

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Date 07 August 2023

Dear Mr Jenrick

I am following up on the letter to Emma Roddick MSP dated 1 August 2023 regarding the Home Office's intention to double the number of asylum seekers placed in hotel accommodation, and also for informing us of the intention to use the [REDACTED] in Edinburgh for housing asylum seekers.

We remain committed to supporting those seeking asylum in whatever way we can. Indeed this year, we reaffirmed our commitment to be a 'city of sanctuary' which welcomes refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and anyone seeking sanctuary.

As you are aware, I wrote to you setting out our concerns over the use of a vessel in the city for housing asylum seekers, with the city's ongoing homelessness crisis and the acute difficulty in sourcing accommodation meaning that Edinburgh is not currently suitable for participation in the UK-wide asylum dispersal scheme. While we understand that the ongoing use of the [REDACTED] in Edinburgh and the imminent exclusive use of the [REDACTED] is part of the bridging scheme and not the UK wide dispersal scheme, our serious concerns over the issue of accommodation availability remain.

Edinburgh has nearly 5,000 homeless households, a 34% increase in two years. We are supporting over 1,223 households from Ukraine – the highest percentage of any local authority area in Scotland. And we are currently supporting 234 refugee, asylum seeker and migrant households – including people with no recourse to public funds – from a wide range of countries across the world including Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

The impact of an increased number of asylum seekers accommodated in Edinburgh will be significant, not just for our local authority services, particularly housing and homelessness, but for health and care services as well as our voluntary sector partners. The funding we understand to be available of £750 per asylum seeker will not come close to off-setting this increased demand for services.

Councillor Cammy Day, Council Leader

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Doubling the available capacity by placing two strangers in each room is contrary to the Code of Guidance on the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 (as amended). This sharing arrangement will undoubtedly lead to individuals experiencing stresses and strains, and will increase the demand on mental health and counselling support required.

We are also concerned that an increase in the number of asylum seekers in hotels would increase the risk of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who have been wrongly aged assessed being in unsuitable and indeed illegal hotel accommodation. We have in recent weeks had three young people for whom the age assessments which were undertaken at port of entry appear to be incorrect. We currently have no residential provision in the city for children who need our care and are above our registered threshold. We have recently secured an additional ten beds, but these are now full. We strive to be the best corporate parents that we can be but placing more unaccompanied children in the city would increase the chances of us being unable to meet the needs of their most vulnerable.

Our concern is exacerbated by our understanding that the streamlined decision-making process will facilitate decisions for people in bridging accommodation. Not only does this render the distinction between bridging and dispersal accommodation moot, but we also envisage this will result in people choosing to stay in our welcoming and supportive city whatever the determination of their claim. This will have consequent impacts on local services, particularly homelessness, health, social care and other local authority support for people with no recourse to public funds.

I must restate my previous position, when speaking of Ukraine support, in the strongest terms possible that until our city receives additional funding, we will continue to have a real and unacceptable risk to our city, our services and to the asylum seekers themselves.

Yours sincerely





Councillor Cammy Day

Leader, The City of Edinburgh Council

cc

Andrew Kerr, Chief Executive, The City of Edinburgh Council

, Deputy Director, Adult and Family Asylum Accommodation, Asylum Support, Resettlement and non-detained Accommodation (ASRA), Home Office

, Policy Manager, COSLA

Emma Roddick MSP, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, Scottish Parliament