



The Rt Hon Suella Braverman
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

For the urgent attention of: The Right Honourable Suella Braverman MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department

10 March 2023

Dear Madam,

Asylum seekers living in hotels: Action needed

We are writing to express our deep concern at the removal of 100 asylum seekers against their will from a hotel in Royal Greenwich. This is an issue shared across all local authorities in London. It is appalling that people who have spent months and sometimes years rebuilding their lives, studying, volunteering and establishing community links, are now being removed and placed miles away from their new homes against their wishes. Some of those who have been housed here are vulnerable, disabled or have complex support needs. This move, without their consent or seemingly considering their needs, will most definitely have a serious impact on people's mental health and wellbeing.

We have written to the Home Office on numerous occasions to raise significant issues over the treatment and welfare of asylum seekers, but have received minimal response. Those who have sought sanctuary in the UK should be able to live safely, healthily and with dignity while awaiting the decision on their asylum claim. Children especially, who have experienced trauma at such a vital stage of their lives, deserve compassion and care. We must make sure their safety is guaranteed and that they experience stability regarding their housing and education. Currently, the system is failing on all these measures.

We are calling on the Government to address fundamental gaps in support to prevent further, unnecessary suffering, find long-term and suitable accommodation for those living in hotels, as well as ending the removal of people with only hours' notice.

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The Leader's Office, Town Hall, Wellington Street, Woolwich, London SE18 6PW

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Woolwich Common Ward

Our asks & concerns

1. Stop the removal of asylum seekers from the places they have made their home

Removals of people against their wishes with only a few hours' notice is unacceptable. Often by the time we are informed, the removal of asylum seekers is already underway. We ask that the Home Office adhere to their own service level agreement of five days' notice before people are moved from their accommodation. Unfortunately, five days' notice has become the exception and not the rule, and people are regularly moved with only a few hours' notice. We also need the same reassurances for when people are moved into the borough, so that we are able to make appropriate arrangements.

These instances raise serious concerns over the way the Home Office works with local authorities to ensure the safety and wellbeing of asylum seekers in our borough and beyond. While we understand the need for people to move out of hotel accommodation – which is wholly unsuitable for long-term use – this is not the solution. Decisions need to be made with the safety, protection and best interests of people at the centre.

2. Improve communication between the Home Office and Local Authorities

We need more transparency from the Home Office and its contractors on arrangements for asylum seekers living in hotels, how these are put in place, and the quality of support on offer, as well as service level agreements and details of the responsibilities contractors are paid to provide. We take our safeguarding responsibilities incredibly seriously and have provided training to staff at the hotels to help ensure people's safety. But we rely on the hotel and Home Office to flag concerns to us.

It is vital that the Home Office improves communication, transparency on systems operations, data sharing and genuine partnership working to build trust with local authorities. We also urge the Home Office to share people's onward address with us, so that we can provide continuity of care. This would facilitate people receiving critical healthcare, uninterrupted access to education, and signposting to local voluntary sector support offers.

3. Ensure basic needs such as food, clothing and healthcare are met

It is a basic human right to be able to access sufficient support. The Government must ensure people receive the right help, including access to healthcare, clothing and essential services that allow them to live in dignity. We are extremely concerned about gaps in support for people, including basics like shoes and coats, and making sure people receive food which is culturally appropriate and nutritious. We know that people's mental and physical health has declined and have heard how people feel isolated and abandoned.

With more people living in hotels on a much longer basis, an increase in the level of Section 95 support must be considered. The current level of £8 a week is nowhere near adequate to cover the cost of public transport to appointments, hygiene items, clothes and other essentials. We also need assurance from the Home Office that people are receiving a full needs assessment prior to placement in hotel accommodation, and that inspections of the standard of accommodation are taking place before people are moved in.

4. A permanent housing solution is urgently needed so people can rebuild their lives

As well as prioritising moving people on to more appropriate, permanent accommodation as a matter of

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urgency, plans need to be put in place to ensure that stays in full board accommodation are minimised and people living in hotels can receive advice, support and assistance to access legal advice. We request that people are only removed from hotels and into permanent accommodation, and not a different Contingency Initial Accommodation Centre. We remain deeply concerned about the fate of asylum seekers still living in hotels. Local authorities need the resources to be able to help people rebuild lives in the UK.

The Government must take urgent action now.

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr Anthony Okereke

Leader of the Royal Borough of Greenwich

Cllr Darren Rodwell

Leader of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Cllr Barry Rawlings

Leader of Barnet Council

Cllr Muhammed Butt

Leader of Brent Council

Cllr Nadia Shah

Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion, Camden Council

Cllr Peter Mason

Leader of Ealing Council

Cllr Nesil Caliskan

Leader of Enfield Council

Phillip Glanville

Mayor of Hackney

Cllr Carole Williams

Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and HR, Hackney Council

Cllr Stephen Cowan

Leader of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Cllr Ben Coleman

Deputy Leader of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Cllr Peray Ahmet

Leader of Haringey Council

Cllr Lucia das Neves

Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care and Well-being, Haringey Council

Cllr Shantanu Rajawat

Leader of Hounslow Council

Cllr Kaya Comer-Schwartz

Leader of Islington Council

Cllr Denise Scott-McDonald

Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Services, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Cllr Marcia Cameron

Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities (Job share), London Borough of Lambeth

Cllr Jim Dickson

Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities (Job share), London Borough of Lambeth

Damien Egan

Mayor of Lewisham

Cllr Juliet Campbell

Cabinet Member for Communities, Refugees and Wellbeing, Lewisham Council

Cllr Ross Garrod

Leader of Merton Council

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE

Newham Council

Cllr Jas Athwal

Leader of Redbridge Council

Cllr Jasmine Ali

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Refugees, Southwark Council

Lutfur Rahman

Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Cllr Grace Williams

Leader of Waltham Forest Council

Cllr Simon Hogg

Leader of Wandsworth Council

Cllr Adam Hug

Leader of Westminster Council

