



## ASPEN Post-Go-Live Update

- The vast majority of supported asylum seekers were able to activate their new Aspen cards prior to the service going live or have managed to activate them since. As such, the majority of eligible asylum seekers are using them as expected.
- We are aware that a small number of asylum seekers are still facing difficulties using their cards. We are continuing to support them with emergency cash payments (ECPs) / vouchers and are issuing replacement cards where required.
- Our latest available management information proposes that over 93% of eligible service users have activated their new Aspen card\*  
[\*These figures have been taken from a live operational database are approximations and have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard].
- Migrant Help remain available to respond to queries and anyone experiencing issues can contact the 24/7 hotline. We recognise the Migrant Help line had high call volumes; however, pressure has reduced after the initial spike during the first week after going live.
- In relation to Emergency Cash Payments (ECPs) – they have been increased in amount and accommodation providers can now self-authorise these to ensure that service users critical needs are met.
- Asylum seekers will receive their payments throughout their period of entitlement either through their Aspen card or, where that is not possible, through ECPs and all will have received or accrued money, on their inactivated card, throughout the transition.
- Checks on the welfare of individuals are taking place through accommodation providers to ensure all are supported in the new system. Furthermore, accommodation staff have been instructed to familiarise themselves with the card activation instructions and to assist service users on the ground where needed.
- In the event that an ASPEN card has not been delivered or a service user cannot activate their card (despite receiving assistance), Migrant Help should remain the first point of contact. As an escalation route, voluntary sector partners/representatives should report this to [ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk). Once received, the team will work to provide a resolution and/or for a replacement card to be dispatched as soon as possible.
- We continue to work with our strategic delivery partners – PFS, Migrant Help and Accommodation Providers to ensure that all cards are successfully received and activated with the appropriate service users being targeted for assistance as a priority.
- Updates, Information packs and FAQ documents will continue to be shared with voluntary sector partners and Local Authorities via Strategic Migration Partnerships in the same manner prior to, and during, transition.
- As with all projects, a project level lessons learnt review will take place and stakeholder feedback will be a part of that. We are currently evaluating the scope, format and nature of the review.



## ASPEN Post-Go-Live Q&A

The following section aims to respond to the frequently asked questions we have been receiving since go-live. The relevant Home Office teams including the operational business and the Asylum Support Payments project team are proactively working with Migrant Help, Accommodation Providers and PFS to provide resolutions for any issues faced during the transition to the new payment card/service.

### **What do service users do if they have not received a card?**

We acknowledge that some cards have not reached service users since they were dispatched. We are proactively working to arrange replacement cards to be sent to service users. If a service user is eligible for asylum support and a payment card but has not received their card, we advise them to report this to Migrant Help; who will forward the concern onto the relevant operational team to action a replacement card, as well as issue an Emergency Cash Payment (ECP) to cover the period until the card arrives.

The escalation point for the voluntary sector/service user representatives is to contact the Aspen PFS inbox [ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk). In this email, the concern should be outlined as well as:

- The service user's full name
- Date of birth,
- Address and
- AS reference number.

The relevant team will check against the cards to ensure the service user is included in replacement card dispatches.

### **What if I don't receive a response to my query to the inbox?**

We are endeavouring to respond to queries received. We may not provide an initial response (holding or in full) whilst we are considering your query as resources are being deployed to resolve queries or issues as soon as possible. However, once we have considered your query, we will provide you with an update on the steps taken to resolve the query sent to us. If you have not heard anything within five days of sending your query, please get back in touch.

### **When will a replacement card arrive?**

Replacement cards are being dispatched to service users as soon as possible with many being dispatched within 2 working days of a response to your query and landing with service users normally within 2 days of dispatch, subject to Royal Mail delivery constraints. ECPs will be available to support service users whilst waiting for their new card.

**An Emergency Cash Payment (ECP) has been requested but it has not yet been issued to the service user.**

All ECP requests are being handled by our operational teams and being shared with our accommodation providers to be issued. Our operational teams will continue to work closely with accommodation providers to ensure the swift issuance of ECPs should service users not have the card and ensure their critical needs are met as an emergency if required.

**The service user has received their new Aspen card but cannot activate (IVR usage).**

Please follow the below steps;

- 1) To activate the card - call the automated IVR helpline on 0800 246 1327 and choose the relevant language.
- 2) Choose option 1: "To retrieve your pin". This covers initial activation of cards as well as a PIN retrieval.
- 3) For this, service users will need the 16-digit card number on the front of their new card and their date of birth in the format DDMMYY. If, for example, their date of birth is 6<sup>th</sup> January 1965, they should enter the numbers on their keypad in this format: 060165 (e.g. image below). To note: we are receiving queries in relation to service users inputting their DoB and that it still does not work. **We ask that service users ensure they are using the DoB stated in any previous Home Office correspondence they are in possession of.**
- 4) The card is activated on completion of these steps. Once the back of the card is signed, it is ready for use.



<<Address Line 1>>  
<<Address Line 2>>  
<<Address Line 3>>  
<<City>>  
<<State>><<Postcode>>  
<<Country>>

**Date of Birth: 06/01/1965**

**A service user has received their new ASPEN card and activated it, but the balance on the card is incorrect.**

The service user should contact Migrant Help to log this discrepancy. This will be forwarded to a caseworker to investigate.

It is important to note that whilst balances as of 5pm on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May were migrated over to the new card provided, some cards transactions would not have been completed prior to 5pm and will have been completed on Sodexo's side since. We are currently in the process of reconciling such transactions with both providers and these will be available for service users after that reconciliation.

**Service users are calling Migrant Help but they are not answering their phone line.**

Call volumes to Migrant Help have now significantly reduced and service users should be able to get through to an advisor without a significant wait for the call to be answered (they are closer, if not similar, to Business As Usual (BAU) levels prior to the Aspen transition).

**Service user has activated their card but unable to withdraw funds.**

Eligible service users can withdraw cash from a cash machine, up to the value of **£300 daily**, and a total weekly limit of £300. The cash withdrawal limit does not affect purchases at point of sale (POS) and they will continue to be available once the cash withdrawal limits has been reached. Please note - if a service user is a failed asylum seeker on Section 4 support, they will not be able to withdraw/access cash from a cash machine. Consequently, repeated attempts to access cash may result in the PINs being temporarily blocked. If service users are eligible to withdraw cash (S95 and S98) and still cannot, they should contact Migrant Help and report this for further investigation into the issue

**Can a service user change their pin?**

Service users **cannot** change their pin. The PIN number allocated with the card that is delivered to them is the pin that service users must remember and keep. They can use the IVR line after activation to reveal their PIN number if forgotten. Please note that this is a change from the Sodexo Aspen Card and repeated attempts to change PINs at ATMs may result in the card being blocked through suspected fraudulent activity.

**Can ECPs be issued via self-authorisation by accommodation providers?**

Providers have been asked to self-authorise when requests for ECPs become known to them. The operational Home Office team will also continue to follow the established ECP processes and issue where needed.

**How long does it take for an ECP to be made and how much will be received?**

Once the action is processed, we aim for ECPs to be issued within the next 24 hours. ECPs have been increased from £20 (up to) £40 whilst we work on the current issues being experienced by service

users. Additional resources have been allocated to process requests and manage card issues reported by service users and their representatives.

### **What happens if a replacement card is requested but I then find my original card?**

If a replacement card is requested, it will not be possible to activate the original card should it then be found. If your original card is already activated, it will automatically be cancelled/deactivated when a replacement request is made. **When your new card arrives, you will have a new PIN number and you must activate it as soon as possible.**

### **Can subsistence only cases receive emergency cash payments?**

We have proactively reached out to all subsistence only cases in an attempt to resolve any card-related issues - such as card activation or re-dispatch – to ensure that they have the support they need. Currently, there is no process in place to provide subsistence only cases with ECPs. We have committed to expedited dispatch of Aspen cards so that individuals will receive a card swiftly and in the same timeline that others would receive an ECP after requesting. It is imperative that any subsistence only cases reach out to Migrant Help if they are experiencing any issues. Service users that have not received their cards will need to confirm/provide their current place of residence so that a replacement can be sent to them.

### **Which routes can be used to request an Emergency Cash Payment?**

As usual, Migrant Help should be contacted in the first instance. Migrant Help will liaise with the relevant teams (accommodation providers/Home Office) to ensure that an ECP is issued to the service user.

However, accommodation providers are able to self-authorise ECPs. If contacted directly by service users, where possible, accommodation providers can also process and distribute ECPs to service users in need of support. Representatives (such as charities/NGOs) should continue to use the dedicated inbox [ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:ASPENPFS@homeoffice.gov.uk) on behalf of a service user in need of an ECP. Within this email, please include the service user's name, DoB, address and NASS reference number.

To clarify:

- 1) Service Users should look to approach Migrant Help in the first instance, but if service users are having trouble speaking to Migrant Help (after a significant wait) they can approach providers themselves, where possible, who are able to self-authorise.
- 2) Representatives and voluntary sector partners should escalate to our dedicated escalations inbox rather than going directly to providers. However, if the service user is not in a position to communicate with Migrant Help or a Provider directly, by all means contact a provider on their behalf but please copy the ASPENPFS inbox into that communication. Our teams will assist in those circumstances.
- 3) Additionally, accommodation providers will be able to self-authorise during their own welfare checks on Service users.

**If reaching out on behalf of a service user, do I still need to provide a written consent form?**

Yes, this continues to be an as-is process and has not changed.

**Are Accommodation providers doing anything else to assist?**

Accommodation providers are proactively supporting during this period through a number of measures.

Providers will be conducting welfare checks (in the most practicable manner – in person or by telephone) in which they will ensure that service users who receive asylum support payments have received their new ASPEN card and activated successfully. Additionally, they will be reporting which service users they encounter have cards (active or inactive) or no cards and this information will be shared with the Home Office for further action.

Accommodation provider's staff have also been instructed to familiarise themselves with the card activation step-by-step instructions and to assist service users on the ground where needed. Members of staff who are present within IA sites will act as an information points to support existing service users; assisting with card activation and helping to resolve any confusion within the community.

Additionally, and as outlined above, accommodation providers now also have the ability to self-authorise ECPs to support those in need.

**How else are we reaching out to eligible service users who have not yet activated their cards?**

We will be refining communications to any eligible service users that we understand have not yet activated cards, contacted Migrant Help, PFS, accommodation providers or Home Office teams via escalation routes.

We will also be distributing additional language translations of existing communications to assist the remaining service users in activating their cards.

**Can you provide information on requesting ECPs when someone is in contingency accommodation?**

Eligible service users in IA are able to make ECP requests through the usual channels (Migrant Help) if they have been unable to activate their cards to access the payments on them that are accruing in the background. The process is the same for all IA full board, regardless of location (so hotels, barracks and IA sites).

Accommodation providers will be assisting service users to activate cards which remains the key activity alongside business as usual operational processes to allocate cards to eligible service users once they enter the asylum support system.

**In terms of a possible reconciliation of asylum support payments, how are you planning to calculate overpayments and what process are you going to use to deduct/reconcile these?**

When we have issued ECPs we have also recorded the amount paid. This will follow our BAU overpayment process in that it will be recalculated in the service user's weekly payments to reduce the amount overpaid – not just reconcile in one lump payment (thus reducing the impact on the individual). It may take a period of weeks/months to recover as the level is to ensure no risk of destitution.