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The Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

Wednesday 30th November 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

**Urgent concerns RE the welfare and disproportionate numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Luton**

I am writing to express my deep concern about the large and grossly disproportionate number of refugee asylum seekers that the Home Office has placed in Luton in recent weeks without any advance warning.

The extreme additional pressure this is placing on public services that are already under immense strain is completely unacceptable.

What is also of grave concern is our view that the Home Office is putting the welfare of vulnerable people at risk by placing them in accommodation that is unsafe and unsuitable.

As a town with the 5thhighest levels of child poverty nationally, in the midst of a spiralling cost of living crisis which is hurting the poorest people in or society the most, this action is utterly inexplicable, irresponsible and indefensible.

Luton has been, and will always be a caring and compassionate town. Our communities, voluntary sector partners and public sector organisations continue to step up and pull out all the stops to support those seeking sanctuary in this country after fleeing conflict, disaster, discrimination and dangerous war zones across the world.

However, it is abundantly clear that this compassion is being abused. The high number of asylum seekers being placed by the Home Office in Luton compared to other places across the country is completely disproportionate. Luton represents just over three per cent of the East of England population yet is currently hosting 24 per cent of asylum seekers placed in hotels in the region. This does not include refugees and asylum seekers we are already hosting in other forms of accommodation.

In addition, we continue to have no clarity or assurances regarding the commitment of government to reconsider a fair assessment of burdens and ensure sufficient funding is available to cover the full extent of impacts on all local services affected by national policy in this area.

My officers have written and spoken to the Home Office about this on numerous occasions. Whilst senior government officials are open about admitting the reality of this disproportionate approach, and say they understand the pressure this is putting on the local system, they continue to choose our town over other areas to place additional refugee asylum seekers, despite commitments to the contrary.

It is completely unfair on these vulnerable individuals who are placed here with little support, and then told to rely on local services that are almost at breaking point following years of austerity, the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. There are additional risks presented by the heightened security and cohesion concerns around such accommodation given national events which have apparently been ignored or discounted.

The failure of the Home Office to respond in any way constructively on the substantive points we have raised over a long period of time, and especially in the light of their recent actions, leaves us with no realistic option to defend the welfare and rights of both refugee asylum seekers and our community other than legal action. We are consulting with key stakeholders and partners on immediate options available to us under the circumstances.

Our firm view is that there are clearly other more appropriate locations for accommodating additional groups of refugee and asylum seekers. Moreover, there is, and has been for a long time, an urgent need for properly coordinated national solutions to this problem that offer due respect to local authorities and their residents as key stakeholders, and do not cause additional human suffering to people seeking sanctuary as the same time as unfairly burdening some communities.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Hazel Simmons MBE**

**Leader of Luton Council**

cc.

Suella Braverman MP, Home Secretary

Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing

Rachel Hopkins MP, Luton North

Sarah Owen MP, Luton South