

07 November 2023

**Our Ref: FOI 187**

## **Request**

We received your request on 10 October 2023 for the following information:

*According to the latest Home Office figures (end June 2023), we understand that there are 3,348 people in asylum seeking households living in Northern Ireland. The UK government's stated plan is to speed up decision making on asylum claims so as to "abolish the backlog of initial asylum decisions" by end 2023; in August the Home Office also changed its policy towards newly-recognised refugees, reducing the "notice to quit" period for leaving their asylum accommodation from 28 days to a minimum of just 7 days. We are concerned that this change, applied to an increasing number of newly recognised refugees, is resulting in increased homelessness here. We seek the following information:*

*1/ How many asylum seeker households in NI have been served 'notice to quit' their asylum accommodation since the beginning of August 2023? How many of these came after a positive decision granting them refugee status?*

*2/ What procedures are in place for notifying NIHE and other authorities of people's change in status? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

*3/ What are the relevant procedures or plans for handling evictions from asylum accommodation linked to refugee status decisions? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

*4/ Which actors are involved in such evictions? (Landlords, Mears Group, PSNI, public bodies, other?)*

*5/ How have the Home Office / Mears Group / NI authorities (TEO, DFC, NIHE) prepared for / allocated resources to address such evictions and the subsequent accommodation needs of the people affected? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

## **Our response**

*1/ How many asylum seeker households in NI have been served 'notice to quit' their asylum accommodation since the beginning of August 2023? How many of these came after a positive decision granting them refugee status?*

The Housing Executive do not hold this information.

*2/ What procedures are in place for notifying NIHE and other authorities of people's change in status? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

Following a successful claim for asylum, individuals that have been granted leave to remain in the UK will receive notice of this from the Home Office (UKVI). They will also receive a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) from UKVI confirming the grant of leave to remain and a letter confirming that asylum support will come to an end on a specified date. In Northern Ireland the household will also receive a Notice to Quit their accommodation from Mears Housing.

The Housing Executive would then receive a referral from Mears to advise of the decision and the Notice to Quit the accommodation. The Housing Executive would then make contact with the individual(s) to determine their needs and intentions for housing and any statutory homelessness duties. Where the household is choosing to remain in Northern Ireland a homelessness assessment will be completed by the local Housing Solutions and Support Team.

The Housing Executive holds a weekly meeting with the Mears Group to monitor cases that have been granted leave to remain and have been given notice to quit their accommodation. These meetings are used to confirm move on arrangements and to try and manage a smooth transition from asylum seeker accommodation to alternative accommodation including temporary accommodation provided under homelessness duties. These are operational meetings that discuss individual cases and a minute is not recorded.

*3/ What are the relevant procedures or plans for handling evictions from asylum accommodation linked to refugee status decisions? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

The Housing Executive do not hold this information.

*4/ Which actors are involved in such evictions? (Landlords, Mears Group, PSNI, public bodies, other?)*

The Housing Executive do not hold this information.

*5/ How have the Home Office / Mears Group / NI authorities (TEO, DFC, NIHE) prepared for / allocated resources to address such evictions and the subsequent accommodation needs of the people affected? Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence / guidelines / agreements / minutes / notes / similar.*

The Housing Executive would have a statutory duty to respond where there is reason to believe that an individual may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days. The Housing Executive would seek to investigate homelessness against the tests of eligibility, homelessness, priority need and intentionality. Where temporary accommodation is required, the Housing Executive will provide this in line with statutory duties.

The Housing Executive meets at a strategic and operational level with a number of statutory and voluntary/community partners to discuss issues linked to asylum seekers and refugees including accommodation needs and this informs service planning. The key groups are detailed below and minutes can be obtained through the chairs:

<b>Meeting Title</b>	<b>Chair</b>
Strategic Planning Group for Refugees and Asylum Seekers	The Executive Office
The Regional Delivery Group	The Home Office
Tactical Delivery Group	The Executive Office
Northern Ireland Governance Meeting	The Home Office

The Housing Executive has established a Refugee Integration Team to assist with managing the transition for individuals from Asylum Seeker to refugee with a specific focus on accommodation. Contact is made with individuals that have been granted leave to remain in order to understand needs and preferences for accommodation. Where homelessness assistance is required the case is triaged to the relevant Housing Solutions Team for case management and completion of homelessness assessments and housing applications. The Refugee Integration Team would have oversight of the move on from Mears accommodation to accommodation provided under statutory homelessness duties. The team would also hold information sessions in Mears contingency accommodation to provide generic advice on housing options in advance of asylum decisions and to discuss individual cases where leave to remain has been granted.

This concludes our response.