



**Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM**

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner  
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31 July 2020

Victoria Atkins MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding)  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to raise my concerns regarding the ending of Victim Care Contract (VCC) subsistence payments for those in catered temporary initial Emergency Accommodation under Section 98 asylum support.

I understand that there have been queries raised in the past regarding the entitlements of this cohort to VCC subsistence, but that following previous communication between the Home Office and The Salvation Army, VCC sub-contractors have always been advised to continue payments. I am aware that on the 9 July 2020, VCC sub-contractors received an instruction to cease payments to this cohort of clients, leaving individuals previously in receipt of VCC subsistence without any form of financial assistance. For some, this was £35 per week in line with the entitlements of those in outreach support (or £39.60 per week under the revised outreach financial support rates as of 1 July 2020<sup>1</sup>).

I recognise that Section 98 asylum accommodation provides temporary, generally full board in-kind support provisions to meet the essential living needs of an individual who has entered asylum support. The judgement of *K and AM R v SSHD* [2018] reviewed at length the definition of subsistence and concluded that there are 'very good reasons' why the state should give potential victims of modern slavery substantially more subsistence than people in asylum accommodation. Whilst providing full-board emergency accommodation may meet a person's essential living needs, it does not recognise their status as a potential victim of modern slavery. I am aware that there is an expectation that any further essential needs, such as travel costs and toiletries are expected to be met by asylum support, but I am concerned as to whether this is happening routinely in practice.

My office has been contacted by multiple organisations within the sector who have expressed significant concerns regarding this recent change. I understand that some are having to provide supermarket vouchers to survivors to enable them to meet their essential needs and I have been sighted on a case where an individual has resorted to begging following their loss of financial support. This is not only determinantal to their recovery, but also puts them at risk of further exploitation. I also understand that due to Covid-19, individuals are remaining in Section 98 initial

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office (July 2020) [Modern Slavery Act \(2015\): Statutory Guidance](#)

Emergency Accommodation for longer than they would be otherwise due to current limits on movement and dispersal within the asylum estate.

I would appreciate clarification on the rationale for this change and why this cohort of survivors are not deemed to be entitled to VCC subsistence. I have contacted the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit who have informed me that there has not been a policy change, but that a review of the VCC financial support policy has been conducted and there is work underway to implement a new policy focused on individual recovery needs.

I am also disappointed to hear about the lack of communication in relation to this change with NRM sub-contractors, the wider sector and importantly, with survivors. Sub-contractors were asked to cease payments to this cohort, without prior notice and seemingly in the absence of a clear explanation of why this change has been made. I am aware that a specific request has been made by VCC subcontractors for the Home Office to write to clients affected by this, however I understand that this has not been agreed and the responsibility has been left with sub-contractors to communicate the change. Regardless of whether this is a change to policy or operational practice, survivors are now losing out on £35 per week that they previously received therefore deserve an explanation. Support workers spend a considerable amount of time building up trust with survivors and this lack of transparency has the potential to have a detrimental effect on rapport moving forward.

I recognise the Modern Slavery Unit newsletter dated 23 July 2020 did refer to the ongoing work to review the financial support that is available through the VCC, however this was a generic update and did not provide clarity or reassurance to the sector on this particular issue. I am aware that the Modern Slavery Strategy Implementation Group's subgroup on Victim Support were not consulted within this review of financial support and have asked to be updated on the process and findings.

I look forward to receiving your response as a matter of urgency as I am concerned that this change will only further exacerbate the vulnerability of victims of modern slavery.

In the interests of transparency, I request that you respond in a way that enables me to publish your letter on my website.

Yours sincerely,



**Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner**



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HOCS Reference: MIN/0012342/20

11 September 2020

Dear Dame Sara,

Thank you for your letter of 31 July, where you raised concerns regarding the cessation of financial support payments for those in initial asylum accommodation. I am sorry for the delay in responding to your letter.

Potential and confirmed victims of modern slavery accommodated in initial accommodation previously fell outside of the service user types listed for Victim Care Contract (VCC) financial support. It was a clarification of rates in the contract in July that resulted in the cessation of payments for this cohort, and we worked at pace to ensure that the situation was resolved as quickly as possible.

On 27 August, we published updated statutory guidance setting out that this group would be entitled to £25.40 per week from the VCC, bringing this cohort in line with other potential or confirmed victims of modern slavery who are also receiving support from the Asylum Support system. The support provided by Asylum Support to those in initial accommodation whether through a cash payment, in-kind or a mixture of the two meets the essential living needs of this group and includes provision for food and toiletries. Travel to essential appointments is also arranged where appropriate. We will be ensuring any potential or confirmed victims of modern slavery supported through the VCC and accommodated in asylum initial accommodation whose payments under the VCC ceased in July 2020, receive a back payment to the date of cessation. Work is underway to make these payments.

Your letter makes reference to the review of the financial support rates for the VCC, this is part of a wider consideration of the current policy and movement towards a needs-based approach to financial support. As a first step, we have launched a call for evidence on recovery needs, and the kinds of services/support needed to meet those needs. This is being followed up with a series of workshops with charities and others to further develop our evidence base and inform policy changes. We will continue to provide updates on this work more widely through our newsletter and our engagement with the Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Group (MSSIG).

I want to take this opportunity to reiterate that providing support to potential and confirmed victims of modern slavery continues to be a key priority for Government, and as you are aware, work is underway through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Transformation

Programme to ensure that the support we provide meets the needs of individuals to help them with their recovery from exploitation.

Finally, I recognise your concerns about the importance of communication on this complex issue, and I hope I have reassured you of our commitment to do so.

Thank you again for raising this important issue with me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

**Victoria Atkins MP**