

MEARS

Briefing on Mears
Delivery of AASC to
Shared City
Partnership



Agenda

- ▶ Key Definitions & The Refugee Journey
- ▶ AASC & AIRE Contracts
- ▶ MEARS Organisational Structure
- ▶ Dispersal Accommodation
- ▶ Contingency Accommodation
- ▶ MEARS Partnerships
- ▶ Safeguarding

Definitions of Asylum Seeker and Refugee Status



Asylum Seekers:

- Flee their homeland;
- Arrive in another country, whichever way they can;
- Make themselves known to the authorities;
- Submit an asylum application; and
- Have a legal right to stay in country while awaiting a decision
- Have no recourse to public funds;
- Usually no right to work (some are permitted if granted by Home Office and after 12 months of waiting for decision)



Refugees:

- Has proven to the authorities that they would be at risk if returned to their home country;
- Has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government; and
- Can now stay here either long-term or indefinitely;
- Entitled to same rights as a citizen;
- Recourse to public funds;
- Right to work

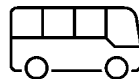
The Asylum Process



Asylum Seeker presents at HO in Belfast or Police Station



Initial assessment carried out by HO (Section 98)



Mears transports service user to contingency accommodation



HO approves service user to be moved to Dispersed Accommodation after checks (Section 95)



Mears supports service users introducing them to their new home and community and signposting to additional services and activities



HO continues with processing of assessment



HO reaches decision on application



If successful: status changes to Refugee status and under NIHE provision

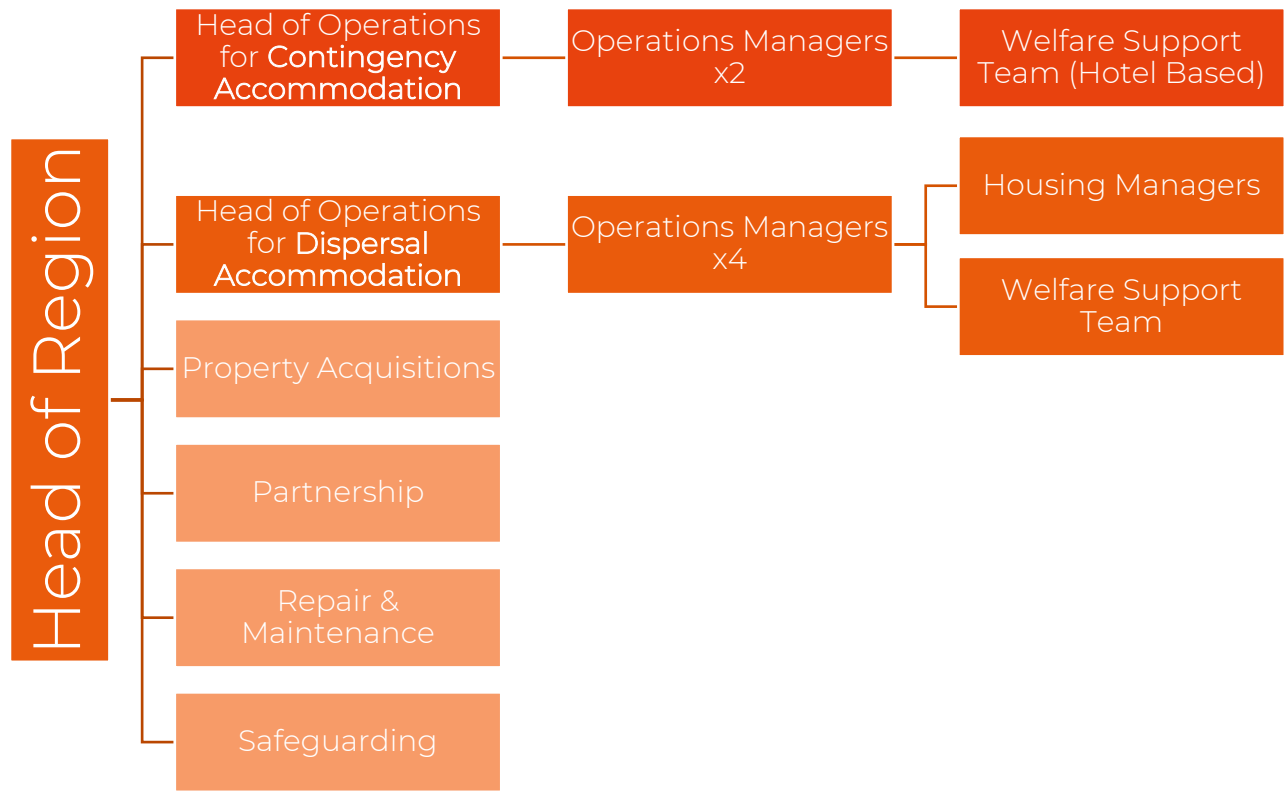
AASC and AIRE Contracts

- AASC Contract: Accommodation and Support Services Contract awarded to and delivered by Mears
- AIRE Contract: Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Contract awarded to and delivered by Migrant Help

The Asylum Accommodation & Support Contract

- AASC Contract awarded to Mears in **2019** and managed by Home Office over a period of **10 years**
- Provision of Housing and Support to families & individuals seeking asylum who are facing destitution
- The 2019 Contract placed greater emphasis in standards of homes, with **150 properties returned due to not meeting standards**
- Recognition of the unique needs & potential vulnerabilities of those using our service, with the implementation of a welfare support & signposting service

Organisational Structure



Dispersal Accommodation



- ▶ Dispersal Accommodation can be categorised into family homes and HMO Accommodation
- ▶ Housing stock consists of privately rented properties
- ▶ Families will receive an offer of accommodation from the Home Office following stay in hotel accommodation
- ▶ In 2022, Mears began to procure properties outside of Belfast due to ongoing demand; dispersal accommodation spans 7 Council Areas at present. However, Mears have approval to procure in all remaining council areas as of July 2024.
- ▶ A structure of Housing Management and Welfare Support provides wrap-around care for families and individuals living in our accommodation

Key provisions
for our residents
in **Dispersal**
accommodation
:

Suitable Housing: Family Homes
or HMO Accommodation

Asylum Payment of £49.18 per
week, per person

Utilities including electricity &
gas or oil

Essential inventory / furnishings

Allocated Welfare Support
Officer & Housing Manager

Housing Manager Role

- ▶ Monthly property visits to report any issues arising to Repair & Maintenance
- ▶ Relocations from contingency to dispersal accommodation
- ▶ Induction into property on arrival
- ▶ Pre-relocation 'Property Readiness' inspection

Welfare Support Role

- ▶ Welfare Check within 48h of arrival to dispersal property
- ▶ Signposting to key services including health, education & CVS
- ▶ Provision of Local Information Guide & other key resources
- ▶ Safeguarding & Escalation
- ▶ Managing caseload of complex cases – families & individuals with additional vulnerabilities

24/7, 365 days on-call rotation

Contingency Accommodation

Due to a rise in the number of new arrivals from 2021, within the context of unprecedented housing demand, Mears began to contract hotels & B&Bs to provide emergency initial accommodation for our service users.

Prior to this time, residents would have entered community housing immediately on arrival.

Number of hotels at height across NI: 22

Number of hotels at present across NI: 9



Key provisions
for our residents
in Contingency /
hotel-style
accommodation

:

Full room and board

Essential Toiletries

Asylum payment of £8.86 per
week, per person

Welfare Support Officer: on-
site for induction, signposting
to services, & safeguarding

Welfare Support in Hotel Accommodation

- ▶ Induction within 24 hours of arrival to property
- ▶ Signposting to Health, Education & CVS
- ▶ Provision of Local Information Guide & other key resources
- ▶ Safeguarding & Escalation
- ▶ Record-keeping & incident reporting

24/7, 365 days on-call rotation

Additionally:

- Facilitated GP registration for all residents (until August 24)
- Support with access to services including GP where language barrier is present
- Active engagement with partners delivering on-site in hotels

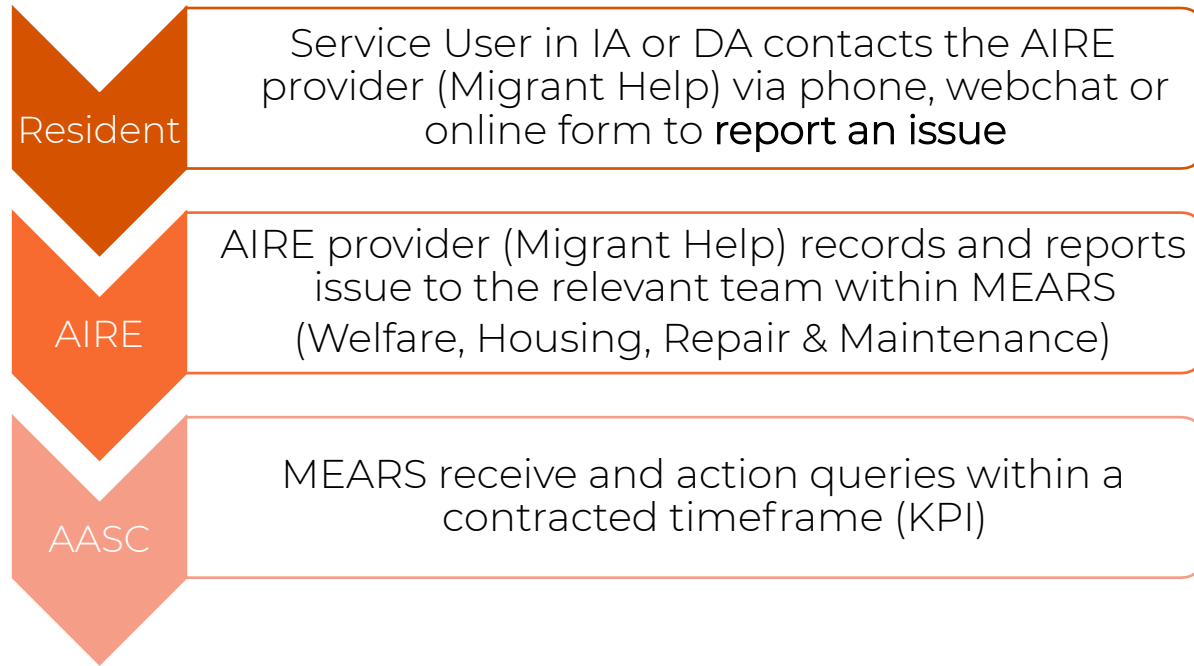
Our Partnership Working



At every stage of accommodation provision, our partners are key in supporting families & individuals seeking asylum.

We work closely with all Health Trusts, Councils & CVS across NI, sitting on key stakeholder forums, to facilitate collaborative working in support of families and individuals in our accommodation.

AASC & AIRE: Issue Reporting Procedure



AIRE (Migrant Help) also manage a robust **complaints procedure** which allows for escalation and resolution of issues reported to MEARS. Complaints are closely monitored and must be responded to and addressed within timeframe, with full response provided to the resident.

Information Sharing

- ▶ ISA with Health – (For consenting residents)
- ▶ ISA with Education – (For consenting residents)
- ▶ Information shared in the **All Council TEO** Meeting about number of bedspaces within each Council Area – Detailing whether an individual or a family.
- ▶ We are currently discussing with Home Office Data Hub on potential for a specific information sharing agreement with Council. (This can only be agreed by Home Office).

Part of our role in the Mears Partnership Team is to:

❖ **Record and relay the needs presenting to our partners**

We work closely with our front-line teams, and conduct 6-weekly Resident's Forums, to better understand and amplify the voices of our resident, whilst working to adapt our services.

❖ **Liaison with Councils, Health Trusts, & CVS**

We attend key stakeholder meetings to collaborate on support implementation for our residents, liaising with Councils, Health Trusts, and community voluntary organisations across NI.

Overcoming Barriers

- ❖ **NINES Family Help Clinic**

Improving access to key services for families, including Health & Social Work, Education, SureStart

- ❖ **GP Registration (until August 2024)**

Voluntary support in registering families & individuals in contingency & dispersal accommodation, as well as supporting with access & appointment booking.

- ❖ **DFI's 'Local Links' Travel Pilot & Consultation**

Voluntary distribution by Mears of 3000 travel passes from October 23 – March 24; voluntary organisation & facilitation of consultations across NI to capture the value of the project.

- ❖ **Dispersal across NI & Council Engagement**

- ❖ **On-site delivery in contingency**

Working with CVS to bring in ESOL Classes, Family Programs, Sport Sessions, etc

Anti-Immigration / Civil Unrest

- **PSNI liaison** – Direct line of communication throughout unrest for real-time updates & to inform strategy.
- Additional security and welfare teams stood up across hotel accommodation.
- **PSNI Resident Engagement** facilitated across all sites NI wide to offer the opportunity for residents to gain first-hand updates on unrest & scheduled protests & ask questions. Personal safety devices distributed.
- **Communications with residents:** daily wellbeing meetings in contingency accommodation to create a safe space for residents to receive information and share concerns; email comms to residents in dispersal accommodation on hate-crime reporting; HelpInHand information distributed and added to induction packs.
- Additional Welfare Support implemented in dispersal accommodation with relocations offered to residents in areas perceived to be high-risk.
- Donations of toys, food, welcome cards, safely delivered by our partners in CVS.

Safeguarding

Mears Housing Management is committed to safeguarding the welfare/wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults that we encounter through the services that we provide, whether directly or indirectly and, that living a life free from harm and abuse is a fundamental right of every person. We believe everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of vulnerable adults; children and young people, to keep them safe.



Reporting & Recording a Safeguarding Concern

In all instances where an employee or sub-contractor has a suspicion or a concern that harm may have occurred or might occur if no preventative measures are taken.



Throughout the asylum accommodation period Mears Housing Management receive information from the Home Office in relation to Service Users with specific needs or identified risks. Mears Housing Management will refer and signpost Service Users to the relevant statutory and/or voluntary services where appropriate.

We assess risk to properties and Service Users from protests/violent disorder/unauthorised access, sharing intel of such with Home Office, HSCT and Police, liaising with those partners regarding their adequate staffing and other arrangements to mitigate those risks.

Liaising with the NHS and HSCT regarding individual Service Users needs (both physical and mental health); attending Complex or Multi -Disciplinary Team meetings to ensure Care Plans and/or Occupational Therapy accommodation adaptations assessments are implemented/completed.

MEARS

Notifying and liaising with Public Health of any infectious risk or management of outbreaks, adhering to expert recommendations.

Signposting to how Service Users can access health and relevant local activities and groups to ensure their integration into the community and ongoing mental wellbeing.

Ensuring via induction that Service Users are aware of UK/devolved law and their entitlement to report racist/hate/LGBTQIA+/ crime against the person to Police (and via Third Party) reporting, along with signposting to relevant support.

Identifying concerns of individual suspected trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery to Police/ Home Office , but also to liaise with same statutory bodies regarding access to evidence or mitigating risk to premises of concern.

To support police ongoing investigations or to prevent risk

- Questions and Discussion

Working together to support people seeking asylum



Tesfay Waldemichael
Head of Regional Services,
Relationships & Partnerships
North

9 September 2024



AIRE overview

- Advice and Guidance
- Issue Reporting
- Eligibility



FRC(First Response Centre) (Single point of contact)

- **Available 24 / 7 for all clients** whether in hotels/contingency accommodation, core IAs, DA or private accommodation
- Work closely with the Home Office and accommodation providers around any trends in calls coming through, ensuring we are **consistent** with our advice and have detailed processes and guidance in place.
- Handle all queries relating to **Issue Reporting**. Close links with the accommodation providers and Home Office Safeguarding team to ensure we are putting the needs of clients first.
- Able to provide a **basic level** of advice and guidance and signposting but will triage more complex and specialised queries to EAGL during their working hours or arrange for a call back.



Issue Reporting

- **Issue Reporting** queries are passed on to the appropriate provider within 30 minutes of being raised.
- Advisers also able to call through **emergency cases** to ensure they are picked up straight away and addressed.
- **Maintenance**
- **Payments**
- **Requests For Assistance** – able to report on and alert the relevant accommodation provider of any concerns within a property or concerns for clients wellbeing
- **Complaints** – ensure clients understand the process, that lodging a complaint would not impact them or their claim and pass on to the relevant party for investigation.



FIRST RESPONSE CENTRE

Issue Reporting - Feedback

- **Feedback** - encourage clients to provide feedback for all providers, MH and Home Office to part of continuous improvement.
- **Service User Experience** - we have worked with the Home Office to put in place surveys which focus particularly on services provided in IA, Issue Reporting, Move On and dispersal.
- Anonymous
- Available in 11 languages
- Links sent at the end of calls, FRC, EAGL and regional teams to ensure that clients are aware of how to provide feedback and what we will do with the information.
- QR code in hotels
- Results are fed into our Continuous Improvement Group internally and reported to the Home Office quarterly.



EAGL

ELIGIBILITY, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE LINE

- 8am-8pm Monday to Friday and calls triaged to EAGL by FRC
- **Advice and guidance** - for more complex and specialised queries.
- **Eligibility** - assist with S98 applications, ASF1s for non-IA clients and any changes to circumstances as stipulated in their Support T&Cs.
- **Signpost** - where MH unable to provide advice or there are other organisations more appropriate, we will signpost to other agencies to ensure the client gets the help and support that they need.
- EAGL can also assist with all queries that are handled by FRC as well should they be transferred through.



Contacting us

Most common ways of contacting Migrant help are below and call back can be requested using the online enquiry form

Asylum Services

[Free asylum helpline](#) (open 24/7/365): 0808 8010 503

You can also contact us via our [webchat](#) or via an [online enquiry form](#).

Email addresses for various queries can be found [here](#).



Regional Operations


- Co-located with AASCs in 9 'Core' Initial Accommodation settings nationally
- IA Service – Induction, ASF1, Q & A, CoC, ASPEN
- Contingency Accommodation / Hotels
- Communication methods and challenges

CLCs

Community Liaison Coordinators

- Our Community Liaison Coordinators participate in all local meetings and work closely with all NGOs to ensure we have up to date information of the services provided by them and agree referral processes.
- Referrals include requests for clothes, counselling/therapeutic services, online ESOL, etc.





(COC)changes to circumstances

This includes:

- changes to names or addresses
- adding or removing dependents
- change of relationship status
- hospitalisation or imprisonment
- requests to move accommodation.
- pregnancies, childbirth, or death



Move on - Negative

- Migrant Helps EAGL team deliver Negative Move On support nationally by telephone.
- Face to face if required it is available through Migrant Helps National Outreach team during the grace period.
- Our Negative Move on Service includes;
- Grace period explanation
- Voluntary return service – information

Outreach



- Specific service for additionally vulnerable clients
- Need identified – referrals from internal teams and external partners
- Third party referral (email outreach@migranthelpuk.org) – referral form to include explanation of the need
- Case assessed and potentially a face-to-face appointment arranged
- Mix of direct Migrant Help provision and partners via the Commissioning Framework



Safeguarding Team

- Dedicated Safeguarding team recruited in 2022 – Manager, specialist Age Dispute Advisor, specialist Disability Advisor and an Administrator.
- Complete review of Migrant Help Policies and procedures.
- Complete review of Migrant Help internal training and guidance notes to staff.
- Continual program of case reviews and lessons learnt.



Commissioning framework

- An opportunity for other organisations to partner with Migrant Help and work alongside our AIRE services (completion of Change of Circumstances, ASF1s and Move-On)

** Guide in your conference pack*



Move On

We deliver positive move on support over the 28 days grace period and deliver nine key touch points, primarily by telephone, face to face can be provided for the most vulnerable by Migrant Help's Outreach team



Our impact 2023

In 2023 We have answered:

- **124,000 calls by EAGL**
- **9,200 webchats by EAGL (went live 24 August 2023)**
- **690,000 calls answered by FRC**
- **65,500 webchats by the FRC**

In 2023, we have submitted:

- **34,000 in- IA/ Hotel ASF1's**
- **7,130 non-IA ASF1's**
- **2,700 S4 ASF1's**
- **11,000 S98 applications**
- **19,300 Change of Circumstances requests**
- **25,300 Proof of Support requests**

In 2022/23 , 13 Millions of Minutes of telephone interpreting provided by Clear Voice

In 2023 We have completed:

- **32,900 Inductions**
- **6,000 Outreach appointments**
- **30,000 Move On appointments**
- **325,500 Advice and Guidance queries, resolved on first contact**
- **244,000 Issue Reporting (maintenance, complaints, feedback, payment issues and requests for assistance) tickets passed on for resolution.**

We have issued:

- **29,750 ASPEN cards**

Any questions?



info@migranhelpuk.org
www.migranhelpuk.org
Free asylum helpline: 0808 8010 503
Head office: 01304 203 977

