

## **Multi Agency Forum update four - June 8, 2023**

This is a joint update from each of the four subgroups which feed into the Multi Agency Forum (MAF), which is planning for the arrival of the barge.

The MAF is made up of local, regional and national representatives from Dorset Council, local NHS, Dorset Police, public agencies and community organisations. It meets weekly to plan and co-ordinate arrangements for the smooth operation of the accommodation facility. This includes provision of health services, safety and security, regulatory arrangements, and voluntary sector involvement, through sub-groups linked to the MAF.

### **General updates**

The Bibby Stockholm continues to undergo refurbishment and further maintenance works and is expected to arrive in Portland in mid-June, with the first cohort of asylum seekers due to embark soon after.

Portland Town Council hosted a public meeting on Tuesday 6 June. Home Office representatives attended and listened to the questions and concerns raised by local people, while Dorset Council, Dorset Police and Dorset NHS spokespeople were also on hand to provide information.

The Prime Minister announced that the government has secured two further barges which will accommodate 1000 asylum seekers. [Portland Port released a statement](#) on Wednesday 7 June, to confirm that it had not been approached to accommodate additional barges.

### **Safety and security subgroup**

Representatives from the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) now attend this sub-group as the legal status of the vessel is confirmed as falling under their regulatory jurisdiction.

A great deal of work is taking place to ensure that the Bibby Stockholm is operated in a safe, secure and successful way both for those onboard the vessel and in the local community. Portland Port has well-established security protocols in place, including its own police and security officers.

### **Emergency response & contingency planning**

Emergency response plans were tested at a tabletop exercise on location at Portland Port on Monday 5 June. The exercise was well attended by members of the Local Resilience Forum and the Home Office where agencies worked through a challenging, theoretical emergency scenario. The exercise confirmed developing emergency plans are robust but require further work to refine details. This has been taken forward by the Safety and Security subgroup to progress.

There was a protest in Falmouth, Cornwall, on 31 May as well as a protest on Portland on 3 June. Both events were peaceful, and no public disorder was reported. There is a further protest planned in Easton, Portland on 13 June by the Dorset branches of Stand Up To Racism, TUC and Unison.

The Home Secretary and Ministers have approved a new policy for police forces impacted by proposals for large new sites and vessels. Under this policy, an agreement has been made to provide additional support for community policing for Dorset Police.

## **Health subgroup**

The funding bid for the health offer surrounding the barge has been re-submitted to the Home Office for further consideration and decision and is awaiting the outcome. The funding proposal is designed to meet the needs of the cohort who will be living aboard the vessel and to minimise the impact on the local community.

The Dorset health system continues to support the barge provider in the creation of their Outbreak Management Plan.

## **Place and Regulatory Services**

The port health team is in regular contact with the provider of the vessel to ensure that it is fully equipped to meet the health, safety and environmental needs of the port.

The question mark over the legal status of the vessel has now been clarified and is being considered. There was a meeting regarding busses for the asylum seekers on Monday, including a tour of the proposed route and drop off points. This is now in the process of being finalised and will be kept under review to align with activities and services being organised by the voluntary and community sector as these are developed.

## **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) subgroup**

VCS subgroup was asked by the Home Office to resubmit its funding proposal which is under consideration and awaiting a response. There is a concern that without confirmation of the funding bid outcome there may not be time to commission services and/or recruit a dedicated coordinator before the first cohort of asylum seekers arrive.

The group has also identified a potential opportunity for a community hub in the local area where many of these activities could take place.

## **Communication and Engagement subgroup**

[A statement from Dorset Council](#) was issued on Tuesday 6 June to confirm it would not be pursuing legal action to challenge the decision to site the barge in Portland Port.

To address concerns, the sub-group is creating a key lines document and information sheet, as part of the developing local engagement plan.

A draft information sheet, which tells the story of the introduction of the barge in Portland, is being updated and will be shared over the coming weeks through council and Port channels. This will be published and can be directed to by public facing officers when speaking to the members of the public.

A warning and informing communications group made up of comms reps from Dorset Police, Fire, Health and Dorset Council is being brought together to focus on local emergency response plans, should it be needed, once the barge is in situ.

**ENDS**