



Home Office

Home Secretary

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Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP
Joanna Cherry KC MP
House of Commons
London
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DECS Reference: MIN/0562960/23

19th April 2023

Dear Dame Diana,

Thank you for your letter of 31 March regarding the use of hotels to accommodate Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and the occurrences when children have gone missing from hotels.

We have been consistently clear that the use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied children is not sustainable and the best place for these young people is within a local authority care placement. My officials are working around the clock with councils to move children into care placements through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

To achieve that goal, we provided local authorities with children's services additional funding for children's services of £15,000 for every eligible young person they took into their care from a Home Office-run hotel dedicated to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or the Kent Reception and Safe Care Service by the end of February 2023. As a result, we were able to temporarily reduce the number of unaccompanied children accommodated in hotels to zero by the afternoon of 29 March 2023. That number has since risen, but we are analysing the results of the additional funding and the findings will inform next steps when considering what further support can be provided to local authorities.

The Illegal Migration Bill creates a new power for the Home Office to accommodate unaccompanied children, pending transfer to a local authority. The Bill does not require the Home Office to accommodate these children but instead provides the power to do so if such provision was felt appropriate. Our policy intention is to only accommodate such children on a temporary basis if deemed necessary.

We expect local authorities to continue to meet their statutory obligations to children from the date of arrival and for the Home Office to only step in sparingly and temporarily. The best place for these young people is and will remain within a local authority care placement. We recognise the pressures on this system.

New powers will allow me, as the Home Secretary, to direct a local authority to receive an unaccompanied child on a date falling after the end of the period of five working days, beginning with the day on which the local authority was given the direction.

We envisage that transfers from any Home Office accommodation into local authority care will be managed operationally as part of an updated National Transfer Scheme which currently manages the movement of unaccompanied minors between local authorities.

The Home Office is not taking on corporate parent responsibilities for unaccompanied children. The Home Office has always taken the view that these children should be in local authority care. The Home Office does not have, and therefore cannot discharge, duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989. It is for the local authority where an unaccompanied child is located to consider its duties under the Children Act 1989.

These provisions relating to accommodation and transfer will initially apply to England but the Bill includes a power, by regulations, to apply them to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Regarding the reports of UASC missing from contingency accommodation, these reports are extremely concerning. While we have not seen any evidence of children being taken against their will, if a child goes missing while in our care, we take it very seriously. At present we work with the police and local authorities to seek to urgently locate any missing children and ensure they are safe. The statutory guidance requires local authorities to share information regarding all missing children locally in a multi-agency forum; therefore, when a child goes missing from a hotel, the relevant local authority will convene a strategy meeting regarding them. Local authorities have a statutory duty to protect all children, regardless of where they go missing from. This can be from home or from a care setting as a looked-after child.

UASC are not detained and are free to leave the accommodation. They may choose to leave for a number of reasons, such as visiting family. The Home Office has no power to hold children or adults in contingency hotels if they wish to leave. To minimise the risk of a child going missing, records of children leaving and returning to the hotel are kept and monitored. Support workers accompany children off site on activities and social excursions, or where specific vulnerabilities are identified.

Unaccompanied minors are only accommodated in Home Office-run hotels when there is no other option. When they are, support staff are in the hotels 24 hours a day to make sure they are cared for, as we work around the clock to move them into long-term care as soon as possible. All contingency sites have security staff and providers liaise closely with local police to ensure the welfare and safety of vulnerable residents.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write to me.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Suella Braverman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP