



Sent by Southwark Council on behalf of
UK councillors

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

Cabinet Office
Southwark Council
P.O Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX

Alice.macdonald@southwark.gov.uk

CC: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for
Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Date: 24 June 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: World Refugee Week 2022

We are writing to you as councillors leading work on refugees across the country as Refugee Week takes place, in order to express our concerns in relation to the UK asylum system.

World Refugee Day is an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of refugees to our society and the efforts of all those who have worked so hard to make refugees welcome.

In the wake of successive refugee crises, councils up and down the country have stepped up. We have collectively supported and provided refuge for the 77,200 Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in the UK via the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme. Prior to this, councils also welcomed and provided vital support for refugees from Syria and Afghanistan.

However, the assistance that councils can deliver to refugees is limited without appropriate support from the central Government.

During the ongoing process of resettling refugees from Ukraine, councils have not received the consistency and level of communication we need from the Home Office, particularly in relation to the resettlement of refugees who have arrived via the Ukraine Family Scheme. The Government has failed to effectively co-ordinate the work of councils across the UK and there is a lack of clarity on proper routes for safeguarding those arriving from Ukraine.

Reports of refugees being placed in inappropriate and overcrowded accommodation via the Family Scheme have been especially concerning. Meanwhile, the Government has not provided sufficient funding for councils to deliver emergency housing support for those Ukrainian refugees who approach us as homeless, leaving local authorities to foot the bill: As of 16th June 2022, 660 Ukrainian families arriving in the UK have presented themselves as homeless to their local council, including 180 families with at least one child. Furthermore, councils who are tasked with finding accommodation for refugees often struggle to find them homes, due to a shortage of social housing, and insufficient Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which in many areas does not meet local market levels for rental accommodation.

It is clear that the Government has failed to learn the lessons of the Afghanistan crisis, particularly in regard to the sharing of communication with local authorities. Almost one year on from the beginning of mass displacement from Afghanistan, the Home Office still has no long term plan to resettle the 37,000 refugees – including 12,000 of Afghan origin - who remain in hotel accommodation across the UK at a daily cost of almost £4.7 million. It is also troubling that, as of 14th June 2022, over 20,000 visa applications made by Ukrainian refugees remain outstanding.

Due to Home Office delays, asylum claimants often reside in this initial, dispersal, contingency accommodation for prolonged periods of time, while they wait to receive a decision on their

application, and during this time they are unable to work and feel isolated from wider society at a time when they are most in need of support. Refugees who come to the UK want to enter employment and contribute to society as well as their surrounding community, but they are held back by needlessly punitive restrictions on their ability to do so.

It remains unclear how the Home Office will address the high number of refugees still situated in bridging and initial accommodation and resettle them across the country. We welcome the Home Office's recent consultation on a Full Dispersal model for the asylum system and we ask that you take forward the issues that will be raised by local authorities responding to the consultation.

However, we feel that the Home Office's recent trial scheme to transfer asylum claimants from the UK to Rwanda under the UK-Rwanda Migration Partnership fall far, far short of the sustainable solution that asylum seekers and refugees urgently need. We must be a country of sanctuary for those who need it.

We urge you to take the following measures to address the issues outlined above:

1. Ensure that councils are provided with appropriate funding including to support those Ukrainian refugees presenting as homeless to local authorities.
2. Urgently improve the Home Office's communication and data sharing with councils to ensure that refugees from Ukraine can be resettled safely as soon as possible via the Ukraine Family Scheme;
3. Uplift Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to the 30th percentile to reflect the current rental market, and enable local authorities to procure refugees private rented sector accommodation, and provide additional funding for Integrated Care Systems, in order to resource the additional pressures placed on local health services who provide healthcare for refugees;
4. Take action to accelerate the Home Office's processing times for asylum claims and implement measures to improve the wellbeing of asylum claimants during their time in initial, dispersal and contingency accommodation;
5. Take forward local authorities' submissions to Government's consultation on the full dispersal model, and implement a long term plan for the resettlement of refugees that integrates them into communities and in residential accommodation, with the involvement of local communities and the third sector;
6. Undertake a fundamental re-haul of the UK's asylum system to ensure that it is fair, humane and treats refugees with the compassion they deserve.

We look forward to hearing from you.

ClIr Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Equalities, Neighbourhoods & Leisure, Southwark Council

ClIr John Tippett-Cooper, City of Sanctuary Champion, Winchester City Council

ClIr Juliet Campell, Cabinet Member for Communities, Refugees and Wellbeing, Lewisham Council

ClIr Siriol Hugh-Jones, Deputy Leader, City of Brighton and Hove

ClIr Jason Brock, Leader, Reading Borough Council

Cllr John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community Safety & Equalities, Birmingham City Council

Cllr Dr Aysha Raza, Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality, Ealing Council

Cllr Kemi Akinola, Deputy Leader of Wandsworth Council

Cllr Roulin Khondoker, Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion, Islington Council

Cllr Alan Waters, Leader, Norwich City Council

Cllr Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Tower Hamlets Council

Cllr Jim Dickson, Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities, Lambeth Council

Cllr Marcia Cameron, Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities, Lambeth Council

Cllr James-J Walsh, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure, Lewisham Council

Cllr Craig Whitby, Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Finance, Mansfield District Council

Cllr John Adams, Cabinet Member for Housing, Gateshead Council

Cllr Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for The Voluntary Sector Cohesion & Equalities, Camden Council

Cllr Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor of Bristol (Children, Education & Equalities), Bristol City Council

Cllr David Rouane, Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr Jas Athwal, Leader, Redbridge Council

Cllr Claire Cummins, Cabinet Member, Housing Services, Bury Council

Cllr Steve Bridger, Leader, North Somerset Council

Cllr Natalie McVey, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health, Malvern Hills District Council

Cllr Bridget Petty, Cabinet Member, North Somerset Council

Cllr Catherine Braun, Deputy Leader, Stroud District Council

Cllr Andy Brown, Leader of Green Group, Craven District Council

Cllr Kate Halliday, Shropshire Council

Cllr Tony Pearce, Stafford Council

Cllr Brian McDaid, Skipton Town Council