



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF



Cabinet Office
Perceval House
14/16 Uxbridge Road
London W5 2HL

23 August 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

Ealing is proud of our track record of providing a safe, supporting home for unaccompanied child asylum seekers. Over the past two full years, we have welcomed 46 new child asylum seekers who are fleeing violence, repression or extreme poverty. We have provided high quality, intensive support for young people who have often experienced the most severe trauma.

Being geographically situated close to Heathrow, one of the key ports of entry for child asylum seekers, as well as being home to many diaspora communities who can provide vital support networks, it is absolutely right that as a borough we play our part in providing a place of refuge and welcome. At present, we do this primarily through the London Referral Rota and the Kent NTS Pathway.

Last month, the revised National Transfer Scheme was launched. We support the principle of a national scheme and share the concerns that there are some local authorities that are not providing the same commitment to welcoming unaccompanied asylum seeking children, compared to boroughs such as Ealing and many other London councils.

Ealing has signed up to the National Transfer Scheme, as we consider this the right thing to do in order to play our part in providing sanctuary for unaccompanied minors. However we remain deeply concerned that the Scheme is potentially fatally flawed as a result of the failure to provide adequate funding to underpin its operation. Like almost every other council, we have experienced very substantial cuts to our government funding over the past decade – a 64% cut in Ealing's case. The impact of the pandemic has exacerbated this. As a result, our children's services are operating under severe financial strain, with funding reduced even as their domestic caseload increases.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are, understandably, often in need of particularly intensive care and support. These highly complex needs often require





specialist, bespoke support that comes with a very high price tag. Under the National Transfer Scheme, the grant provided by the government contributes only towards the cost of placements, and not towards these substantial costs of additional support. Indeed, the grants rarely cover the full costs of even the placements by themselves. The additional funding of £6m made available to councils as part of the National Transfer Scheme is insignificant given the number of cases and local authorities that it will be split between.

Given the very substantial costs that are being left for financially stretched councils to find in order to properly support children under the National Transfer Scheme, we believe it is highly unlikely to deliver on its goals. Inadequate funding for the scheme from central government will not help to encourage those local authorities who are not currently playing their full part to do so. Instead, it will likely mean that the costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children, only partly recompensed by the government, will continue to fall disproportionately on a small number of councils, including Ealing.

An additional financial risk to many local authorities, including Ealing, arises from the placement of asylum seeking adults in local hotels, normally without consultation with or notice to the council. Generally around 5% of those adults being placed in the borough result in requests for age assessments, and with some of these assessments subsequently determining that the individual in question is under 18, they become classed as unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and therefore eligible for support and care. As an example, Ealing Council was not made aware of a hotel in Acton being used by your department to accommodate asylum seeking adults until we received six referrals from that location in the space of two days as a result of requests for assessments.

We are aware of 8 such requests for assessments from individuals placed in Ealing in the past three weeks. If even a small number of these lead to a change in status to children, that represents a rapid increase in placements that need to be found and support costs covered by Ealing Council, above and beyond those children we may accept via the National Transfer Scheme. We would therefore ask that closer working be established between the Home Office and those local authorities where significant numbers of asylum-seeking adults are being placed in hotels and consideration be given to additional support where these lead to unexpected and rapid increases in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are the borough's responsibility.

Ealing will continue to willingly and proudly play our part through the London Referral Rota, the Kent NTS Pathway and the National Transfer Scheme, as well as welcoming children with local connections. We want to provide refuge and a safe,



welcoming home and to go further than we already do in terms of numbers, but we need the government to step up and fund the National Transfer Scheme properly to enable us to do so. We believe that a national scheme is vital, but that the current funding arrangements are likely to seriously undermine it. We are therefore asking you to urgently review the level of financial support available to councils under the National Transfer Scheme, to work with the local government sector to better understand the real costs of providing the support that unaccompanied children need and to enable councils like Ealing who want to do more to be able to do so.
Yours sincerely,

Cllr Peter Mason
Leader

Cllr Kamaljit Nagpal
*Cabinet Member for
A Fairer Start*

Cllr Aysha Raza
*Cabinet Member for
Tackling Inequality*