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Sent: Thur 15/07/2021 5:31:16 PM (UTC)

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Subject: Letter to the Home Secretary

Home Secretary,

Matthew and I have had a difficult, but privileged day visiting the incredible frontline staff in Kent. Coming new into the Migration and Borders space, I have been struck by the dedication, drive and professionalism of the staff working here. They are working in the most difficult of contexts. The operational challenge here is immense – Matthew and I witnessed first-hand the crowded atrium and Refugee Council areas at Kent Intake Unit, and I'm concerned that these facilities are very clearly not ideal for vulnerable children. There are no beds here, limited options to provide proper social and healthcare provision and we are reliant on the willingness of Refugee Council to continue running their service. This isn't guaranteed, but Home Office staff have been excellent at maintaining a close dialogue with the Refugee Council at all levels, and I will be speaking with their CEO tomorrow to support these efforts.

We need to be careful about the Legal Professional Privilege Legal Professional Privilege Legal Professional Privilege I am very concerned about the numbers here. There are currently 55 UASCs at KIU, the longest of whom has been here for 6 days. Three UASCs have left our care without authorisation and there are further UASCs who arrived but have not shown up at KIU. I feel we must now take action to address the immediate LPP LPP reputational risk we are carrying.

I'm pleased that Minister Philp agrees that the direct procurement of accommodation for UASCs using our prerogative powers is a good option. The caveat here is that this is unlikely to be enough on its own, Legal Professional Privilege I therefore do support the Department's position to insert an emergency mandatory backstop into the NTS - the current dire situation in Kent does present an exceptional justification to add in this provision. This will not change the voluntary principles behind the new NTS, and is not an immediate solution given the steps necessary to implement, but instead will give us a way to manage exceptional numbers of UASCs on weeks like this one and will hopefully act to influence more immediate support from Kent County Council. It is also true that the threat of us beginning an emergency backstop may be enough to bring some LAs on board and stabilise things so that going forwards we don't need to call on this backstop.

I am clear that the asylum system as a whole needs significant whole system reform. I am determined that we will deliver that for you. However, we do need to take some difficult decisions now to address what is actually happening on the ground today, to free ourselves to focus on your longer term goals.

Tricia

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