

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Office

Date: 18th November 2021
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Dear Ms Patel,

We write to express our anger at the failure of the Home Office to follow through on its promises regarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs).

Earlier this summer, your department commissioned hotel accommodation in Hove with less than 24 hours' notice to us as the local authority. At the time we wrote to you expressing our concerns and have subsequently continued to raise the issue via our officer team and public statements.

Home Office civil servants have repeatedly committed to end the use of the Hotel. 4 months later, the site remains in use.

Despite this, we received notification yesterday that your department has not only gone back on this promise but opened a second site in Hove. This happened once again with no notice and no formal or informal consultation with the local authority. This is far from good enough for both the council and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We have little patience left for Home Office excuses. In a response from Chris Philip MP in August, he apologised for the lack of notice. Yet it is clear on the basis of your department's subsequent actions that this apology was meaningless.

It is obvious that the voluntary national transfer scheme rota is not working. Your department is failing in its responsibilities to support some of the most vulnerable children who arrive on our shores, and the need for resources, proper support and capacity is not being shared with other local authorities across the country, given that so many choose not to volunteer to help.

Hotel accommodation is not where UASCs should be placed when they arrive in this country. They should be offered secure placements in local authorities. They need access to urgent and vital support with adequate resources provided to enable this. Yet the Home Office continues to allow many local authorities to turn the other way and in the process fails to provide a warm, safe home for these children.

In Brighton & Hove, we are nearing 150% of our 0.07% quota, mixed from voluntary placements from the National Transfer Scheme and spontaneous arrivals. As a city of sanctuary, we pledged to do our bit to support refugees. But we are stretched. An entire decade of cuts and underfunding from the Conservative Government have left us struggling.

We regret to say that we now have no capacity to offer more placements at this time. The pressure to do so continues to fall on authorities who are playing their part, while others look the other way.

The continued use of these hotels is not only morally wrong, it also increases pressure on us as a local authority. Council officers have been working tirelessly to ensure that the Home Office is doing the best for the young people in the hotel.

When you first commissioned the first site in Hove in July, basic measures were not in place to ensure the welfare of these children. It was Brighton & Hove City Council officers who worked to ensure this was in place and we are proud of everything they have done.

Of course, it cannot be ignored that it is not just UASCs that are being housed by the Home Office in hotels in Brighton & Hove. Refugee children and families are also being placed in a third hotel in Hove, which was again opened with no notice to us as the local authority.

This is a further concern to us and a clear example that your department has no plan on how to provide support for refugees who arrive on our shores. This is especially the case when due to accelerated climate change and uncertainty through global conflicts, numbers of UASCs and refugee families are set to increase.

We therefore write to ask you to:

- Urgently implement a mandatory national transfer scheme rota for local authorities with less than 0.07% of their quota
- Immediately end the use of both sites for UASCs in Brighton and Hove and provide us with a clear exit plan for the third site housing adults and families
- Provide urgent funding support to recognise the pressure your department is placing on our officers to provide support and challenge throughout the use of these sites
- End the Home Office toxic rhetoric on asylum seekers which places in harm's way children, young people and their families when they arrive in the United Kingdom.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Phélim Mac Cafferty
Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council



Councillor Hannah Clare
Deputy Leader & Lead Member for
Childrens' Services