



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

8 April 2022

Dear Home Secretary

Holiday Inn Express, Manvers, Rotherham – Asylum Seekers

I was dismayed to receive an email earlier this week from the Deputy Director in your Home Office Asylum Directorate telling me that you had identified the Holiday Inn Express hotel at Manvers “to start using to accommodate asylum seekers”. The email makes clear that you are having to use hotels on a “temporary basis” because migration controls are failing as “we continue to see illegal entry to the UK via small boats across the English Channel”.

Since receiving this information late on Monday, I have met with the Leader and Assistant Chief Executive of Rotherham Council who had no knowledge of this plan until I shared the Home Office email with them. I have also met with the Chief Executive of Mears Group, your Home Office contractor for the asylum dispersal system across Yorkshire and the Humber. And a Rotherham multi-agency meeting was held with your officials late yesterday afternoon, which strongly stressed the points of concern about the suitability of the Manvers site that I set out below.

I understand the Home Office has contracted directly with the franchisee of the hotel for six months and you plan to move asylum seekers from the Ibis Hotel in Bramley from next week, with further arrivals from outside Rotherham from May onwards. This decision has been taken without any consultation with the local council or local agencies, and without any reference to the interests of local residents. You will be disregarding local views and disrespecting Rotherham by pressing ahead with this plan.

We are a town that has always been willing to welcome those fleeing persecution who are refugees in Britain, as we have done recently with support for the Afghan refugees airlifted out of Kabul in the face of the Taliban take-over who were placed in this Manvers hotel over the last six months. Local people responded with donations of clothes and toys. Our Rotherham schools welcomed the children into classrooms and the next-door Aldi supermarket provided toys, food and sweets before the Home Office vouchers were eventually available.

We have been pleased as the Afghan families have been able to move on to permanent accommodation in South Yorkshire and elsewhere and we were sorry to see the remaining Afghan guests moved last month to another hotel in Leeds. However, we also looked forward to regaining the Holiday Inn as a hotel for paying guests and visitors. We want it back open and operating as a hotel.



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The hotel is utterly unsuited as accommodation for 130 asylum seekers. My main concerns are as follows, and your Home Office officials will confirm that our local council, NHS and other agencies share these deep reservations.

Suitability of the Manvers area – the hotel is part of a purpose-built commercial area, situated 7 miles from Rotherham town centre, well away from any support services but in close proximity to residential properties.

Refugee Welfare – in addition to the concerns at being able to meet mental and general health needs, there would be little access to English classes, no cooking facilities in the rooms to ensure culturally suitable food and the geographical isolation of the hotel will limit available other activities.

Community cohesion – police have highlighted heightened risks from local opposition through to orchestrated far-right activity from this use of hotels in Rotherham, with visits by far-right groups in the past and videos posted online.

Health needs and capacity – there is no spare capacity at all in the Rotherham NHS system, and the pressures from the recent hotels has had a knock on impact on the wider health system, meaning that they are missing their targets for other services locally. The hotel is also situated well away from doctors' surgeries and community centres in the area.

Voluntary sector capacity – there are no black and minority ethnic groups in Manvers and the Rotherham town centre-based BME organisations have limited capacity to travel to the hotel, with the Refugee Council in particular already overstretched, including in supporting the Afghan ARAP scheme.

It is clear that the Home Office's use of hotels to accommodate refugees is a direct result of serious problems in the asylum system, which is failing and unfair.

As your deputy director points out in his email to me, you have lost control of people crossing the channel and House of Commons Library figures confirm that the number entering the UK in small boats has risen from 1,843 in 2019 to over 28,000 in 2021 during your time as Home Secretary. Meanwhile, as the Home Office is taking longer to process asylum applications, the backlog has almost doubled in the last three years to over 85,000 pending cases.

We already have 472 refugees in special asylum accommodation in Rotherham, with a further 161 in 'initial accommodation', the majority hotel-based. You will see from the figures that our borough already has the second highest proportion of dispersed asylum seekers per 10,000 population in Yorkshire and the Humber, before hotel places are taken into account. We want to play our part but we want the system to work fairly. It isn't working fairly when 9 out of 21 local authorities in the Yorkshire and the Humber region aren't willing to play any part in the national asylum system.



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Your Migration Minister Kevin Foster told me in a letter in November that: "We have worked to ensure a proportionate distribution of refugees across the country, so no individual LA bears a disproportionate share of the responsibility". This is simply not true, when you are failing to require all council areas to make an equal contribution to receiving and supporting refugees.

Given these concerns, I write to ask you as Home Secretary to take immediate action to:

1. Halt current plans for the use of the Holiday Inn Manvers for one month, while you consult with local agencies and reconsider your Home Office plans for Rotherham
2. Visit with the Holiday Inn Manvers with me to see for yourself why this hotel is totally unsuited to asylum accommodation
3. Require all local authorities to contribute to the national dispersal programme to ensure a fair share of responsibility for asylum seekers across the country
4. Provide a special fund wherever you do use hotel accommodation to help local authorities, public services and refugee groups offer the support that many of these desperate refugees require
5. Get control of the escalating crisis in migrants crossing in the Channel.

I look forward to receiving your rapid response to my concerns.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Healey', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Healey MP
(WENTWORTH AND DEARNE CONSTITUENCY)