality of the engagement with local authority mechanisms to safeguard young people
  - the negative impact of pausing the asylum process while young people are housed in hotels
- 1.24** Stakeholders also raised broader concerns about delays within the age assessment process, and the misidentification of young people as adults by the Home Office.

## Previous ICIBI reports

- 1.25** This report complements a number of inspections carried out by the ICIBI on adjacent and interlinked areas of Home Office activity: ‘An inspection of how the Home Office considers the ‘best interests’ of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’,<sup>21</sup> August – December 2017 (published on 28 March 2018); ‘An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation’, May 2021 – November 2021 (published May 2022); ‘An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil’, December 2021 – February 2022 (publication pending).

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<sup>21</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/695310/An\\_inspection\\_of\\_the\\_best\\_interests\\_of\\_unaccompanied\\_asylum\\_seeking\\_children\\_March\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/695310/An_inspection_of_the_best_interests_of_unaccompanied_asylum_seeking_children_March_2018.pdf)



## 2. Recommendations

1.	With immediate effect, prevent individuals without a clear enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check from residing and working within the hotels currently being used to house young people, and for any hotels used by the Home Office in the future. This should be checked routinely by team leaders, and the relevant Home Office operational manager.
2.	Within one month, using external expertise if required, undertake a robust assessment of the collective needs of the young people housed in hotels, with due regard to Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ‘best interests’ principle, <sup>22</sup> to inform the development of standards, service design and operational delivery, to include the views, feedback and data from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• children and young people housed in hotels</li><li>• contractor and Home Office staff, particularly Safeguarding Advice and Children’s Champion and the Safeguarding Hub</li><li>• management information collected by the operation</li><li>• external agencies (local authorities, NGOs and any other relevant experts)</li></ul>
3.	Within 3 months, develop a challenge and scrutiny mechanism, drawing on internal and external expertise and the resources outlined in Recommendation 2, to monitor the delivery of the operation with a specific focus on safeguarding children’s welfare.
4.	Within 6 months, develop, and begin delivering, a viable and sustainable exit strategy from the use of hotels which acknowledges the Home Office’s Section 55 duty and the principle of the ‘best interests’ of the child.

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<sup>22</sup> Article 3 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

## 3. Scope and methodology

- 3.1** This inspection examined the Home Office’s use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, with particular reference to the Home Office’s obligations under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. This inspection was not included in the Chief Inspector’s original 2021–2022 Inspection Plan but is a response to concerns raised with the inspectorate by stakeholders, and from the inspectorate’s own intelligence-gathering activities.
- 3.2** While noting concerns highlighted in the (unpublished at the time of writing) ICIBI report ‘An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil, December 2021 – January 2022’, and raised subsequently by stakeholders, about the quality of the age assessment process undertaken at Tug Haven, Western Jet Foil and the Kent Intake Unit, this inspection did not consider this issue.<sup>23</sup>
- 3.3** This inspection was supported by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted). Set out in agreed formal Terms of Reference, Ofsted provided advice and assistance to ICIBI inspectors during the onsite phase of inspection by sharing their expertise of the provision of children’s services and child safeguarding. This expertise aided the Chief Inspector in the execution of his legislative powers, specifically with regards to his assessment of whether the Home Secretary has upheld her duty to ensure the welfare of children, as she is obligated to do under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. This activity was undertaken on the basis that Ofsted would not be exercising powers or authority to inspect or to act outside the power to advise and assist (paragraph 8 of Schedule 13 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006). Ofsted inspectors did not operate independently, gather evidence or make inspection findings or judgements. This inspection report represents, therefore, the conclusions of ICIBI inspectors, informed by the advice and assistance of Ofsted, provided verbally during the onsite phase of the inspection and followed up in correspondence.
- 3.4** The inspection was informed by the ICIBI’s expectations (see Annex C), particularly “Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System) ‘owner’”.
- 3.5** Inspectors undertook the following activities:
- reviewed publicly available information about the use of hotels to house young people
  - held a familiarisation call with the Home Office UASC Matrix Management team on 14 March 2022
  - met with a range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, Department for Education, local authorities and government oversight bodies

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<sup>23</sup> Inspectors requested information on the number of occasions when individuals were not screened at the Kent Intake Unit (where Home Office staff process children) and were placed into children’s hotels, and the number of occasions when individuals who were initially assessed as children and placed in these hotels were subsequently reassessed and deemed adults, but the Home Office does not hold this information. This inspection was only concerned with the accommodation and safeguarding of the children housed in hotels, all of whom were considered by the Home Office to be children.

- formally notified the Home Office of the inspection on 18 March 2022
- received and analysed 122 pieces of documentary evidence
- accompanied by Ofsted inspectors (operating in an advisory capacity), visited all 4 hotels currently in use on 5, 6 and 26 April 2022, observing the physical condition of the hotels and conducting interviews and focus groups with social workers, care workers, team leaders, nurses, security staff and hotel staff
- informally interviewed 16 young people aged 16 and 17 across all 4 hotels<sup>24</sup>
- between 20 and 25 April, undertook 12 virtual interviews with Home Office staff, from Higher Executive Officer to Senior Civil Service grade
- on 27 April, held a feedback session, sharing initial observations from the onsite phase of the inspection with members of the Home Office UASC Matrix Management team

**3.6** The report was sent to the Home Office for factual accuracy checking on 23 May 2022 and returned on 9 June 2022.

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<sup>24</sup> The onsite visits took place during Ramadan. Inspectors took a child-centred approach to speaking with the children, produced a bespoke child-centred briefing document which was shared with the Home Office in advance of inspectors visiting the hotels, and used the ICIBI's ethical research methodology for engaging with people with lived experience.

## 4. Key findings

- 4.1** The key findings of this inspection represent the judgements of ICIBI inspectors, informed by the specific advice and assistance of Ofsted inspectors, provided during the onsite phase of the inspection and subsequently in writing.
- 4.2** An increase in the number of young people seeking asylum in the UK, the decision by Kent County Council to no longer accept these young people into their care, and concerns about the suitability of the Kent Intake Unit, led to the Home Office housing these young people in hotels in East Sussex and Kent, while they waited for a permanent local authority placement via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).
- 4.3** Home Office staff were clear this was not a role or activity that they felt comfortable delivering due to a lack of skills, expertise and authority. Originally envisioned as a short-term solution, by the time of this inspection, it had been operating for 7 months. The temporary nature of the provision, the speed at which it was set up, and the aspiration for it to end, has produced an operation notable for its piecemeal and inconsistent development.
- 4.4** The lack of a coherent design including establishing the expected standards for the operation's delivery undermined the quality of Home Office oversight. Concurrently, the failure to effectively identify and assess the needs of these young people, and to ensure that the operation to house them could meet these needs, led to inconsistent safeguarding and welfare outcomes.
- 4.5** Inspectors found that while staff, both in the Home Office and hotels, were keen to emphasise how effectively they were able to safeguard young people, this inspection revealed gaps in protection. More broadly, the wellbeing of the young people in their care was, in some areas, subsumed by a narrative of temporality and short-termism, and marked improvements are required to ensure this operation is fully child centred.

### Safeguarding

- 4.6** Home Office staff were clear on their commitment to safeguard the young people housed in hotels and had put in place processes and guidance in order to achieve this. However, the operation was struggling to move on from being an emergency response and ensuring that some guidance, for example, was no longer in draft form.
- 4.7** While each hotel had nurses based onsite, none of them were able to prescribe medication, including basic pain relief, or had access to an emergency bag containing a defibrillator or an epi-pen. Young people had inconsistent access to healthcare outside the hotels, leading to a failure to safeguard young people's welfare. Young people were registered at local GP surgeries, primarily to enable them to be provided with an NHS number, though these took 28 days to arrive and by then young people had often moved on to their local authority placement. Contractor staff were not clear on who (they or the young people) could consent

to medical treatment for a young person, despite receiving reminders about this from Home Office staff.

- 4.8** The Home Office had not provided mental health support within the hotels, and questions asked of young people which might reveal mental health concerns were constructed in such a way as to avoid close examination. While this reflects a best practice approach that uncovering and exploring trauma should be undertaken while a young person is settled in a more permanent placement, it became problematic for young people who were not placed promptly, or whose trauma required addressing more immediately.
- 4.9** Social workers were located in the hotels, though only during office hours, leading to concerns that the opportunity to assess young people at risk of trafficking had been missed, as by the time the social workers came on shift these young people may have already disappeared. Observations and interviews with social workers indicated they had a good understanding of the expectations required of them, and the particular needs of the young people they worked with. It was not always clear how safety plans, developed after the assessment of a young person, and designed to be shared with all staff with whom the young person might engage, were monitored and where ownership for the required actions lay.
- 4.10** The identification of vulnerable young people was negatively impacted by poor record keeping prior to arrival at the hotels. However, there was a range of formal opportunities for contractor staff to capture and explore the particular needs of the young people in hotels, and safety plans were developed to enhance safeguarding based on the information gathered. There was an inconsistent approach to document sharing with the Home Office about a young person, and a full history of each young person was not always available.
- 4.11** Referral processes were marked by a lack of clarity over who was responsible for making the referral, and therefore there was scope for referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in particular, to fall through the gaps. The role of the Home Office's Safeguarding Hub and the value they brought to the referral process was not always clear to contractor staff.
- 4.12** While the number of young people who went missing from the hotels was lower than that seen among the national 'Looked After Child'<sup>25</sup> population, of the 31 young people who had gone missing since the hotels opened, 6 had still not been found. Initial responses to young people who went missing were considered good by stakeholders and contractor staff, though they further reported that the responses to subsequent incidents were less robust.

## Operational delivery

- 4.13** The young people who spoke to inspectors all stated that they were happy and felt safe in the hotels, though the majority were very keen to move on, and start their education.
- 4.14** The physical environment was shabby but functional. Contractor staff managed the accommodation based on the cohorts (age and gender) of the young people in the hotels. Inspectors noted that not all staff were clear on the application of the room-sharing criteria and may not have been risk assessing thoroughly.

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<sup>25</sup> A child is looked after by a local authority if s/he is in their care by reason of a care order or is being provided with accommodation under section 20 of the 1989 Act for more than 24 hours with the agreement of the parents, or of the child if s/he is aged 16 or over (section 22(1) and (2) of the 1989 Act). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1000549/The\\_Children\\_Act\\_1989\\_guidance\\_and\\_regulations\\_Volume\\_2\\_care\\_planning\\_placement\\_and\\_case\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1000549/The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_Volume_2_care_planning_placement_and_case_review.pdf)

- 4.15** In all but one of the hotels, the kitchens were permanently closed, and food had to be provided from another location. All the young people had every meal served in take-away containers as the use of plates was, according to contractor staff, not included in the contracts. The food was of mixed quality and the way in which it was provided missed an opportunity to create a more child-centred environment.
- 4.16** Activities for young people were limited and comprised access to art materials, sport including swimming and football, indoor games, and some basic, perfunctory informal English language sessions. By failing to provide any formal education or schooling, young people's basic educational needs were unmet.
- 4.17** Young people were not provided with access to legal advice as their asylum claims were on hold for the duration of their stay. The Refugee Council, which had been providing some support to young people, withdrew this service in January 2022. In early April 2022, the Refugee Council recommenced their delivery of rights and entitlement briefings to young people at the hotels under their wider contract with the Home Office.
- 4.18** Staff consistently referred to those in their care as 'YPs' (young people), and contractor and Home Office staff referred to those at risk of going missing as 'flight risks'. Both terms may be seen as dehumanising and risk downplaying the particular needs of these young people.
- 4.19** Team leaders, who were responsible for the daily operation of the hotels, were answerable to 2 authorities: the Home Office and their own employment agency.<sup>26</sup> This led to some tensions and 2 team leaders perceived that they could not reject poor quality care workers as they were provided by the same agency as the team leaders.
- 4.20** Care workers were of mixed quality: while some clearly built constructive and supportive relationships with young people, others appeared disinterested and disengaged. Staff had little job security, were unclear on how long they would be employed to work in the hotels and reported being given only 24 hours' notice of being required to work.

## Oversight

- 4.21** The Home Office's narrative, publicly and to inspectors, on the use of hotels emphasised the short timeframe in which these hotels were operationalised and the temporary nature of their existence, as justification for why some guidance, processes and procedures were still evolving. Contractor staff were not always clear on their roles and responsibilities, leading to concerns that young people were subject to inconsistent practices. Training did not account for the transient nature of the workforce, provide a thorough induction on the needs of these young people, or include sufficiently robust assurance to mitigate the risks created by the transience of the workforce.
- 4.22** Home Office staff did not always appear to understand the details of the contract they were overseeing, which proves challenging when seeking to hold the contractor to account. This is compounded by the lack of clarity for delivery of the overall operation. There was no mechanism for assessing if the quality of the care provided to the young people was of a suitable standard (or indeed, what that standard was) and feedback opportunities for

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<sup>26</sup> At the factual accuracy stage, the Home Office clarified that "Team leaders' roles and responsibilities are fully laid out in their job description and issues relating to Care Team staff are, in the first instance, dealt with by the Team Leaders and through their agency C2K. If there are issues relating to Care Team staff that are unable to be resolved, then the Home Office will engage with providers at the scheduled weekly meeting unless the issue raised requires immediate attention."

the young people were limited to forms (in English) provided at the end of their stay, and complaints boxes.

- 4.23** Inspectors found 2 hotels had staff living onsite, with access to the master keys, who had not been Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) cleared. Local protocols dictated that these staff did not access the young people's bedrooms without being accompanied. While the staff were now in the process of being DBS checked, they remained living onsite. At interview with team leaders and Home Office staff overseeing the hotels, it became clear that there was no consistent requirement for hotel staff to be DBS checked, and that the absence of these DBS checks had only come to light in recent weeks, when highlighted by inspectors.
- 4.24** A firmer managerial approach to processes and guidance had developed from December 2021, though progress was slow. Efforts to focus on continuous improvement were hindered by the dominant view that the operation was only temporary. However, inspectors concluded that different practices across the hotels suggests a lack of oversight of how young people's needs should be met and overall, a weak operational culture and a lack of a management accountability framework that failed to promote and safeguard young people's welfare.

## Design

- 4.25** While this operation had been rolled out in a very short timeframe, the Home Office had taken advantage of some limited external, and more readily available internal advice in its design. However, the extent to which these sources of advice continued to be valued was harder to ascertain. An internal review<sup>27</sup> from October 2021 had identified areas for improvement, but progress against the review's recommendations was slow, and was impeded by the need to rely on other agencies to deliver some of the actions. There was no clear vision of the corporate expectations of the operation, the standards required and applied, and how the organisation would consistently deliver these.
- 4.26** As highlighted by the Home Office's own risk register, and discussions with stakeholders, the Home Office is effectively operating unregistered young people's homes. The defence of necessity likely applies, but the assertion of the operation as 'temporary' is less robust, especially as external oversight is absent, and viable, available, alternative solutions remain elusive. Home Office staff were clear on the pressure this work had brought to bear on their own wellbeing and emphasised how they had reflected regularly on the ethical dimensions of their decision-making.
- 4.27** Local authorities were given as little as 24 hours' notice of a hotel opening, a similar approach to that taken by the Home Office with the opening of Penally Camp and Napier Barracks and hotel contingency accommodation, to house adult and family asylum seekers.<sup>28</sup> While they had committed to provide these young people with relevant services, as much as they were able, they were not involved in the running or oversight of the hotels.
- 4.28** Inspectors found limited evidence of progress on a concrete exit strategy from the use of hotels.

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<sup>27</sup> RASI [Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration] 'Lessons learned UASC hotels October 2021'

<sup>28</sup> See 'An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation, May 2021 – November 2021' [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1074799/An\\_inspection\\_of\\_contingency\\_asylum\\_accommodation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1074799/An_inspection_of_contingency_asylum_accommodation.pdf)

'An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation: HMIP report on Penally Camp and Napier Barracks, November 2020 – March 2021', <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-hmip-report-on-penally-camp-and-napier-barracks>

**4.29** While the temporary mandating, starting on 14 December 2021, of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) had meant that young people were now moving into local authority placements more promptly, the time these placements took to arrange could vary. Between July and December 2021, 15% of young people spent 30+ days in hotels; over January and February 2022, 12% of young people were still spending 30+ days in hotels. Contractor staff revealed that they (and subsequently the young people) were often given very limited notice of a placement, meaning time to prepare the young person for the move was very short.



## 5. Evidence and analysis

### Safeguarding

- 5.1** Overall, both contractor and Home Office staff, at all levels, were confident that they were doing their best in difficult and pressing circumstances and had placed safeguarding and young people’s welfare at the centre of operations. Home Office staff regularly articulated at interview the organisational commitment to safeguard young people, and this was reflected in the risk register, added in March 2022:

“Failing to effectively safeguard (contrary to section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009) UASC in temporary UASC hotels awaiting placements with Local Authorities”

- 5.2** Mitigation for this risk included activities already underway, such as the mandating of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the provision of professional care services within the hotels. Progress against these controls was difficult to ascertain, and the Home Office considered it was too early to assess the impact of the mandating of the NTS. Discussions between the Home Office and the Department for Education (DfE) as to alternative solutions were ongoing.

- 5.3** Inspectors observed that the operation was struggling to meet the change in state from emergency set-up to ‘business as usual’. Processes and approaches deemed secondary at the point of setting up the hotels, now 7 months after the first hotel opened, still required attention. This work was being undertaken in a piecemeal, inconsistent fashion, which meant that some hotels were better able to meet the safeguarding and welfare needs of young people than others.

- 5.4** The duty to safeguard applies to contractor staff and the Home Office. The Home Office’s ‘Safeguarding Strategy: unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children’,<sup>29</sup> published in November 2017 notes: “Unaccompanied children can be highly vulnerable and can be particularly at risk of going missing due to trafficking and exploitation.” The policy goes on to state:

“Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. From the point at which they come into first contact with officials, to their placement in safe and appropriate accommodation with their health, educational and other needs adequately supported, clear pathways and clearly defined legal responsibility is vital.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Home Office ‘Safeguarding Strategy: unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children’ (November 2017) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/656425/UASC\\_Safeguarding\\_Strategy\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656425/UASC_Safeguarding_Strategy_2017.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Home Office ‘Safeguarding Strategy: unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children’ (November 2017) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/656425/UASC\\_Safeguarding\\_Strategy\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656425/UASC_Safeguarding_Strategy_2017.pdf) Pg. 17.

- 5.5** Safeguarding was defined in ‘Safeguarding Strategy: unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children’ as:
- a. “protecting children from maltreatment
  - b. preventing impairment of children’s mental and physical health or development
  - c. ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
  - d. taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes”
- 5.6** The Home Office provides contractor staff with a number of briefings and training materials on areas of risk, and the duty to safeguard, drafted by the Safeguarding Advice and Children’s Champion (SACC). The ‘Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) for Staff Mandatory Safeguarding Briefings’, drafted in March 2022, sets out the requirements on team leaders and senior practitioners to deliver, record, monitor and provide updates on safeguarding training. The list of briefings covered knife crime, anti-social behaviour and county lines, as well as information on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the NTS. In interviews with inspectors, contractor staff demonstrated that not all of them were familiar with the training packages.

## Healthcare

- 5.7** Nurses, provided by Sanctuary Healthcare, had different working patterns and availability across the hotels, ranging from 3 nurses covering 8am–6pm, 7 days a week at one hotel, while at another there were 2 nurses working 8am–5pm, weekdays only. The young people were told to call 111 or 999 outside of those hours, although the Folkestone-based nurses provided an out-of-hours number that contractor staff could use to contact them.
- 5.8** Inspectors found the nurses across all hotels to be engaged, empathetic, supportive and enthused about their work. Not all nurses had experience of working with young people or migrants. None had specific mental health training applicable to their role and had received no additional training on the specific needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking or refugee young people, other than mandatory safeguarding briefings as set out in the Staff Mandatory Safeguarding briefings SOP.
- 5.9** While their primary role was to undertake a health screening of a young person on arrival, the nurses had an ‘open-door policy’, and young people were able to see the nurse without appointment. Nurses told inspectors that their duties included the initial health screening, GP registration, monitoring of eating habits and sharing concerns with social workers as necessary.
- 5.10** Inspectors noted that the nurses’ job description, provided by the Home Office, was incomplete, not dated and not signed off. It states:
- “Settings are not CQC [Care Quality Commission] registered, and nurses have no indemnity cover to diagnose or prescribe and should utilise the national 111 service and build relationships with local health partners to access their services and/or signpost residents including:
- urgent treatment centre (UTC)
  - local pharmacies
  - supporting registration of residents with GPs”

- 5.11** Nurses interviewed by inspectors said they would like to be able to do more than currently allowed. They said they had raised with the Home Office, on more than one occasion, the need for an effective first aid bag for emergencies, including an epi-pen and defibrillator, but this request had not been fulfilled. The nurses were also unable to prescribe basic medication such as paracetamol; instead, one nurse said young people were instructed to purchase it out of their £10 per week pocket money. A Home Office representative stated that they were currently working with Sanctuary Healthcare to enable the nurses to administer immediate pain relief, though no timescale was provided for this to be implemented.
- 5.12** Nurses also raised the need for better translation/interpreter services as the current telephone translation service was considered problematic, putting a barrier between the healthcare staff and the young people. Problems reported included long wait times, the connection dropping out and the translator not translating what the young person had actually said and resulting in initial assessments taking longer, and difficulties assessing mental capacity.<sup>31</sup>
- 5.13** Inspectors found inconsistencies in the ability of the young people to access healthcare provision outside the hotels, with particular challenges in some hotels in getting dental treatment. One hotel had weekly visits from the nurse practitioner from the local GP surgery who ran a clinic for the young people; the other hotels did not have the same local support. Nurses indicated that a key part of their role was to register the young people with local GP surgeries with a view to getting them NHS numbers. These numbers take a minimum of 28 days to arrive, and often young people had moved on from the hotel before these numbers arrived. Nurses were responsible for forwarding these numbers to the new local authority but commented that the process was not always consistent and highlighted their concerns that young people may subsequently register and apply for another NHS number, causing difficulties in terms of accessing services. The ‘issue log’ within the Home Office’s risk register highlighted “medical information not being shared with the local authority due to an identified gap in the process”. This risk was raised on 26 January 2022 and recorded as high priority with significant severity. At interview, a senior Home Office manager indicated she was developing solutions to address this problem.
- 5.14** Inspectors identified that contractor staff were not clear on whether the young people could consent to medical treatment, and if they could not consent, whether they could provide this consent on their behalf. Nurses were clear on the process for obtaining consent, primarily in the context of COVID-19 and diphtheria vaccines, and this was recorded in the young person’s notes. Team leaders, however, did not appear to fully understand the parameters of their authority. In one example, a hospital treating a young person who required a significant medical procedure sought consent from the team leader who was unclear on whether they could give it; the hospital undertook a Gillick assessment<sup>32</sup> of the young person to enable them to provide consent. The issue of consent was also required in terms of enabling a child to agree to a local authority placement. Inspectors observed a daily call between the Home Office and contractor staff where the Operational Manager led with an item on consent, setting out the parameters of how it operated for young people. A subsequent discussion with senior managers revealed that additional work had been undertaken by the UASC Matrix Management team, particularly SACC, on ensuring that contractor staff developed a better

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31 See An inspection of the Home Office’s use of language services in the asylum process May – November 2019, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933930/An\\_inspection\\_of\\_the\\_Home\\_Office\\_s\\_use\\_of\\_language\\_services\\_in\\_the\\_asylum\\_process.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933930/An_inspection_of_the_Home_Office_s_use_of_language_services_in_the_asylum_process.pdf)

32 The right of a child under 16 to consent to medical examination and treatment (decided by the House of Lords in *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA* [1986]); Gillick competence is based on an assessment of a child’s intelligence, competence and understanding to truly be informed about their treatment.

understanding of consent, though interviews with contractor staff indicated there was still confusion as to by whom or how consent could be provided.

## Mental health support

**5.15** Contractor staff across the hotels raised concerns at the lack of mental health support available to young people in hotels, noting the levels of trauma experienced by them as a result of their journey and prior experiences. A nurse commented: “It would be good to have mental health professionals onsite. It would be of such benefit to the boys. We do our best but we’re conscious we’re not able to do enough.” One consequence of the lack of support was that staff would not necessarily demonstrate the professional curiosity expected in their role as this could be re-traumatising. A stakeholder shared the experiences of one of their clients who shared:

“[he] worries for his mother and younger siblings in his home country. He was merely advised that if he moves on from the hotel, he would be able to seek support from the Red Cross family tracing service... He also shared that he had been locked in a room and beaten during his journey to the UK but no further support was offered in relation to this. Whilst social workers were present in the hotel, our clients were not allocated to one and so did not have a particular person to approach with any issues that arose.”

**5.16** The nurses with whom inspectors spoke did not have specific training on mental health for young people provided in this role. For social workers, who may assess young people with mental health needs, the extent of the support they were able to provide was limited.

**5.17** Inspectors asked the Home Office about the practice of not providing mental health support in hotels. Home Office staff explained that this was a decision based on best practice. Subsequent correspondence with the Home Office demonstrated their approach that: “for mental health interventions to commence there should always be a detailed assessment of the child and this is not possible in a short-term care setting at the hotels especially where there is no wraparound support”. Within the context of the hotels:

“... social workers and care workers provide one to one emotional support and there is the option of a GP referral if necessary and the referral capacity to further therapeutic support is potentially possible via the referral to the GP. However, we know we cannot refer all the children based on the limited one to one initial assessments by the social worker or health nurse, as the extent of the emotional impact cannot be established.”

## Contractor staff

**5.18** The Home Office employed, via an agency, social workers to be based onsite during office hours only, Monday to Friday. There was on-call weekend support available. Most social workers with whom inspectors spoke were on short-term contracts and lived in a local hotel, provided by the Home Office, for the duration of their placement. Experience of working with migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking young people varied across the social workers. As well as assessing young people on arrival, social workers saw their role as providing support in terms of explaining the NTS and managing the young people’s expectations of the process. They also undertook informal monitoring of the young people, noting, for example, if a young person was becoming socially isolated. Social workers were live to the particular issues or potential vulnerabilities of some cohorts of young people, such as Vietnamese nationals at risk of exploitation or going missing. In one hotel, social workers ran group induction sessions with the

newly arrived young people where their needs and possible sources of support were discussed. Social workers made reference to the positive relationships they built with the young people, and inspectors observed this in one of the hotels in particular.

- 5.19** Senior practitioners “lead the allocation and delivery of high quality initial social work assessment in a timely way to meet the needs of the HO [Home Office]”. Senior practitioners function as both a source of support and guidance for the social workers in hotels, and as a point of liaison and engagement with the Home Office and other external agencies. The 2 post-holders split their time over the 2 hotels in each region. Senior practitioners interviewed by inspectors reported broadly good working relationships with the Home Office and contractor staff, including social workers.
- 5.20** Team leaders were in charge of the day-to-day operation of the hotels and led the care workers “to proactively deliver against the welfare and domestic needs of these YPs, identifying risk and mitigating through escalation/sharing with partners as necessary”. Two were on duty during the day, and another at night. Those interviewed did not have backgrounds in child or youth service provision, and a number were ex-police officers. While their logistical skills were observed by inspectors, and in discussions with them, they articulated their aspiration to provide the best for the young people in their care. The extent of their sensitisation or familiarisation with the issues facing these young people, and therefore their ability to spot potential indicators of vulnerability, was not always as robust as expected by inspectors. For example, at interview, one team leader said that there was a young person in the hotel who was withdrawn, but then said “we put the cricket on and he was smiling and he was ok after that” – he did not exhibit, or make reference to, any professional curiosity to explore the young person’s behaviour further.
- 5.21** No job description was provided for care workers but, from interviews with contractor staff and care workers themselves, their role appeared to focus on engaging with the young people via activities and conversation, providing emotional support if required, and accompanying them out of the hotel. Concerns about young people observed by care workers were to be escalated verbally to team leaders.

## Home Office teams

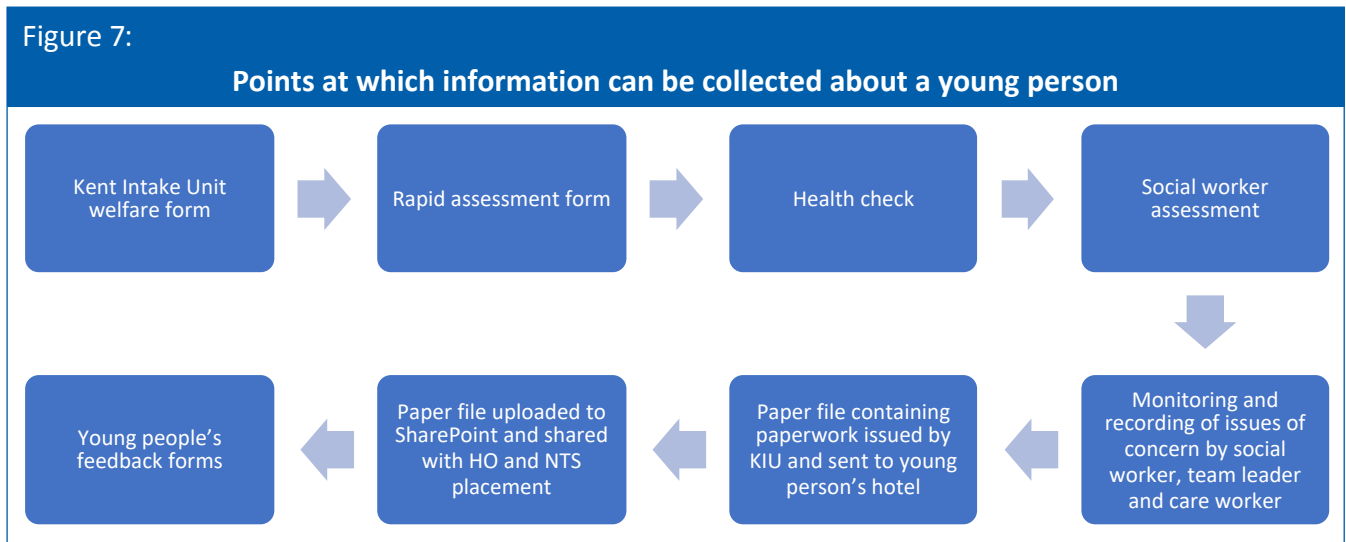
- 5.22** The Asylum Safeguarding Hub (Hub) has responsibility for overseeing safeguarding issues within the asylum system, though its staff are not trained social workers. Staff from the Hub sit on the UASC Matrix Management team. The Hub’s work, in the hotels, is governed by the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) ‘Temporary/Interim UASC Hotel Referrals’, though this was, in March 2022, still in draft format. As a result, some processes lacked clarity; for example, the SOP noted the gap in processes for referrals for young people turning 18 in hotels. The Hub functioned as a repository for management information about vulnerability and safeguarding, though had not consistently undertaken this role from the inception of the hotels’ operation. According to senior managers, the role of the Hub was to sit outside the operation, taking a holistic approach to safeguarding, guiding and advising operational delivery.
- 5.23** The 2 professional advisors from the Safeguarding Advice and Children’s Champion (SACC) provide “specialist safeguarding advice, support and safeguarding scrutiny to UKVI on the running of 4 hotels”, and this includes the recruitment and training of social workers, supervision of the senior practitioners, and local authority engagement at strategic and operational levels. The SACC also plays a key role in the development of SOPs and guidance.

# Identification of vulnerable young people

5.24 The Home Office, in its draft SOP ‘UASC Referrals’ states:

“...the ability to record and gather data on vulnerable cases has been recognised as a priority action. The ability to do so will facilitate case management, improve our understanding of the associated risks, provide all parts of the business with improved intelligence to support more directed interventions.”

5.25 There are a number of points prior to, and during, a young person’s stay at a hotel where vulnerabilities can be identified and recorded, as set out at Figure 7.



5.26 A welfare check is undertaken and recorded at the Kent Intake Unit (KIU) and shared with the Hub. Inspectors were told that the poor quality of these forms, and the high volume of errors, meant that they were reviewed and queries or inconsistencies raised with KIU to make sure correct paperwork/information is shared with contractor staff.

5.27 Inspectors were also made aware of incorrect, error prone, immigration paperwork being given to young people at the KIU, including the wrong dates of birth on records even where there was no dispute over the age of a young person (including several, different dates of birth within the same file). Inspectors observed a young person in a hotel with an IS91R (reasons for detention) form which wrongly indicated that he was liable for imminent removal. This caused significant distress to the young person and his extended family (who had arrived unannounced at the hotel and found the form). However, inspectors noted the positive way in which the team leader reassured the young person and his family, but also the challenge faced by young people and contractor staff when official documentation is incorrect.

5.28 On arrival at a hotel, a rapid assessment form is completed by the team leader and functions as an initial alert system for young people who may require additional support. The form asks for details of a young person’s health, wellbeing, safety and journey from France. Several contractor staff told inspectors that they found the lack of questions about a young person’s journey prior to arrival in France problematic and denied staff the opportunity to identify young people who had been trafficked, exploited or were the victim of sexual or other violence. Inspectors queried the value of question 9 which states “Have you witnessed or experienced violence? (Don’t tell us about it now, but if yes, ask to see/refer to a social worker)”. The form, according to the Home Office, sought to balance the need for staff to



identify vulnerable young people with the decision to limit how much trauma should and could be explored during their time in the hotel.

- 5.29** Young people were then, depending on the time of arrival, subject to a health check undertaken by the onsite nurses. This screening focused on identifying initial health concerns, allergies, and vaccination requirements.
- 5.30** Each young person was then assessed by the onsite social worker. This 6-page form covered: basic information, their journey to the UK including prior to arriving in France, health check and 'signs of safety' which included questions on what was working well, what a young person was worried about, and "what needed to be happening" (referencing actions for the social worker). Information gathered via this assessment was shared with team leaders and uploaded onto the Home Office's SharePoint (Microsoft Office collaborative filesharing system). Contractor staff raised concerns that there was reduced social worker onsite coverage on the weekends when young people may arrive and need support.
- 5.31** Safety plans were used to safeguard young people and could be either developed after the rapid assessment for young people identified at risk of going missing, or after the social workers' assessment. Details of the safety plans were shared with contractor staff at the morning meetings within hotels and shared with the Home Office via SharePoint. Inspectors reviewed a number of individual safety plans and noted that the approach used by social workers was not to mandate actions, but rather develop recommendations. The recommendations were not assigned owners, nor was it always clear what monitoring would be undertaken or assessment made of whether a recommendation had achieved its aim. There is, therefore, no way to know whether recommended actions have been followed up, or how effective they were. A Home Office staff member commented "they [safety plans] are often quite similar."

## Record keeping

- 5.32** In all 4 hotels, records for each young person were held in paper form and electronically on SharePoint. Each young person's electronic folder contained the same sub-folders to facilitate the use of standardised templates and ensure accountability. Responsibility for uploading information onto SharePoint lay with team leaders and the Staff Daily Management Meeting SOP, which contains the agenda for these meetings, with "YP documentation upload check" on departure listed as a point to cover.
- 5.33** Home Office operational staff told inspectors that clear direction was given to contractor staff to scan all documentation onto SharePoint. Paper copies would then be taken off-site and archived. However, when reviewing a number of case files onsite, inspectors noted some information was held only in the paper files and was not available on the SharePoint files.
- 5.34** There was no consistent format for labelling or dating electronic documents. Forms had a date in the file name, but this was potentially misleading as, for example, a 'return from missing' document was saved as 29 March 2022, but a review of the form showed it had been updated to include a record of an incident occurring on 30 March 2022. Inspectors reviewed the documents held for several young people and noted that some forms were undated.
- 5.35** Inspectors were told that safety plans are reviewed on an ongoing basis, but this would not be reflected in the file name using a date as part of the naming convention, nor was the date of the last activity always clear from reviewing the document itself. Home Office staff commented

that the files were not supported by an overarching chronology document as usually found in a young person's records held by a local authority, and which functioned as a helpful overview of a young person's history and needs.

- 5.36** In one Kent hotel, the team leader who had been in post for over 4 months had not yet received Home Office security clearance, despite holding Developed Vetting status for a previous role, and so had no access to Home Office computer systems at all. At the Eastbourne hotel, inspectors were told that arrival and departure reports are completed by staff on young people, but this process did not exist at the other hotels, and so relevant information which could inform the Home Office and contractor staff as to young people's experiences of the hotels was not consistently collected.<sup>33</sup>
- 5.37** The information collated about young people while residing in hotels was important to enable NTS to effectively ensure a young person was provided with a placement which best met their individual needs. In this respect, complete and accurate records developed and collated in the hotels were key, and should include, where relevant, details of family relationships, and any additional needs. One social worker raised concerns that the absence of a mental health assessment while the young person was in the hotel meant that mental health needs, which would need to be met in placement, were unknown. Stakeholders, noting the fact that these young people did not have 'Looked After' status and therefore had not been fully assessed and provided with a dedicated social worker and key worker, would potentially undermine the suitability of the placement.
- 5.38** The NTS Protocol states that the receiving local authority can expect to receive key basic information about the young person prior to their transfer and requires documents to be collected and organised in a way which informs the process and enables good decision-making. Staff were in regular contact with the NTS team and were, on the whole, aware of the obligation to upload records onto SharePoint and share with the NTS on transfer or as appropriate.

## Information sharing

### Referral process

- 5.39** Safeguarding referrals could be made by team leaders, social workers and senior practitioners to the Safeguarding Hub. Care workers were expected to escalate concerns via the team leaders in the first instance. According to Hub staff, the majority of referrals related to young people having gone missing, being at risk of trafficking and exploitation, or displaying signs of suicidal ideation and self-harm. One referral had been made in relation to concerns raised about the behaviour of a member of staff.
- 5.40** It was not always clear, from the SOP, or talking to contractor staff, who held responsibility for making external safeguarding referrals. At interview, social workers and senior practitioners indicated that referrals went through the Hub, and/or they would make the referrals themselves to the relevant agency such as police or local authority. The UASC referral SOP stated (NB: highlighted text and tracked changes appear in the document itself):

"On receipt of the referral into the Safeguarding Hub, the staff member will assess the appropriate actions required dependent on the detail provided.

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<sup>33</sup> At the factual accuracy stage, the Home Office stated that this process was in place across all 4 of the hotels in use. However, this assertion did not reflect the observations of inspectors onsite, nor what staff at these hotels told them.



Only urgent referrals (as stated in the list below )to be sent to social services (now social workers in hotels), [staff from SACC, names redacted by ICIBI] from Children’s champion unit can help us triage these if we are unsure

An urgent referral should be made to Social Services if: (to be clarified with RW)

- An allegation of abuse or inappropriate behaviour is made against a member of staff working at the Hotel in regard to a young person.
- A young person is reported to be missing from the Hotel and their whereabouts are not known
- A young person staying at the hotel reports that they have been abused, either inside or outside of the premises
- A young person that indicates Suicidal ideation.
- A young person states they have been a potential victim of human trafficking / modern slavery

<b>Step 5</b>	<b>Missing person: The following actions should be taken: SOP - SHASY18 - Recording Children As Missing – SOP found in SOP FOLDER – ‘To be reviewed as Workshop’</b>
<b>Step 6</b>	If a young person discloses / been identified as a PVOT/MS then a referral into the NRM by the first responder or social services to be completed as children do not need to give consent to be referred into the NRM. – Check if SW at hotels will pick this up – [name redacted by ICIBI]”

**5.41** Inspectors asked contractor staff about the extent to which the Hub was gatekeeping referrals. Concerns were raised about what the Hub was doing with the information provided from the hotels and whether it was being shared with the Home Office operations team or the local authorities. Hub staff defined their role as ‘signposting’, though on further examination this appeared to refer to, in some cases, making referrals or sharing information with external agencies.

**5.42** The referral SOP did not contain any instructions for Home Office, or other staff, to monitor the progress of a referral or collect any management information, beyond a requirement to update CID (Home Office caseworking information database).

**5.43** Hub staff, meanwhile, indicated that they held responsibility for National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals, stating:

“We tend to do it to make sure we have all relevant information, and we know it’s been done. In busy periods, it is more beneficial for social workers to be dealing with arrivals, rather than the referrals which we can do though technically social workers are the first responders.”

**5.44** Despite this, there was a lack of clarity provided by the social workers interviewed by inspectors as to the process for NRM referrals. Social workers in 2 hotels, and a senior practitioner in a third hotel, stated that they made NRM referrals and did not refer to the Hub in this process. The Home Office clarified, at the factual accuracy stage, that it is the social workers who identify the need for an NRM referral and “share the details with the Hub who then complete the referral form and record the referrals that have been made”. They went on to state “We have been unable to identify occasion/s where referrals have been made directly

by the social workers. And this is not the process in place.” Inspectors requested data on NRM referrals from the Home Office and were told the data provided comprised “the referrals made to the NRM by Home Office staff where the Safeguarding Hub has been made aware either through notification or they have made the referral themselves ... the safeguarding Hub only picked up responsibility for maintaining this data from September [2021] onwards, so we do not hold data prior to this.”

## Relationships

- 5.45** Information sharing between contractor staff in hotels relied on formal and informal processes. The Staff Daily Management Meeting Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) outlines the agenda for the staff daily management meeting, a multi-agency meeting attended by a representative from each of the staffing areas. Key decisions, actions, engagements, or critical information requirements are discussed at the meeting. The team leader ‘shift handover – takeover’ SOP sets out the expectations for team leaders in relation to formal handovers and shift changeovers, including updating the daily site log and SharePoint. Nurses attended the daily meetings with social workers and held their own weekly meeting with all the nurses based across the 4 hotels.
- 5.46** Home Office staff in SACC and the Hub reported constructive working relationships with local authorities, though some local authorities were more engaged than others. Local authorities also described constructive working relationships with the Home Office.
- 5.47** A social worker commented: “It’s good, they [local authorities] come and see what we’re doing, we share information with them and we’re happy to take advice from them. We share ideas and information.” Though one local authority commented that social workers do not routinely attend their multi-agency forums, which prevents them from being connected to the broader local authority network.
- 5.48** Opportunities for engagement and collaboration between the Home Office, local authorities, police and other agencies were provided at an operational and strategic level through, for example, weekly oversight meetings and the Safeguarding Sub-Group. A review of the minutes from these meetings illustrated that they functioned as a good opportunity to share information and align practices. However, it was also clear from the minutes of the Safeguarding Sub-Group that the Home Office operation was in constant development.

## Young people going missing

- 5.49** Between July 2021 and February 2022, a total of 31 young people went missing and 6 remained so at the time of writing; of these, 3 had been missing since November 2021. Not all of these merited a ‘serious incident form’ (as set out at Figure 8 below). All of these young people were male. Albanian (9), followed by Afghan (7), comprised the top nationalities of young people who had gone missing. Though 2 young people were aged 14, those aged 17 were the most common to go missing. For those who returned, they were missing for an average of 26.4 days. The data provided by the Home Office was caveated by:

“A few of the young people were with Local Authorities in their care for some time before it was established that they were already known to the Home Office and were considered to be missing, it was only when fingerprint checks were done after they had taken them to claim asylum that it was identified that this was the case.”

- 5.50** Outcomes for the young people who had gone missing varied: 9 ‘presented to the local authority’, 9 had been encountered by the police, of whom 5 were recorded as ‘police – with family in UK’, and 4 had ‘self-presented to the police’. Overall, 14 had been referred into the NRM, although it was not clear who made these referrals. A senior manager from a local authority commented that, in contrast to the numbers of young people who went missing from care, these numbers were considered low. The latest available data on ‘Looked After Children’, covering 2020, shows 12,430, or 11%, went missing,<sup>34</sup> in contrast to 2.41% within the population of young people housed in hotels.
- 5.51** The response to a missing young person is governed by the SOP ‘Recording children as missing’ (26 January 2021) though this was provided in draft form. It had not been tailored to the specifics of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children generally or the particular young people housed in hotels. An abridged Missing After Reasonable Steps (MARS) process had been developed between the police and the Home Office. The SOP requires that the Home Office caseworker makes the report to the police that a young person is missing, though at interview team leaders indicated they would take this step.
- 5.52** Young people who were missing were discussed at the daily meeting with staff held internally within each of the hotels, across professional meetings held jointly across hotels, and at the UASC Matrix Management meeting. Externally, the Home Office engaged in local authority strategy meetings which were required each time a young person went missing; these meetings were attended by social workers, police and staff from the Hub. These young people were also discussed at Safeguarding Sub-Groups held with local authorities and attended by more senior Home Office and local authority staff.
- 5.53** The Home Office, and contractor staff, were live to mitigating the risk of young people going missing: requesting young people’s IMEI numbers<sup>35</sup> from their mobiles on arrival; and recording a description of or photographing the young person when they left the hotel. However, inspectors also noted that the provision of social workers during business hours misses the opportunity to assess children at risk of trafficking or going missing as, by the time the social workers come on shift, these children may have already disappeared.
- 5.54** The Home Office provided a comprehensive briefing on missing young people to be shared with care workers, and which clearly set out details of warning signs. However, the ‘actions’ undertaken on the young person’s return were clearly not aimed at the care worker, requiring, for example, that they develop a safety plan with the police and social services. Inspectors were told there were inconsistent responses both across and within hotels to young people going missing. While it was said that initial reporting when a young person was first identified as missing was considered good, momentum was lost with young people who went missing subsequently. According to social workers in Kent, the processes to identify and safeguard young people who had gone missing lacked the robustness seen in that demonstrated by Kent Reception and Care Services.
- 5.55** The wish to be reunited with family in the UK played a role in driving young people’s behaviour, including to leave their accommodation. Though Home Office staff made it clear that they were “not a family reunification team”, they did seek to explore any family links at the earliest opportunity so young people can be referred (within the NTS) to the closest area to family in the UK.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2020#releaseHeadlines-charts>

<sup>35</sup> International mobile equipment identity.

- 5.56** Home Office and contractor staff had identified cohorts of young people who they considered were at greater risk of going missing. In response, risk assessments and safety plans were, according to contractor staff, undertaken on arrival in mitigation of this risk. Though inspectors were told of a girl who had been identified as being at risk of trafficking who had gone missing prior to a risk assessment and safety plan being completed. Home Office staff indicated that certain cohorts were also prioritised for local authority placement based on risk.
- 5.57** Young people who returned from being missing were interviewed, using the Social Work Missing Persons Return Interview Form. The social worker was required to update the safety plan based on the outcome of the interview and share it with the Hub and NTS team in the Home Office, and to notify the SACC team.

## Management information

- 5.58** Inspectors requested data held about the young people housed in hotels between July 2021 and February 2022. The Home Office had not consistently collected information about the young people from July 2021, when the hotels opened. More broadly, the quality of the data from hotels was described by the Home Office, in March 2022, as:
- “... well maintained but recognised as not assured or verified and systems corruptable [sic]. Real time data flow between operational points remains unreliable and challenges planning. SPOC for referrals to address flow into hotels, further work required to understand pipeline data at fixed points from the port and NAIU.”
- 5.59** The Hub had responsibility for collecting information about young people held in hotels and updating various trackers as required. This information was used to inform Freedom of Information requests and media queries, as well as internal statistics for Home Office use.
- 5.60** Inspectors reviewed the data provided on every young person housed in a hotel, which included details of their vulnerabilities. Data showed that 38.9% (498 of 1,281) young people had a recorded ‘known vulnerability detail’, though this ranged from trafficking concerns to an allergy to pasta. This pointed to a lack of clear criteria as to what constituted a vulnerability, and very limited information on the action taken on it.
- 5.61** Inspectors also reviewed the data on the number of incidents which required the completion of a serious incident form. This is set out at Figure 8. Inspectors also asked for details of the incidents and their outcomes, though this could not be provided as the information was not held. The data provided was caveated by:

“These are all incidents that the Safeguarding Hub has completed or been made aware that a High-Profile Notification (HPN) has been created. The Hub has taken and followed up where appropriate all Safeguarding actions. The safeguarding Hub only picked up responsibility for maintaining this data from September onwards, so we do not hold data prior to this.”

Figure 8:

Number of incidents within hotels which have merited the completion of a serious incident form, September 2021 – February 2022

Basis for referral	Sept. 2021	Oct. 2021	Nov. 2021	Dec. 2021	Jan. 2022	Feb. 2022	TOTAL
Missing	2	1	14	5	7	4	33
Violent/Disruptive Behaviour	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Suicide Self Harm Level 1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Serious Illness	0	0	2	1	0	1	4
Suspicious Activity	0	0	1	0	1	2	4
Media Attention	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
Serious Incident at Hotel	1	0	1	3	0	1	6
Suicide Self Harm Level 2/ Refusal to Eat	0	0	0	3	2	0	5
Other	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>59</b>

Figure 9:

NRM referral and outcome (reasonable grounds (RG) and conclusive grounds (CG))<sup>36</sup> by month, September 2021 – February 2022

Month	No. Referrals	RG Outcome	CG Outcome	Total no. Young People
Sept. 2021	2	1	Awaiting outcomes as at May 2022	196
Oct. 2021	3	4		148
Nov. 2021	3	3		329
Dec. 2021	5	4		194
Jan. 2022	5	3		102
Feb. 2022	4	2		30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>999</b>

## Operational delivery

### Experiences of young people

**5.62** Inspectors spoke to 16 young people across the 4 hotels, drawn from a variety of nationalities, who had been in the hotels for a range of time periods. All of them told inspectors that they were happy, felt safe, and most importantly to them, were treated with respect by the staff around them. A significant number complained about the quality, quantity and selection of food on offer. A lack of clarity as to what was happening next, in terms of both their

<sup>36</sup> At the time of the request, no conclusive grounds decisions had been received.

accommodation and their asylum claim, and a strong desire to return to education, also dominated the conversations with inspectors.

- 5.63** Inspectors observed the communal areas within all the hotels at different times of the day and noted that the young people interacted well with each other and took advantage of the computer games and art available. Likewise, some team leaders and care workers appeared to have good, warm, courteous relationships with the young people. In Hove and Eastbourne in particular, social workers knew the young people by name and encouraged them to communicate with confidence.

## Physical environment

- 5.64** Inspectors visited all 4 hotels in operation, 3 in early April, and one in late April. Inspectors visited during Ramadan which impacted how many young people were around and their behaviour (and subsequently, the interactions they had with staff). Hotels had very different atmospheres with some feeling 'lighter' than others, due to décor, location and staffing.
- 5.65** Overall, rooms for young people were clean and functional, though the décor was dated and some of the furniture was worn. Window stops were in place, though inspectors saw examples where they were hanging loose.<sup>37</sup> Each hotel had several different spaces for the young people to spend time communally. These spaces usually contained a television, games consoles, and depending on space, table tennis or table football. Access to outdoor space was not consistent, with no private outdoor space available in Folkestone or Hythe.

## Managing the accommodation

- 5.66** The Home Office did not provide inspectors with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) governing how the residential element of the hotels should be run. According to team leaders, most young people were housed in single rooms. Room allocations were broadly based on availability, though staff indicated that where there were concerns about a young person, for example, suicide/self-harm, that young person might be placed on a specific floor or part of the hotel.
- 5.67** Team leaders told inspectors that where hotels had more than one cohort of young people, for example, females or males under 16, the residential floors were configured in a way so as to keep them separate and care workers were required to constantly staff posts at the entry/exit points to the corridors with these rooms. Young people from all cohorts were able to mix in the communal areas. In one hotel an additional, female only, space had been provided though this was shared with the (all male) COVID-19 testing team, who left the space when it was in use, and screened off using a curtain.
- 5.68** Contractor staff told inspectors that staff did not enter young people's rooms, and if they had to go to a room, they were accompanied by a care worker, or by security staff in the Eastbourne hotel. Inspectors were not provided with documentation, such as written guidance or SOP, to support this assertion.
- 5.69** There were no restrictions on young people visiting or spending time in each other's bedrooms, though team leaders from several hotels commented that if there was too much noise from one room, young people might be asked to leave the room. Young people in all the hotels were

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<sup>37</sup> See para 10.26 'An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation, May 2021 – November 2021' [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1074799/An\\_inspection\\_of\\_contingency\\_asylum\\_accommodation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1074799/An_inspection_of_contingency_asylum_accommodation.pdf)

able to move freely around the buildings, except to areas where young people of the opposite sex, or those significantly younger than others, were housed.

- 5.70** Room sharing was possible and was governed by an SOP introduced in late March 2022. The SOP, primarily focused on the need for room sharing when capacity and numbers required it rather than a young person's preference, and identifies, as best practice, the need to consider the languages spoken by the young people, developmental stage and maturity levels, as well as references to behaviour management. The criteria and assessment for room sharing were not consistently understood by staff. Social workers indicated, variously, they were content for young people who had travelled together to share; that only young people who were related could share; young people could share if they spoke the same language. At interview, a social worker told inspectors they had recently approved a young person with suspected learning difficulties to share a room but had not explored the power dynamic he had with the young person he was sharing with – inspectors understood, following the interview, that an assessment would take place.
- 5.71** Master keys to all the rooms were available to all staff. In Folkestone, these were on a board in the office which was not always staffed though was covered by CCTV; in Hythe, these keys were on the team leader's desk in an area accessible by all staff and young people, though the desk was always staffed and every time the card was used, it registered on the hotel's system.

## Routine

- 5.72** Young people were not detained at the hotels but did have curfews which varied across hotels and age groups. For all the hotels, young people were required to sign in and out at the front desk with 4-hour check-in periods. The young people exchanged their room keys for cards containing the hotel's details in case they got lost. In one hotel, staff were required to take photographs of the young people on exit to provide a record of their appearance if they went missing, whereas at others, staff took written descriptions of clothing and relied on CCTV images. Young people, particularly those identified as vulnerable, are offered care workers as chaperones when leaving the hotel; for those under 15 and following a risk assessment, they would not be allowed out unless accompanied.

## Food

- 5.73** Contractor staff and young people alike complained about the quality, quantity and variety of the food in the hotels. Staff indicated that food was a central theme within the feedback forms completed by young people on their departure, and stated this feedback was taken on board in the design of menus and catering delivered.
- 5.74** The catering regime observed by inspectors demonstrated limited engagement with the nutritional needs of young people, the cultural aspects of food such as sharing dishes, or the reality of teenagers (ready access to snacks). Breakfasts comprised packaged croissants, fruit and yogurt, served in paper bags, deemed 'fatty' by the nurses in one hotel, who had raised concerns about this in meetings, though no improvements had been forthcoming. Home Office staff acknowledged a disparity of food across the hotels, noting that some were better than others, and that there was still work to do.
- 5.75** In 3 of the hotels, no food was prepared on site and the kitchens were not operational, food was provided pre-packaged, in take-away boxes, and re-heated in microwaves. At the fourth hotel, despite the kitchen being operational, food was also provided in take-away



boxes. Contractor staff told inspectors that ‘the contract’ prevented the young people being served meals on plates. Inspectors were not provided with any evidence which supported this assertion.

- 5.76** Food at the Eastbourne and Hove hotels, other than breakfast, was prepared off-site in Lewes and quality was deemed poor. Staff told inspectors that bread or fruit could be provided to young people who requested additional food during mealtimes; snacks, including fruit, were available at set times in some hotels, but were always available in others. Inspectors noted that, in one specification document outlining the requirements for the hotels, meal costs were set at £25.71 per child, per day and stipulated that “a minimum of 3 substantial meals per day are to be provided with choice from a Hot and Cold menu, with access to snacks including fresh fruit. Menus should also cater for specific dietary requirements (including but not limited to cultural and medical).” Inspectors observed that the food provided to young people did not appear to meet this requirement.

## Security

- 5.77** Security is provided for all 4 hotels by Mitie Group on behalf of the Home Office. At the Hythe hotel, this is further sub-contracted to Bold Security Group. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on security has been drafted by the Home Office and requires security staff to “provide a continual presence at the identified access control points”; though Mitie has also developed its own SOP for each hotel. Inspectors observed that female security staff were present at hotels housing females.
- 5.78** Inspectors observed, and stakeholders commented on, a “lack of professionalism” among the security team at Folkestone, including sitting in cars while on duty on the perimeter of the hotel, meaning they are not positioned in the right place to respond to incidents as they occur. This was also standard practice at Hove. On 9 April 2022, a far-right activist live streamed, on YouTube, his visit to the hotel. Security staff remained in cars despite the individual having been onsite for over 13 minutes and, subsequently, the intruder was briefly able to enter the hotel via a back door. He was then intercepted by security staff and removed from the premises.
- 5.79** The Home Office SOP further states that the security team is responsible for “checking that only authorised persons are allowed to enter and will request identification from the individual”. Inspectors observed that they were not always asked for ID on entry to the Folkestone Hotel over their 2-day visit.
- 5.80** The security operation at Eastbourne, Hythe and Hove ran more smoothly than that at Folkestone. However, inspectors noted the limited English language skills of staff (this was raised as an issue at the Folkestone and Hythe hotels particularly) and the very recent introduction of additional, basic, security measures. Inspectors were informed of an incident in March 2022 in which a member of the public arrived at the Hythe hotel displaying aggressive behaviour – a contractor manager said that the ability of security staff to de-escalate the situation was undermined by the language barrier.

## Education

- 5.81** The young people are not provided with any kind of formal or informal education while living in the hotels. Social workers had identified a need for more educational input, such as English as a Second Language. Home Office staff acknowledged the importance of education but commented: “there’s no way our provision can cater for that gap.”



- 5.82** Eastbourne offered English lessons when a member of contractor staff, who was also a qualified teacher, was onsite. Inspectors saw a very informal, basic English class led by care workers at Folkestone and noted its contents and value were limited. Inspectors were told that team leaders and social workers had developed a tender for an external organisation to deliver more structured English classes, though it had not yet been made public.

## Legal advice

- 5.83** A number of stakeholders raised concerns about the ability of young people to access legal advice while living in hotels to support their asylum claim or provide advice with regard to their stay at the hotel. The Home Office considered that, as no immigration work was undertaken at the hotels, and the young person's asylum claim was effectively on hold for the duration of their stay in hotels, access to legal advice was best provided at placement. However, this 'one size fits all' approach ignores both the needs of young people who spent longer in the hotels and the impact of remote working which enables legal representatives to provide advice regardless of location.
- 5.84** Inspectors were concerned that this pausing of the asylum process had a particular negative impact on those who would turn 18 in hotels and therefore have their claims considered as adults. However, the Home Office clarified that when young people housed in hotels turn 18, their claim is still processed as if they were a child by specific UASC 'hubs', even though they are moved into adult hotel accommodation. In other words, young people for whom a pause in the asylum process would have the greatest impact are not disadvantaged by being housed in hotels.

## Visitors

- 5.85** The Home Office provided inspectors with a copy of guidance for contractor staff on the expected approach to visitors and gifts for the young people, dated December 2021, which encouraged a safeguarding assessment and advice on basic safety procedures. Team leaders told inspectors that, on occasion, family members or friends would turn up at the hotel and wish to see a young person, and sometimes take them away with them. Team leaders were broadly confident in their approach in managing these situations, logging relevant details to share with the Home Office and facilitating appropriate contact. While inspectors were onsite, they observed a team leader effectively engage with a family and manage the expectations of the young person and adults present. However, inspectors were also told that once a young person left the hotel, it was hard to monitor contact, and there had been occasions where a family member had visited, and a young person had gone missing shortly afterwards.
- 5.86** Inspectors heard examples of staff monitoring gifts and noting when young people appeared to have been provided with expensive items such as trainers and clothes. In one hotel, in response to concerns that young people were returning from visits to a local barber with 'gifts' such as phones, staff decided to bring a barber onsite to mitigate the risk.

## Charity support

- 5.87** Interviews with team leaders and social workers indicated that there had been limited engagement with local charities or support groups; it was unclear the extent to which Home Office or contractor staff had sought to drive this engagement effort. The Refugee Council were contracted from 20 September 2021 to provide "light touch support and charity activity co-ordination" for the young people, on the understanding that it was a short-term, emergency

response. The Refugee Council withdrew from this work in January 2022.<sup>38</sup> The hotels in Kent utilised the service of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (Barnardo's), a service unavailable in East Sussex, to visit young people about whom they were concerned and to educate the other young people regarding the risks of trafficking. Contractor and Home Office staff were positive about the value of these visits.

- 5.88** Access to spiritual support varied across the hotels. In one hotel, the local imam did not visit, and the young people did not attend the local mosque, instead prayers were led by a care worker. In another hotel, the children were able to visit the local mosque. Instructions had been provided by Home Office staff to contractors to help facilitate Ramadan. There was no spiritual provision for Orthodox Christians (despite the high numbers of Ethiopians and Eritrean young people), or any religious texts available apart from an English language bible and the Koran in Arabic.

## Mobile phones

- 5.89** Young people were allowed to keep the mobile phones they arrived with, though were requested to provide the IMEI number to staff. Those who did not have phones were not provided with them and had to ask staff to use the telephone if they wished to make a call. Staff did not proactively help young people notify their families where they were.

## Culture

- 5.90** Across the hotels, though primarily by team leaders and care workers, the young people were referred to as 'YPs', meaning young people. Social workers in the main referred to them as children. Home Office briefing documents also referred to 'YPs'. Inspectors considered that the use of this term could be dehumanising and drew attention away from the fact that these are vulnerable children and young people. Further, Home Office and contractor staff referred to young people who might be at risk of going missing on the basis of their nationality, such as Vietnamese and Albanians, as 'flight risks', and made reference to these young people 'absconding' rather than being at risk of exploitation.
- 5.91** Inspectors observed that there were inconsistencies in the extent to which the young people could understand their environment and those within it. Not all the staff had or wore lanyards denoting their name and role. In some hotels, the rooms for social workers, nurses and team leaders were not labelled so it was not clear where each service was located. There were no pictorial representations on the walls of the routines or processes (for example, when meals were served). Young people were not consistently provided with a welcome or induction pack, often only a copy of the ground rules, usually in English. Inspectors did not see or hear evidence of young people being provided with information about the local area, a map, or details of activities and support services. This was in contrast to the Contracting Venue Specification document for Adult/Children asylum seekers which states that: "All information supplied to Service User should be in a method that is understandable by people who may not have English as their first language, picture signage should be used where possible."
- 5.92** The vast majority of young people arrived with just their clothes and were provided with basic toiletries and clothes. The clothes, usually sourced from Primark or Sports Direct, consisted of tracksuit tops and trousers in a limited range of colours (black, blue, grey), as well as flip flops

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<sup>38</sup> The Refugee Council withdrew wraparound support from all hotels although they continue to provide advice and guidance in line with their wider work with any separated or unaccompanied child in the asylum system. The wraparound support in hotels was considered a temporary additional service.

and trainers. Inspectors, noting that most young people in the hotels were wearing identical outfits, raised concerns at the safeguarding implications for this and the fact they were easily identifiable. Team leaders had not identified this risk and told inspectors that they try to get as much variety as possible in the available clothing, but the young people want to wear certain colours and wear the same as the others. Home Office staff also responded that teenage males have certain preferences with clothes. This was echoed by care workers.

## Oversight

### Guidance

**5.93** The Home Office provided inspectors with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and guidance used to govern the operation of the hotels. These documents were drawn up with advice from the professional advisors working in the Home Office's Safeguarding Advice and Children's Champion team (SACC).<sup>39</sup> A number of the SOPs were still in draft form, including those for site access control and safeguarding referrals. A manager told inspectors that there had not been time to finalise guidance as they had been in crisis management mode; a senior operational manager commented: "We have come a long way in 4 months, but we have a long way to go." Although action was being taken to finalise the guidance, a timeline by when this would be completed was not provided.

### Roles and responsibilities

**5.94** The Home Office acknowledged to inspectors that its staff do not have the expertise to meet the specific needs of these young people in an operational, residential setting and so it was necessary for them to bring this expertise in from external providers. The Home Office provided inspectors with job descriptions for these roles (senior practitioner, social worker, care worker, nurse, team leader and security staff) although one team leader told inspectors he had not been provided with a job description when he started in the role.

**5.95** Inspectors observed that, despite these job descriptions, the lines between the roles and responsibilities of contractor staff were not always clear in the delivery of the operation, as illustrated with the management of case records held at the hotels. Team leaders told inspectors that it was the responsibility of care workers to record safeguarding concerns that they had observed in a child's (paper) file, whereas care workers stated that if they had concerns, they would inform the team leaders, who would then record this in the file. A nurse also told inspectors that they were concerned that care workers were not recording health concerns on young people's files.

**5.96** Electronic files, which include the information held in paper form in the hotels, are uploaded onto SharePoint (the Home Office system) and form part of the information shared with local authorities as part of the NTS process. While team leaders retained overall responsibility for uploading and updating information about the young people on SharePoint, social workers retained responsibility for uploading their assessments. Inspectors, in their onsite review of files, noted that there were no stated, expected timeframes for the uploading of these documents, and saw an example where an assessment undertaken a week previously still had not been uploaded. The team leader told inspectors that he was unable to chase the social worker for the assessment as he did not have the authority to supervise their work.

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<sup>39</sup> A Home Office team responsible for "promoting the section 55 children's duty and wider safeguarding responsibilities across the migration, borders, and citizenship directorates".

- 5.97** Inspectors spoke to a police officer who fulfilled the liaison role between the local authority, police, Home Office and hotel operations.<sup>40</sup> While he spoke positively about his role and the relationships he had built up with young people and staff, he told inspectors that he had not received any guidance or briefings from the Home Office about their expectations for his role and had no formal job description. Instead, he had developed his role based on his experience and “what I think is right”, though a formal job description was now being developed by the Home Office.
- 5.98** The inspection found there was confusion between the Home Office, police and security staff on expectations. For example, there were multiple SOPs in place regarding security, i.e., a Home Office document and secondary documents by the security company for each hotel. The Home Office SOP implies the security teams provide a presence only and to report incidents to a team leader and, where necessary, the emergency services. A Home Office operational manager told inspectors that security staff should just be protecting access to the hotel and police would be called only to de-escalate an incident, whereas the expectations of the police were for the security staff to be “giving clear instructions to tell people to leave”. Inspectors found that the police liaison officer had never been shown the Home Office SOP, simply being told: “they are in place”, and thus was given no opportunity to feed into its development. Nonetheless, he had briefed the onsite security supervisors with his own expectations based on his experience, including passing on learning points from previous incidents.

## Training

- 5.99** Inspectors reviewed the training and briefing materials delivered to contractor staff which comprised a series of Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs), PowerPoint presentations and briefing documents on a range of topics and processes. The Staff Mandatory Safeguarding Briefings SOP states that it is the responsibility of all team leaders to ensure all contractor staff are familiar with the SOPs, safeguarding presentations and guidance, and the senior practitioner is responsible for delivering the training, assisted as necessary by the social workers based in the hotel. Training should be delivered on a quarterly basis, though due to the turnover of staff and short notice of shifts, not all had received their training. Inspectors spoke to care workers across all 4 hotels who had mixed experiences of the training they had received, resulting in staff having an inconsistent awareness of processes. Only some care workers stated that they had received an induction prior to starting work in the hotels. While all the care workers indicated that they had previous experience of care work, not all were familiar with the particular needs of asylum-seeking young people or received any sensitisation sessions prior to starting work. None of the care workers that inspectors spoke to had attended a training session delivered by a senior practitioner or social worker.
- 5.100** Similarly, team leaders had received a mixed level of training, with several stating they had not received any initial induction training before starting their role, one stating that he had not received any formal training at all and another stating that they had done some online training only.
- 5.101** Team leaders told inspectors that they used the daily shift briefing to cascade information to staff and to direct staff to the relevant guidance or briefing document. All care workers stated that the daily shift briefing, delivered by the team leader, was the method by which information or policy changes were communicated to staff, as well as providing updates on individual young people. One team leader stated that they leave the relevant information in the staff recreation

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<sup>40</sup> The officer was also responsible for a similar liaison role with Napier Barracks in Folkestone which is currently used to house adult asylum seekers.

space for them to read and staff are required to sign it as evidence that they have done so. He stated that the 'transient nature' of the workforce makes it hard to ensure all staff are fully up-to-date with policies and procedures. Inspectors, noting that a transient workforce requires greater assurance of training, did not see clear evidence that a robust system was in place to assure the Home Office that all contractor staff were up to date with their training.

## Oversight

- 5.102** Inspectors were told by a senior manager that team leaders, although supplied by the agency, had been brought onto the Home Office's systems and were Home Office staff; though the team leaders told inspectors they were not Home Office staff but were employed by, and were staff of, an employment agency. Team leaders in all 4 hotels also told inspectors that they had 2 'bosses' – their agency who dealt with employment issues, and the Home Office for operational issues.
- 5.103** One team leader stated that it was hard to "get rid of poor (care) staff" as there is a limited pool of available staff, with another saying the "agency tell us they have to be fair to the people on their books". This was made more problematic by the fact they were themselves employed by the same agency. In contrast, a team leader based in a different hotel was confident that poor staff could be changed by the agency, though they had not yet had cause to request this. Home Office staff, in discussions with inspectors, were clear that team leaders could ask the agencies to provide alternative staff if required.
- 5.104** Inspectors observed different practices and contracts at each of the 4 hotels. A Home Office operations manager told inspectors that oversight of the operation across the 4 hotels was continuing to develop but that more work was required to ensure clear accountability for, and consistency of, the delivery of the contract. The absence of defined standards, and therefore an effective mechanism for assessing if the quality of the care provided to the young people met this standard, made this work challenging. Home Office staff were not always clear on the expectations and deliverables in each contract, nor what should be happening in each location. The senior operational manager told inspectors that they had been brought in to bring rigour and consistency to the operation and to ensure that staff knew what was expected of them. Despite this, at interview, it was clear that the Home Office staff charged with monitoring the contracts still did not have sufficiently robust oversight of the operation. For example, an operations manager told inspectors that there was 'a gap' in the monitoring of health and safety assurance checks in the hotels and they did not know who was assuring that the required health and safety checks were being conducted.
- 5.105** The Operational Manual, drafted 20 March 2022, included details of the assurance processes, including site visits by the UASC Management Team and reference to SharePoint which enables Home Office staff "to 'dip test' documents and logs uploaded by the Team Leaders or Social Workers". Inspectors observed Home Office staff onsite and spoke to others who had visited previously – the extent to which they held contractor staff accountable for delivery was not always clear – one could not recall the names of the hotels she had visited, despite these visits occurring in late 2021.
- 5.106** The Home Office's position statement provided to inspectors indicated that: "All staff interacting with UASC have DBS [Disclosure and Barring Service] clearance". Inspectors were not provided with an SOP or contract requirement that set out the Home Office's expectations for the DBS checking of staff residing in hotels (such as receptionists) but had sight of an email dated 24 March 2022 sent by Home Office Commercial that stated:

“The Hotel staff, as part of their contractual obligation, have to ensure that their staff are security vetted. However, as part of the UASC requirement, if an individual is required to stay overnight or have live in staff at the hotel, we requested that this individual have enhanced DBS checks conducted.”

- 5.107** Inspectors found, through the course of their onsite visits, the presence of non-DBS cleared hotel staff residing in 2 of the hotels. In the Folkestone hotel, 3 members of staff were living permanently in the basement, one of whom was also visited by a child (under the age of 10) though the team leader was unaware the child was on the premises. All of these adults had access to the hotel’s master keys which were not locked away, though they were covered by CCTV. When inspectors highlighted their concerns with the team leader, they were told that, while there were no plans to DBS check these individuals, there was a protocol in place which meant that they were escorted by care workers whenever they need access to young people’s rooms. Subsequently, at interview on 21 April 2022, inspectors were told by a Home Office senior manager that they had not been aware that these resident hotel staff had not been DBS checked, that the situation was unacceptable and that they took the matter seriously. Applications for DBS checks were subsequently submitted (and remained outstanding at the time of drafting). The staff continued to reside at the hotel while the checks were being undertaken.
- 5.108** On 26 April 2022, inspectors visited a hotel in Hythe. During the visit, inspectors were informed that the hotel had 4 staff (maintenance worker, cleaner, night manager and receptionist) residing in the hotel, none of whom had been DBS cleared. As in the Folkestone hotel, inspectors were assured that a protocol was in place which meant that the staff never visited a room alone. A team leader told inspectors that they were informed by the Home Office “a couple of weeks ago” that these staff had not been DBS cleared and that the paperwork to have the checks conducted had been completed “a couple of days ago”. Here, as in Folkestone, the staff were able to continue living onsite while the checks were being undertaken. The Disclosure and Barring Service website states that an enhanced DBS check takes 6 weeks to be completed.<sup>41</sup> The hotels in Eastbourne and Brighton have no hotel staff residing on the premises. Inspectors were told that staff employed by the hotel in Eastbourne have had DBS checks organised by their employer but that the Home Office has never asked to see proof of the checks.
- 5.109** A Home Office senior manager told inspectors that the DBS requirement for hotel staff had not been included in the contracts that the Home Office had agreed with the hotels, noting it was a “mixed economy”, and there were different approaches taken to the issue by each hotel. Inspectors were told that it is now the intention of the Home Office that all staff working in the hotels should be DBS cleared and that the Home Office was working towards achieving this. However, at interview and in follow-up correspondence, it appeared that the senior operational manager did not have the full picture as to which hotel staff, located in which hotel, had been DBS checked.

## Continuous improvement

- 5.110** Contractor and Home Office staff were able to identify both small, and significant, changes they would like to make to the operation. These ranged from having social workers onsite constantly, including overnight, to amending the wording of assessment forms. Aspirations to escalate or enact these changes were limited and staff often qualified their suggestions by

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-check-applicant-criminal-record/get-a-standard-or-enhanced-dbs-check-for-an-employee>



commenting, variously that: this was not a space the Home Office wanted to be in; the goal was to withdraw from hotels as soon as possible; it wasn't appropriate for the Home Office to provide these services as it was a temporary measure. While the Senior Civil Servant (SCS) was clear that staff should feel empowered to improve provision, and to request changes as she was usually happy to approve them, she observed the team may be restricting themselves in terms of the suggestions they made.

- 5.111** Management information which would help inform further improvements to the operation was being collected; however, the repository for this information, the Safeguarding Hub, had insufficient capacity to analyse the information and draw out any relevant themes or best practice.

## Design

### Approach

- 5.112** The development of the operation to house young people in hotels was informed by advice and input from the Department for Education, and visits by the Children's Commissioner, Barnardo's and Médecins Sans Frontières. The latter concluded, in August 2021: "we were impressed with the operational effective[ness] of the team onsite."
- 5.113** From within the Home Office, input was sought from the Safeguarding Advice and Children's Champion. Their advice ranged from the design of services, contributions to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the drafting of guidance. Through interviews with Home Office staff, it became clear there was a perceived shift in how the advice from the SACC was interpreted, and utilised by operational staff as the use of hotels continued, from food standards to the provision of CCTV.
- 5.114** The Home Office had recognised, early on in the process, that the hotels would require specialist, external staffing. The operational management plan sets out the roles of all those involved, and the mechanisms by which information is shared between contractor staff and Home Office staff, though this was only drafted in March 2022.
- 5.115** The Home Office's written evidence did not include an overarching vision or statement of commitment, and there was limited reference to the expected standards of the operation, beyond the basics sketched out in the contracts. The extent to which an assessment had been undertaken to ascertain the shape of the operation was hard to establish. Advice provided by external organisations in terms of issues to consider appear to have been only partially incorporated into the operational model.
- 5.116** No evidence was provided about the Home Office's engagement with the young people housed in the hotels to enable them to input or shape the design or implementation of the operation. While the young people were provided feedback forms (in English) at the end of their stay and complaints boxes were available across the hotels, there was no thorough or effective mechanism in place to ensure that their views were taken on board. At the factual accuracy stage, the Home Office stated that "the social workers in Hove and Eastbourne, at the end of their initial assessments ask about their [young people's] feedback using a template of questions of their hotel experience and address this at their daily morning Care Team led team briefings." The initial assessment is usually undertaken within 24 hours of a young person's arrival at a hotel. The 'initial assessment questions' template provided in evidence by the Home Office did not include any questions about the child's experience of the hotel.

- 5.117** The evolving nature of the operation has meant that the services, structures and approach have been developed in a reactive, as required, manner. This led to inspectors' concerns that gaps may have developed in the extent to which the operation safeguards young people and actively promotes their wellbeing. One member of Home Office staff commented: "As nothing has gone wrong there is complacency. But, if something does go wrong, we don't have a leg to stand on."
- 5.118** A lessons learned exercise, 'RASI [Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration] Lessons Learned UASC Hotels October 2021' had been conducted, though the identity of the team/author who carried out this work is unclear. It drew from workshops held in October 2021 with "staff, C2K, [Hove 1], Mitie and Refugee council [sic]" and focused attention on 4 key areas: "Role of the Home Office and other government departments; People; Partnership Working; Processes". The review made 10 recommendations. Recommendation 10 stated: "Alongside the use of management tools, there should be an agreed set of parameters which articulate what good looks like for the UASC and enables us to consistently measure and address performance via an oversight board." An update on the implementation of this recommendation, dated March 2022, noted:
- "Agree KPIs [key performance indicators] and reporting at the outset. Reporting template developed – weekly written reporting to commence asap with development of operational and business support team."
- 5.119** Progress on the realisation of this activity was unclear.

## Impact on staff

- 5.120** Across the board, all Home Office staff with whom inspectors spoke were clear that this was not an area in which they were comfortable operating – "The biggest challenge is the cultural challenge – an immigration service caring for children". Although they had approached the task with care and consideration, they made it clear that they did not believe the Home Office was the right agency to undertake this work. The Senior Civil Servant drew inspectors' attention to the use of the ethical decision-making model,<sup>42</sup> introduced as a result of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, and commented that the team had, from the start, reflected on how they felt, professionally and personally, and discussed the ethics of the situation. The RASI lessons learned document reflected this assertion, noting the need to recognise that: "the work with children is emotionally taxing and relentless and ensure sufficient staffing levels to enable staff to maintain resilience". At interview, staff from a number of teams highlighted the negative personal impact this work had had, particularly on their workload.

## Absence of statutory responsibility

- 5.121** Recognising the context in which the decision to use hotels to house young people was made, and the Department's aspiration for the measure to be temporary, it is unsurprising that the Home Office has not developed an official policy for the use of hotels to house young people. Correspondence in autumn 2021, between the Home Secretary and the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC), and officials' appearances before the HASC, provided some sense of the parameters of the Home Office's position. Most notable is the fact that neither the Home Office, nor the local authorities where the hotels are located, hold statutory responsibility for these young people.

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<sup>42</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1032399/The\\_Ethical\\_Decision-Making\\_Model.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1032399/The_Ethical_Decision-Making_Model.pdf)



- 5.122** Local authorities and stakeholders raised with the Home Office and with inspectors their disquiet about the consequences of this: these young people were not considered to be ‘Looked After Children’ and were therefore prevented from accessing the relevant safeguards this status affords under the Children Act 1989, such as being allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer, and the development of a care plan of the child’s needs. Local authorities were live to this gap and were working with the Home Office to ensure, in as much as they were able, that young people were afforded the same safeguarding as that provided to a ‘Looked After Child’ for whom they are usually responsible; however, some services, such as those noted above, could not be provided until placement. The SCS acknowledged that these young people did not receive their legal entitlements, and indicated that this was a key driver for the Home Office ceasing the use of hotels as promptly as possible.
- 5.123** The ‘UASC hotels’ risk register provided to inspectors, dated March 2022, includes the risk of “Failing to meet Statutory responsibility in looking after Children”, rated as black (most serious), and subsequently highlighted as a key strategic risk through RASI risk management. The Home Office considered the implication of this risk was: “...that the Home Office is assuming statutory responsibility for young people, which should be assumed by the local authority”. Mitigation includes working with Department for Education (DfE), plans to stop using hotels, ensuring ministers are sighted on the risks, and the vigorous pursuit of care placements for young people. Initial concerns about this risk appear on the issues log of the risk register on 12 August 2021:
- “18/8 [SCS] confirmed we are running a childrens homes and committing a criminal offence but relying on the defence of necessity. The mitigation is to stop doing this, hence exit strategy with KCC and potential mandation [sic] of the NTS. ACTION: Advice is going to ministers.”
- 5.124** The lack of statutory responsibility had particular consequences for young people who were approaching their 18th birthday. In order to become a ‘Looked After’ child and therefore be able to access support post-18, a young person must have arrived in the UK 13 weeks before their 18th birthday; however, the ‘clock’ on the 13 weeks doesn’t start on arrival at the hotel, but rather when a young person is placed with a local authority. A senior manager stated that, for young people where this might be an issue, the Home Office ensures that when a young person receives their placement, they are provided with funding for leaving care support.<sup>43</sup>
- 5.125** One stakeholder raised concerns about the status of the Home Office in this context, arguing that the Department was operating beyond its remit:
- “the entry Local Authority is responsible for accommodating and supporting that child until a transfer takes place, if a transfer is deemed to be in their best interests. The SSHD [Secretary of State for the Home Dept.] does not have any powers to carry out this duty on behalf of entry local authorities and by doing so is enabling the unlawful refusal of entry authorities to comply with their statutory duties towards UASC arriving into their area.”
- 5.126** Stakeholders raised concerns that the Home Office was operating unregistered children’s homes, in contravention of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, which prohibited the placement of children under 16 in unregulated settings. The Home Office perceived this risk to constitute unregulated children’s homes and highlighted this in the UASC risk register, rated red, stating:

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<sup>43</sup> This support includes a personal advisor, pathway plan and access to a bursary for education.  
<https://www.gov.uk/leaving-foster-or-local-authority-care>

“RISK: There is a risk that exit strategy options to exit out of UASC hotels back to LA responsibility [sic] may not achieve the outcome in time for intake surges in spring.

IMPLICATION(S):Continued legal and statutory responsibility [sic] that LA may not take back and HO continues to run UASC hotels without any statutory [sic] responsibility.. 9th Sept we will be breaking the law and continuing [sic] to run unregulated children’s homes and continuing to expose HO to illegal activity, burnout and trauma.”

- 5.127** The mitigation provided focused on commencing conversations with local authorities, ministerial intervention, and a documented exit plan shared with policy and legal teams, though additional comments noted that this risk was now an issue as a result of increased arrivals in March 2022.
- 5.128** As these hotels were not considered children’s homes, they were not subject to the statutory oversight provided by Ofsted. In an interview, the Senior Civil Servant emphasised that the Home Office was open to scrutiny, noting that the Children’s Commissioner and the Department for Education were sighted on the operation, and commented that it was not just a Home Office effort but a cross-governmental response to a particular challenge.

## Relationships with local authorities

- 5.129** Local authorities in the areas where the hotels were located were not informed of the Home Office’s intentions to house young people in hotels in their areas. In the case of Brighton and Hove, 24 hours’ notice was given, and the local authority and police were not consulted on the suitability of the hotel or its location. In the case of East Sussex, the local authority was made aware of Home Office plans in November 2021, and the first hotel opened the following month. Engagement between local authorities, and between local authorities and the Home Office, are facilitated by the Strategic Migration Partnership. Inspectors met the local Strategic Migration Partnerships and key leaders within the relevant local authorities. All highlighted their concerns about the lack of statutory responsibility for the young people and the knock-on effect this had on the young people’s ability to access services.

## Exit strategy

- 5.130** Senior Home Office staff indicated that exiting from the use of hotels was a priority. However, while there were some limited references to plans to encourage local authorities to develop reception centres, similar to that run by Kent County Council and their Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS), it was unclear how much progress had been made. The RASI lessons learned recommendation update indicated that a “solution enabling [the] exit of hotels during seasonal surge of 2022 increasingly unlikely.”
- 5.131** Contractor staff in hotels similarly lacked clarity on the future plans of the Home Office, and a number indicated they thought the hotels were shutting in the coming months. This lack of certainty over the length of the operation was a cause for concern for some staff, who had limited assurance as to how long they would be employed. One team leader commented:

“... We’ve been unsettled in the last 6 weeks by under resourcing at C2K and there have been real issues with knowing rotas. Sometimes you don’t know if you’re working tomorrow. It’s pretty poor for our wellbeing.

Home Office staff can be insensitive about our different level of job security. For example, the Home Office said “No YPs in [hotel], great we’ll close it down” with [hotel] managers on

the call. This is very demotivating and unpleasant to hear. We should have more notice of changes, and more certainty whether things are going to continue...

...if there are no YPs we've got no clarity about what would happen if the hotel was mothballed. That's bad for us, but worse for support workers who'd be out of work tomorrow."

**5.132** Home Office staff acknowledged the predicted number of migrants via small boats, considered to be around 65,000 in 2022, but could not articulate how they saw the Home Office managing this volume of arrivals or provide evidence of a deliverable alternative solution.

## National Transfer Scheme

**5.133** Inspectors did not consider, in detail, the operation of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) except to review the length of stays of young people. Under the NTS, by the end of February 2022, a total of 889 young people housed in hotels had been placed in 142 local authorities, 498 had been placed in Kent Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS), 4 had been reunited with their families, and 22 had turned 18 and been moved to adult initial accommodation, as set out in Figure 10.

Figure 10:  
Outcomes for young people housed in hotels, July 2021 – February 2022.

Month	Family reunion	Initial adult accommodation <sup>44</sup>	Kent Reception and Safe Care Service	Local authority placement	TOTAL young people in hotels
July 2021	0	3	0	0	91
Aug. 2021	0	0	0	0	191
Sep. 2021	0	0	73	51	196
Oct. 2021	0	1	85	57	148
Nov. 2021	0	1	103	58	329
Dec. 2021	3	3	98	128	194
Jan. 2022	1	12	75	70	102
Feb. 2022	0	2	64	27	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>1,281</b>

**5.134** The mandating of the NTS, meaning that all local authorities now must accept young people seeking asylum, in December 2021, had not led to a significant reduction in lengths of stays due to the increase in young people who arrived in November who required placements, and the impact of the Christmas break on available working days. The NTS Protocol sets out that transfers should take place within 10 working days of referral to the NTS. Social workers and Home Office staff told inspectors that they had a process of escalating cases where a young person had been waiting for a longer period to be transferred, was vulnerable or young (under the age of 16). However, overall, the average timescale for the placement of young people under 16 was only one day less than those aged over 16.

<sup>44</sup> Where a child turns 18 and is housed in a hotel, they are no longer eligible for the NTS and are moved to adult hotel accommodation.

**5.135** Staff across the hotels told inspectors that the young people persistently asked when they would be moved on from the hotel, and that this was a source of ongoing anxiety. Inspectors queried the material provided to the young people which explained the NTS process to them and were referred to a PowerPoint presentation developed by social workers and the Safeguarding Advice and Children's Champion team (SACC). This presentation, delivered at hotels to groups of young people by social workers, had been developed in March 2022. Inspectors observed this presentation being given to one group of young people in a hotel and noted formal interpreter services were not used (a security guard interpreted for an Arabic speaking male and a member of care staff, who happened to speak Pashto, helped interpret for an Afghan young person). The written material was, according to a social worker, similarly in the process of being translated. A written briefing on the NTS was available to staff working in the hotels (dated October 2021) and included 'Lines for YP's' to manage their expectations. Some limited information about the NTS was also provided in the UASC Information Cards pack for young people; however, neither staff nor young people mentioned sight of these cards at any of the hotels, nor did inspectors observe any copies of this pack in the hotels.

# Annex A: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (until 2012, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency) was established by the UK Borders Act 2007. Sections 48–56 of the UK Borders Act 2007 (as amended) provide the legislative framework for the inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality and customs by the Home Secretary and by any person exercising such functions on her behalf. The legislation empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on and make recommendations about all such functions, in particular:

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar activities
- the procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- the law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 (c. 74) (exception for immigration functions)
- the procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of offences
- the procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints; and
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom, which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials.

In addition, the legislation enables the Secretary of State to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to her in writing in relation to specified matters.

The legislation requires the Independent Chief Inspector to report in writing to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State lays all reports before Parliament, which she has committed to do within 8 weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full except for any material that the Secretary of State determines is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security or where publication might jeopardise an individual's safety, in which case the legislation permits the Secretary of State to omit the relevant passages from the published report.

As soon as a report has been laid in Parliament, it is published on the Inspectorate's website, together with the Home Office's response to the report and recommendations.

# Annex B: ICIBI's 'expectations'

**Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use (e.g. statements of intent (both ministerial and managerial), impact assessments, legislation, policies, guidance, instructions, strategies, business plans, intranet and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)**

- They are written in plain, unambiguous English (with foreign language versions available, where appropriate)
- They are kept up to date
- They are readily accessible to anyone who needs to rely on them (with online signposting and links, wherever possible)

**Processes are simple to follow and transparent**

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined
- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets)

**Anyone exercising an immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function on behalf of the Home Secretary is fully competent**

- Individuals understand their role, responsibilities, accountabilities and powers
- Everyone receives the training they need for their current role and for their professional development, plus regular feedback on their performance
- Individuals and teams have the tools, support and leadership they need to perform efficiently, effectively and lawfully
- Everyone is making full use of their powers and capabilities, including to prevent, detect, investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute offences
- The workplace culture ensures that individuals feel able to raise concerns and issues without fear of the consequences

## **Decisions and actions are ‘right first time’**

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led
- They are made in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance
- They are reasonable (in light of the available evidence) and consistent
- They are recorded and communicated accurately, in the required format and detail, and can be readily retrieved (with due regard to data protection requirements)

## **Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly ‘put right’**

- Safeguards, management oversight, and quality assurance measures are in place, are tested and are seen to be effective
- Complaints are handled efficiently, effectively and consistently
- Lessons are learned and shared, including from administrative reviews and litigation
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement, including by the prompt implementation of recommendations from reviews, inspections and audits

## **Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System) ‘owner’**

- The BICS ‘owner’ is accountable for:
- implementation of relevant policies and processes
- performance (informed by routine collection and analysis of management information (MI) and data, and monitoring of agreed targets/deliverables/budgets)
- resourcing (including workforce planning and capability development, including knowledge and information management)
- managing risks (including maintaining a risk register)
- communications, collaborations and deconfliction within the Home Office, with other government departments and agencies, and other affected bodies
- effective monitoring and management of relevant contracted out services
- stakeholder engagement (including customers, applicants, claimants and their representatives)



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