

Multi Agency Forum weekly update – May 31, 2023

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

Subgroup updates

Safety and security sub-group

The safety and security group is making progress in the planning for the arrival of the barge in Portland. This sub group reviewed the Port's Security Plan and has been agreed this is suitable to cover the Bibby Stockholm.

Dorset Police has been working with national colleagues to better understand the potential community impact of an asylum centre on Portland. Whilst the arrival of asylum seekers may increase the fear of crime, the reality is the presence of a well-managed facility will see very low levels of crime and antisocial behaviour and in some cases a reduction in the wider community due to the increased presence of support staff.

Dorset Police already supports an asylum-seeking community in Bournemouth. Whilst Portland is a different proposition we are expecting a minimal impact on crime and antisocial behaviour for the area.

Dorset Police continues to work with our strategic partners. Portland Port and the contractors responsible for the accommodation facility to develop the plans and responses for the safety and security of the asylum seekers and the wider community.

Dorset Police continue to liaise with organisers of the planned anti-barge demonstration and picnic due to take place on Saturday 3 June and a further Stand up to Racism demonstration planned for 13 June.

Plans will be tested at the upcoming tabletop exercise on emergency responses.

Health sub-group

Work continues at pace, via collaborative and creative working across the health and care system to design the core offer, facility set-up and outbreak plan.

In conjunction with the sub-group, Dorset NHS has identified a package of services to meet the needs of the cohort who will be living aboard the vessel and to minimise the impact on the local community. A health plan proposal has been submitted to the Home Office which is now under consideration for funding.

Place and Regulatory Services sub-group A view on the barge's legal status has been received from the operator and Home Office. This is being discussed with the council's Legal Services. This is important as it will dictate the regulatory (fire and safety) requirements. A provisional proposal for the bus route between the Port and neighbouring towns has been developed and is now being tested. A tour to review the proposed route with local councillors has been arranged. More information on this to follow shortly. The bus route and services will be kept under review and be aligned with activities and services being organised by the voluntary and community sector as these are being developed.

Voluntary and community sector involvement sub-group

The sub-group has developed a set of proposals that includes provisions for physical activities, English language lessons, cultural integration courses and other community led activity like local volunteering opportunities which will be open to all asylum seekers who are accommodated on the barge. The sub-group has now submitted these proposals to Home Office for further discussion on funding.

Communication and engagement sub-group

It is recognised that there continue to be local concerns and uncertainty. As more decisions are made through the MAF, the comms and engagement sub-group is evolving local engagement plans to provide facts and information. The sub-group now includes representatives from Weymouth and Portland town councils.

The Home Office [factsheet](#) has been updated and is available online. Please encourage residents and stakeholders to read this information for answers to their questions.

Other updates:

The Bibby Stockholm is currently undergoing refurbishment and general maintenance. Further investigations are required which may affect timing of arrival of vessel into Portland. Currently this does not impact the timelines for the arrival of the first cohort of asylum seekers from mid-June onwards.

Portland Town Council has arranged a community meeting on 6 June at 7pm in response to local concerns and questions.

Those on board the Bibby Stockholm will have been through a screening process and there will be no under 18s accommodated. For contingency purposes, Dorset Council's Children's Services are working up plans to provide a framework for any asylum seeker claiming to be under 18, where the council will have a duty to care for that person as an unaccompanied minor.

ENDS