



1 December 2022

Dear Councillor,

USE OF HOTELS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

I would like to express my gratitude for the invaluable support that so many Local Authorities across the United Kingdom are providing vulnerable people seeking asylum, and for your wider support including through the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, for Afghan refugees and for Ukrainians.

The UK has a long and proud history of welcoming and supporting those who need our protection. Just this year alone we have provided sanctuary for tens of thousands of Ukrainians seeking safety from Putin's illegal war, with over 200,000 visas issued through the Ukrainian Visa Schemes.

Alongside our generous, well targeted resettlement schemes, we have experienced an unprecedented number of illegal Channel crossings which have risen from 299 arrivals in 2018 to over 40,000 this year. Taken together, they have placed our finite resources under immense pressure.

The enduring solution to this challenge is to break the business model of the people smugglers so that we can support those most in need whilst deterring those intent on entering the UK illegally. To this end, the Home Secretary has negotiated a deepening of our cooperation with French law enforcement to hinder small boat crossings, and we are implementing the Nationality and Borders Act provisions to reform the asylum system to make it fair but robust. We are also seeking to operationalise the Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda at the earliest opportunity. The Home Secretary is also working alongside the Prime Minister to introduce further plans for reform of our laws.

However, in the meantime, the Government has a statutory obligation to provide support and accommodation to asylum seekers where they are destitute. We will therefore need to continue to use contingency accommodation to ensure that we are in line with those obligations. Whilst our Manston site is fully equipped to provide for all basic needs during initial screening post-arrival, we need to move people on from there quickly, and this means finding suitable accommodation at pace.

The record numbers of individuals illegally crossing the Channel has impacted not only our ability to find suitable accommodation for people as quickly as is necessary, but also our engagement with Local Authorities. I have led conversations with local government colleagues in recent days and heard your concerns. I recognise that we must significantly improve engagement with you on these important issues, alongside improved engagement with Members of Parliament. Accordingly, I have instructed my officials to take the following immediate steps to rectify the situation and give you reassurance of the level of service you can expect from the Home Office henceforth in respect of asylum accommodation:

- a) Email notification to the local authority not less than 24 hours prior to arrival on-site. This email will request a meeting to discuss requirements prior to arrival and will include plans to swiftly stand up an operational forum. A follow-up meeting will be held a week after the arrival date;
- b) Clearer and more comprehensive written notification of our intention to use a hotel with a fulsome factsheet and briefing pack on asylum, asylum support and accommodation;
- c) Information on the proposed cohort to be accommodated, accepting that this can change as arrivals take place and we may be required to accommodate people by the Courts at very short notice; and
- d) Home Office correspondence will always include a point of contact so that you can liaise with officials in a timely manner.

These performance standards will be reviewed regularly and, wherever possible, service levels will be progressively raised. In addition to the above, Home Office officials will also provide email notification to local MPs not less than 24 hours before arrival on-site, followed by a phone call to their constituency office and an offer of a meeting with a senior official to discuss the proposed use of a hotel. We have also stood up weekly virtual drop-in sessions for MPs to discuss asylum accommodation.

We all recognise the vital role local authorities play in this work which is why I have led and will continue to lead regular engagement with you on this matter. Strong and transparent dialogue is critical in addressing the issues that you face. In tandem with this, my officials will continue to work with local authorities through our Strategic Migration Partnerships and the Asylum Resettlement Councils Senior Engagement Group.

We know that colleagues in local government will have ideas about how we can better identify and procure accommodation of all types, including hotels and dispersed accommodation. We remain keen to explore all options, including to reduce our use of hotels. If you would like to put forward specific proposals, please do contact rasengagementhubregionalconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk and we will happily discuss this in greater detail with you.

I welcome the strong commitment we have had from our partners in local government to work with us on detailed plans for an equitable, full dispersal model for procurement of asylum accommodation. We must continue to work collaboratively on this. Once implemented, the model will create up to 100,000 dispersal beds by December 2023 and ensure fair and equitable distribution across the UK. This is paramount and will ultimately resolve much of our current pressure in respect of contingency accommodation.

Home Office appointed contractors also need to do more to constructively engage with local government. I have this week met with them to set out our expectations on how they manage these relationships, including providing named points of contact for each site. I will make clear to them the strong views that Councillors have expressed to me.

Using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers is not a long-term solution. Uppermost in our thoughts must be: the impact on local communities, including access to public services, community cohesion and public order; delivering value for money for the taxpayer; and reducing pull factors to enter the UK illegally by ensuring accommodation is decent, but not luxurious. It is against these criteria that we will consider further contingency accommodation options.

The Home Secretary and I are keen to work with colleagues and local authorities to reach a more sustainable position – one in the best interests of the British people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration