Dear Mr. Fannin,

I refer further to your correspondence of 17 September, 2019 regarding the Committees meeting on 4th April 2019 that the Department of Justice and Equality stated it was putting contract out to tender for additional centres for direct provision.

While a claim for International Protection is being examined, the State is legally obliged to offer accommodation and related services to anyone without means - which includes all meals, medical care and utilities. A weekly personal allowance is paid to each person in a centre and exceptional needs are covered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The Department of Justice and Equality needs to find new accommodation centres as the numbers of people arriving to seek International Protection in the State continues to rise (figures are up 50% so far this year). Because of a shortage of places in centres, there are now, as of 29th October 2019, 1531 people in emergency accommodation in hotels and guesthouses. I am aware that this is a highly unsatisfactory situation and can only be short-term.
The procurement of new accommodation centres are done in two ways.

Firstly, the Department has advertised in the national media for expressions of interest from property owners for a short-term contract (usually 1 year) to meet demand while the regional tender process is rolled out nationally. Centres in Kenmare, Lisdoonvarna, Mallow, Moate and Wicklow were opened in 2018 through this process. Further centres may also be opened through this process.

Secondly, this Department is running procurement competitions on a regional basis throughout the country to procure accommodation through the government’s procurement portal Etenders. This search is nationwide. The contracts are longer term than the expressions of interest with a minimum contract duration of 2 years on offer and a maximum contract duration of 4 years. Accommodation providers can offer premises both through the expression of interest process or the tender process. The Committee will be aware, that until the procurement process, which is commercially sensitive, is complete, it is not possible to confirm any specific locations or premises.

The following regional competitions have progressed through the evaluation stage and are in the mobilisation phase; the South East, Midlands and the Mid-West Regions. Evaluation is underway for the South West and Western Regions. It is anticipated that the evaluation process will conclude by mid November 2019 for the Western region. For the purposes of the tender, the Western region covers Galway, Mayo and Roscommon.

The closing date for bids for the Mid-East Region was the 16 September and evaluation will commence shortly. Advertisements for bids for the Dublin Region were published on 18 September and advertisements for the Borders Region were published on 14 October. Consideration of all premises in the Dublin and Border areas offered to the Department will follow from those competitions. When the evaluation and commercially sensitive aspects of the process are completed, the Department will begin engagement with local communities and their political representatives and in order to allay any concerns about impacts on local services.
Since April 2019, we have opened one new accommodation centre in Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary. This has the potential to house 16 families in own-door accommodation with a capacity for 70 people. It currently accommodates 17 people from 4 families and 4 further families will arrive later this week. The Department is working with all relevant Government Departments including Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Transport, Tourism and Sport, Health and with the HSE to ensure that any additional services that are needed are put in place. The Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, Mr David Stanton, T.D., and Department officials have engaged with local community leaders and service providers in relation to the centre and mitigating any concerns on impacts on local services.

A further accommodation centre is proposed in Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim. Minister of State David Stanton and Department officials have met with local TDs, Councillors and community leaders from Ballinamore to ensure that concerns the community has are heard and addressed. This dialogue is ongoing the department is confident that any concerns about possible impact on local facilities and services can be addressed. Work is underway across government to ensure full service provision. Information has been provided on all these issues directly to local residents in Ballinamore.

I trust that the information provided is satisfactory to your request.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Aidan O'Driscoll
Secretary General

November, 2019