

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 63

Subject: Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children abandoned in local hotels

Date of meeting: 15 December 2022

**Proposer: Councillor Grimshaw
Seconded: Councillor Wilkinson**

Ward(s) affected: All

Notice of Motion

Labour Group

Council notes:

1. In July 2021 the Home Office began contracting with hotel owners in Brighton & Hove and elsewhere to house asylum-seeking children;
2. Alarming reports that at least 222 unaccompanied children placed by the Home Office in hotels nationally – many in Brighton & Hove – have gone missing;
3. The Home Office has a mandatory statutory duty under section 55 of the Borders Act 2009 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK;
4. Local authorities have mandatory statutory duties under the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need within their area;
5. The mandatory National Transfer Scheme is intended to promptly transfer unaccompanied children, on their arrival in the UK, to statutory local authority care;

Council requests:

6. The Chief Executive writes to the Home Secretary:
asking for explanation of the legal basis upon which they are moving unaccompanied asylum seeking children outside of the local authority area of their arrival in the UK into hotels in Brighton & Hove being used as “intake centers” , and provide legal clarity about whether the Home Office accepts responsibility of ‘corporate parent’ for the “children placed in those “intake centers”
7. requesting an urgent meeting with the Home Office to discuss the welfare needs of and adequate funding for unaccompanied children
8. A report or briefing to the next CYPS meeting to clarify:
 - a. At what point in the process Brighton and Hove City Council is informed by the Home Office that a child is being transferred out of area to a hotel or “extension of an intake center” located by the HO in Brighton and Hove

- b. What specific steps are being taken to safeguard children once officers are made aware of their arrival

Supporting Information:

- Nationally, 222 young people who have been accommodated in hotels have gone missing
- Clarity around legal responsibility, powers and statutory duties around the welfare of children would help the council to be pro-active in monitoring the safeguarding of them in terms of child safety, well-being and environmental & public health
- As a City of Sanctuary we have a responsibility to ensure that all refugees are welcomed to the city not just with words but with actions and that the Council exercise its statutory responsibilities in protecting all who come here, particularly women and children
- It's not just unaccompanied children who are suffering but accompanied children too – a single hotel room is not an appropriate place to keep a family of three or four people for more than a year
- Children cannot thrive in such an environment and their mental and physical health is being damaged by this
- The Home Office urgently needs to speed up both the interview process and the move-on/full dispersal process into more suitable accommodation
- There have also been worrying reports that the Home Office has provided new dates of birth to unaccompanied children in order to place them in adult accommodation

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/government-must-take-action-end-crisis-unaccompanied-children-being-placed-hotels>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/22/uk-asylum-seekers-home-office-accused-of-catastrophic-child-protection-failure>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1111982/An_inspection_of_the_use_of_hotels_for_housing_unaccompanied_asylum-seeking_children_UASC_March_to_May_2022.pdf

An Inspection of the use of hotels for housing UASCs (October 2022) by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders & Immigration

“The position the Home Office finds itself in, running unregistered children’s homes, is one that staff and stakeholders alike have found uncomfortable. This is clearly not a space the Home Office wants, or should be operating in.”