

Update on the status of accommodation being provided by Serco to former Asylum Seekers in Glasgow

Wednesday 12 June

- Programme to return properties to owners to start in coming weeks
- Serco to donate £150,000 to support charities caring for homeless in Glasgow

Serco is currently contracted by the Home Office to provide housing and support services for asylum seekers in Scotland. We are also, and at our own expense, providing free housing to several hundred former asylum seekers who have had their asylum claims refused and who no longer receive Government funding towards their housing. We have been advised by the Home Office that most of these people have exhausted all avenues of appeal and no longer have the right to remain in the UK. Notwithstanding their legal status, in recent years we have not always insisted people leave their properties when their Government support stops, in order that they have some time to make alternative arrangements. This pro bono support has been costing Serco around £1m per year.

About a year ago it became clear that our approach was not sustainable, as the numbers of people refusing to move on, and the length of time they were staying, was increasing rapidly. In July 2018 we started a more active process to encourage people to relocate, but subsequently suspended the process in the face of legal challenges to our right to change locks. Whilst we were very confident that what we were doing was lawful, we also felt that it important that this be seen to be the case and for it to be confirmed by the Courts. We now have that legal certainty following a comprehensive judgement in Serco's favour delivered in the Court of Session by Lord Tyre in April.

In January, Serco was informed by the Home Office that it had been unsuccessful in its bid to supply accommodation for asylum seekers in Scotland from 2019 onwards, and by the end of September 2019 we will no longer have any people providing housing services in Glasgow, neither will we have a licence to provide accommodation. Accordingly, in the coming months we are going to have to return all the housing we rent in Glasgow to its owners at the end of the leases. We will therefore be restarting our lock-change programme so that properties may be returned to their owners with vacant possession in accordance with our contractual obligations.

This is not a step we have taken lightly; we have explored many alternative solutions over the past twelve months, and we have been working with Glasgow City Council (GCC), the Home Office and the third sector to explore different ways forward. Ultimately, for many of the people concerned, the best solution may be the

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Assisted Voluntary Return Scheme under which the Home Office supports people who have lost their right to remain in the UK and need help to return to their home country.

To help what is likely to be an increased burden on voluntary organisations, Serco will be making up to £150,000 available to charities supporting the homeless in the Glasgow area. When people leave their properties, we will point them towards alternative sources of support.

Although the exact number of people we are looking after varies, at the moment we are providing free housing to around 300 people. Almost all are single adult men and women, and no children will be left without housing. The lock-change programme will be rolled out in a phased manner over the next four months, with no more than 30 people being issued with lock-change notices in any one week and people will be given at least 21 days notice so they can make alternative arrangements. We will continue to work with the Home Office, Glasgow City Council and charities to mitigate the impact of this programme in the months ahead, and we expect the number of people who need to move to fall steadily as we work with the Home Office and other parties to find alternative solutions which might include re-instatement of Government support or people making their own arrangements to return to their home countries.

Julia Rogers, Serco's Managing Director, Immigration, said: "We very much regret the distress this will cause, but hope that it will be understood that we cannot be expected to provide free housing indefinitely to hundreds of people who have been unsuccessful in their asylum claims and most of whom have no legal right to remain in the UK. We call on all parties to work with us constructively to help people navigate their way through to a new future beyond the asylum system, and we will be making funds available to charities to support this work."

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About Serco

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