



Portland Port – update about asylum seekers accommodation

Portland Port has moved to address local concerns as preparations continue for the arrival of an accommodation facility for asylum seekers.

It has been working with the Home Office and local agencies to ensure the safe arrival and operation of the vessel, and to minimise its impact locally and maximise the benefits of its stay.

Bill Reeves, chief executive of Portland Port, said: “We understand that there are genuine concerns about the arrival of the accommodation facility for refugees at Portland.

“We wish to reassure local people that a great deal of effort and co-ordination is being carried out in relation to such issues as security, policing, health provision and other matters.”

Asylum seekers would have had their fingerprints and identities recorded by the Home Office before going aboard. They will also receive health screening for medical conditions.

A Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) has been established locally involving local agencies, police and emergency services.

The Home Office is working closely with Dorset Police to ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place.

It is also in discussions with the NHS about the potential range of on-site medical facilities, to help mitigate the impact on local health services.

There will be communal recreational and exercise facilities for asylum seekers. The Home Office is talking to the local voluntary and community sector about providing a range of activities, including English language training.

The facility is due to stay at Portland for at least 18 months with potential benefits for the local economy.

Bill said: “The port is a commercial business. Arrival of the facility will help to drive continued growth, secure more long-term jobs and generate future investment with benefits for the local economy. “There may also be jobs created directly by the vessel operators as well as direct and indirect spend in the local supply chain.”

Portland Port, which has been operating since 1996, has more than 50 staff and has a number of tenants which together employ more than 250 people.

More than 130,000 passengers are due to arrive at the port in 2023 in a record year for cruise calls, which contribute about £10m to the local economy annually.

Bill said: “We don’t anticipate any disruption to the tourism industry of the area and our cruise programme.

3.5.2023

“There is a strong, vibrant and diverse tourist economy in the area which welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors to the area every year, among which the number of refugees will form a very small proportion.

“We have a strong vested interest in the safe operation of the facility for our business, local people and the refugees themselves.

“We believe that concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour have proven to be unfounded at accommodation sites elsewhere and there is no reason to expect any different here.

“There will be advice for the refugees about cultural sensitivities and behaviour.

“In addition, some of the refugees coming to the Portland safe haven will have already been in the country for some time staying at hotels so they will have an understanding of UK culture and expectations.”

Bill added: “We have been guided by the Home Office on confidentiality and the timing of announcements.

“Consultation is ongoing with elected representatives of local authorities and with other stakeholders, and we are also making as much information as possible publicly available on our website and through the media.”

The Home Office is also planning other accommodation facilities elsewhere in the UK.

Bill said: “Portland Port strongly believes that providing berthing space for the refugees’ accommodation is the right thing to do.

“There is a strong incentive for the refugees to be law-abiding because they are in the latter stages of their asylum assessment.

“They have no greater ambition than to be accepted in the UK after fleeing sometimes horrific situations. I cannot think why people who have travelled thousands of miles and have risked their lives to get here would do anything to run the risk of their asylum claim being denied and them being deported.”

Visit the Portland Port and Home Office websites for more information.

ENDS