



Response Form – Cap on Safe and Legal Routes Consultation

About you

Full name	John Littlemore
Job title or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Local authority (or equivalent) represented	Maidstone Borough Council
Date	27-11-2023
Postcode	ME15 6JQ



Responses

Ahead of responding, please familiarise yourself with the consultation paper, with particular regard to the “Instructions for completing the questionnaire” section.

Question	Response
Q1: What organisations (including VCS organisations, and community sponsorship groups) in your area have you engaged with while compiling your response and have you included the responses received from these organisations in your local authority consolidated response?	Kent County Council Other Kent Local Housing Authorities YMCA Maidstone Mind Making A Difference Maidstone Salvation Army Maidstone
Q2: What is your capacity to house and support those coming through safe and legal routes under the cap in calendar year 2025?	Zero



Q3: What evidence can you provide to support this (for example, number of properties that you have available or can procure)?

Maidstone Borough Council has supported the Government in addressing this issue by providing homes through our Housing Register and under the Local Authority Housing Fund by providing new housing for 22 refugee families.

However, current pressures on the Housing Service with record numbers of households having to be placed into temporary accommodation, larger households having to be placed out of area due to a lack of suitable accommodation locally. This position is reflected across the South East and the pressures Kent is experiencing has been reported to the South East Asylum Dispersal Governance Meeting on a number of occasions.

Since April 2023 we have received over 2,000 approaches for assistance with housing resulting in over 700 homeless applications being taken. Our innovative use of data analytics to prevent homelessness places us in the top quartile nationally for preventing homelessness but we experience an increasing demand for housing at the point of applicants being homeless on the day.

Nationally, housing associations across the UK are cutting back development programmes amid a “perfect storm” of inflation, higher interest rates and the soaring cost of debt. Registered housing providers are expected to cut their build pipelines by 22% in the short to medium term.

Our ability to assist applicants into the private rented market is severely curtailed by the disparity between the local housing allowance and market rents. As a result our use of temporary accommodation has more than trebled from 80 households 4 years ago to nearly 300 at present. This is particularly manifest for larger families with over 25% of those in TA requiring four-bedroom properties or larger that do not exist in the social housing sector. This has resulted in larger households staying disproportionately longer in TA and our experience to date suggests that many of the refugee households are



	<p>extended families that are seeking to be housed as one family unit, which is unachievable.</p> <p>This situation is not assisted by the large pull on our private rented accommodation by London Housing Authorities and other neighbouring Councils. One London Borough having purchased over 160 properties in our area to place their homeless applicants.</p> <p>The Town Centre in Maidstone hosts the largest concentration of supported accommodation in West Kent. This includes the only Kent Probation Approved Premises, which serves the whole of Kent. Other Probation Trusts also utilise accommodation in our locality for CAS3 accommodation.</p> <p>No account appears to have been taken of the demands on service arising from the Asylum Dispersal Scheme or how the existing allocation for dispersal will be met and what capacity there is to support these households.</p> <p>There is no identification in the consultation document to suggest that financial assistance will be provided to local housing authorities to meet the housing needs of this cohort.</p> <p>No account has been taken of existing unmet need e.g. Maidstone has one of the highest number of Ukrainian households with over 450 families placed in the Homes for Ukraine scheme.</p> <p>There is a lack of school places and General Practitioner capacity in our locality, particularly in the Town Centre where most out of area placements are made.</p>
<p>Q4: Of the above number, in 2025, how many of the following groups do you anticipate being able to</p>	<p>a. Complex Cases: 0</p>
	<p>b. Single people: 0</p>



accommodate, and ensure appropriate support is in place for:	c. Large families: 0
Q5: Of the above number, how many of these do you expect to come through the community sponsorship scheme in your area?	
Q6: The Resettlement Tariff and Community Sponsorship Funding provide the local authority with access to central funding for the purpose of supporting refugee integration. What impact has this funding had on your ability to resettle refugees in your area?	Although our VCS is motivated to help, our discussions have highlighted there will be sufficient capacity within the VCS regionally to support these vulnerable persons. It is unclear where the funding will go in two tier areas and who will be responsible for commissioning which services, which makes planning extremely difficult. No separate funding has been identified for housing costs.
Q7: There is no additional funding being introduced with the cap. How could the funding instructions be changed to maximise the existing funding, enabling innovation and increased delivery of services in your area?	



Q8: What impact do you assess the local provision of public services such as education, social care (adult and children) and healthcare has on your ability to resettle refugees in your area? Why do you assess this to be the case?

Kent County Council has confirmed that there is no capacity for school places within the urban settlements.

Where there is limited capacity, this is located in rural areas, which are by their nature are isolated and not conducive to supporting persons newly entering the UK into employment and establishing other networks.

Kent County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education notes that for new school development beyond 2024 the commissioning proposals are dependent on the pace of planned housing development being realised, which is by no means certain. The Plan recognises that Maidstone will experience an increase in school age population over the lifetime of the Commissioning Plan.

Kent County Council is struggling with the number of UASC placements in our locality and has taken the decision to end early the placement of former UASC children when they reach adulthood, further placing demands on an already stretched housing service.

Health Services are overwhelmed in our area. The majority of GP practices in Maidstone have the worst patient to GP ratio of all of West Kent, with one Town Centre practice having a ratio of 7,328 patients to a GP. We are aware that funding from Government in respect of Contingency Accommodation for asylum seekers is woefully inadequate to meet their needs many of whom have longstanding untreated conditions.

As part of the Asylum Dispersal governance arrangements, we have been lobbying the Home Office for over 12 months to develop a model to assess the cumulative impact on local housing authorities to the range of pressures and placements within our areas, despite assurances this has yet to be delivered and therefore limits the objective assessment of what is a fair settlement.



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Thank you for participating in this consultation.

Please send your response by midnight on 15 December 2023 to:
capconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk