Wealden
District Council

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By email

Dear Mr Larter

Crowborough Training Camp

Thank you for attending the meeting of the Council's Scrutiny and Performance Committee on 10 November 2025 ("**the Committee meeting**"), along with Mr Harding, to discuss the Home Office's proposal to use Crowborough Training Camp to accommodate asylum-seekers ("**the Proposal**").

You will be aware that there is considerable concern amongst residents of the Council's area, and on the part of other bodies which may be affected, about the Proposal, and that the Council is concerned about the planning implications of the Proposal. Accordingly, in order better to understand the Proposal and the Home Office's decision-making in relation to it, and in order to enable the Council (and other affected bodies) properly to consider what steps it may be necessary or appropriate to take, I would be very grateful if you would provide answers to the following questions.

(1) Has a decision been taken whether to proceed with the Proposal?

I understand from what Mr Harding said at the Committee meeting that the Home Office is in a "preparation phase" and that, although there is a "firm intention" to proceed with the Proposal, no decision has yet been taken whether to do so ("we cannot as yet say that we're absolutely definitely going to use the site", "we have not made a formal decision"). However, the factsheet published by the Home Office on the gov.uk website on 31 October 2025 might be read as implying otherwise, therefore I would be grateful for express written confirmation that my understanding is correct. We are also conscious that the Home Office team indicate that the Home Office (not the Ministry of Defence) has undertaken works at the site to install additional fencing and CCTV at the site in preparation for the proposed use.

(2) If any decision has been taken whether to proceed with the Proposal, please confirm exactly what decision has been taken, when it was taken, by whom, and on what basis?

As explained immediately above, my understanding is that no decision whether to proceed with the Proposal has yet been taken. If that understanding is incorrect, I would be grateful for full details of any decision which has been taken.

(3) If a decision has not been taken whether to proceed with the Proposal, what matters remain outstanding, and when does the Home Office anticipate that it will take such a decision?

At the Committee meeting, Mr Harding referred to the fact that, before taking a decision whether to proceed with the Proposal, the Home Office wished properly to ascertain what is the likely impact on "local risks", the local population, and local services, and he also referred to other work that remained outstanding before a decision could be taken (including commercial arrangements, arrangements in relation to health care, and health and safety checks). Mr Harding said that it should be possible to provide an indicative date for a decision "as our plans firm up". It would therefore be helpful to understand exactly what matters remain to be explored (and how they will be explored) before a decision is taken, and what is the anticipated earliest date that a decision might be taken.

In this context, Mr Harding referred to a "community cohesion impact assessment", and he was asked by one of the Council's elected members to provide a copy of that assessment. Mr Harding responded that the Home Office would share as much information as it is able to. Insofar as I am aware, the Council has not yet received a copy of the community impact assessment, and therefore I would be grateful if you could provide a copy by return.

If no community cohesion impact assessment has been completed, we would be grateful if you could please confirm when this is expected to be finalised.

(4) Does the Home Office intend to consult with local residents and affected bodies?

At the Committee meeting, you and Mr Harding were asked whether the Home Office would consult before a decision was taken whether to proceed with the Proposal. In response, Mr Harding referred to meetings with local residents to enable them to "speak to [the Home Office] directly". As I understand the position, therefore, the Home Office does intend to consult. Self-evidently, the best sources of information on matters such as the likely impact of the Proposal on the local population and local services are local residents, the Council and other bodies which already operate in the area, and consultation would be the best way of obtaining that information.

Further, at the site visit on 15 October 2025, reference was made by the Home Office to the development of a communications and engagement plan into which the Council could input. As far as we are aware, no plan has been forthcoming. If a plan has been developed, please provide this, or if it is in the process of being developed, we would be grateful for the opportunity to review and input on it.

(5) If the Home Office does not intend to consult, is it nevertheless willing to consider information provided by the Council and other bodies?

As I have mentioned, the best sources of information on matters such as the likely impact of the Proposal on the local population and local services include the Council and other bodies which already operate in the area. The Council is working with its local partners to compile relevant information in this respect, which it intends to submit to the Home Office by 28 November 2025. I would therefore be grateful if you could confirm that the Home Office will not proceed to take a decision whether to proceed with the Proposal until it has received and considered this information.

(6) If a decision were to be (or has been) taken to proceed with the Proposal, what advance notice does the Home Office intend to give to the Council (and other bodies) before starting to implement the decision?

If the Proposal were to be implemented, that is likely to have a significant impact on the residents of the Council's area, the Council itself, and other bodies which may be affected. Accordingly, it is vital that there is as much advance notice as possible of the implementation of any decision to proceed with the Proposal. At the Committee meeting, you stated that the Home Office would try to be as clear as possible about the decision-making process and "the likely go live time". At the Operational Working Group meeting on 13 November 2025, your team confirmed that this would be at least 'days' and Sussex Police asked that this period be extended to 90 days. Accordingly, I would welcome greater clarity about what notice the Home Office intends to give should it proceed to implementation.

I understand that, in the case of the potential use of RAF Linton for the accommodation of asylum-seekers, the Home Office agreed to provide notice of any decision to move asylum-seekers to the site at least 14 days in advance of any asylum-seekers actually being moved to the site. I would therefore ask that at least the same period of notice will be afforded to the Council in the present case.

(7) On what basis does the Home Office consider that the Proposal would be compliant with planning control?

At the Committee meeting, you and Mr Harding were asked about the basis on which the Proposal would be compliant with planning control, but you were unable to provide a substantive answer. Accordingly, I would be grateful for an explanation as to the basis on which the Home Office considers that the Proposal would be compliant with planning control?

It would be helpful to have a response to each of the questions above as soon as possible, and in any event within seven days.

In the interests of transparency, and of keeping the public informed, I shall arrange for a copy of this letter to be published on the Council's website.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Trevor Scott
Chief Executive