

Sian Berry AM,
Andrew Boff AM,
Hina Bokhari AM
and Sem Moema AM
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
LONDON E16 1ZE

To the Rt Hon James Cleverly, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street,
London SW1P 4DF

Sent via email to: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

17 January 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

Notice to quit period for asylum seekers from Home Office accommodation

We are writing to you – as a group of cross-party London Assembly Members – to raise our deep concerns for the welfare of an increasing number of asylum seekers who have been granted leave to remain and are now being forced to present as homeless or rough sleeping at shelters across London and the rest of the country.

We are relieved that the Home Office has reversed the seven-day notice-to-quit period, which was introduced in August 2023, back to the 28-day period. However, this still gives refugees awarded leave to remain barely enough time to find a safe home, or apply for a job or Universal Credit.¹ All of these steps are, in addition, made more difficult for people whose first language is not English.

We are also pleased to see the Home Office has taken some action to deal with the backlog in asylum claims so that asylum seekers can have their status regularised more quickly and restart their lives in the UK. This is something the London Assembly unanimously called for in its motion of 8 June 2023.² However, we are very worried at the impact the increase in people in need of housing having left asylum accommodation is causing on the ability of services to cope.

Data released by London Councils in December 2023 found that: “846 homelessness presentations were made in October from refugees and asylum-seekers evicted from Home Office accommodation such as hotels. This represents a 39% increase on September’s figure.”³ This data highlights the severe impact notice-to-quit periods have on refugees’ and asylum seekers’ capacity to access the services they require to

¹ Home Office reverses policy on UK hostel evictions after surge in refugee homelessness, 21 Dec 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/21/home-office-reverses-policy-on-uk-hostel-evictions-after-surge-in-refugee-homelessness>

² Removal of housing protections from asylum seekers, 8 Jun 2023, <https://www.london.gov.uk/motions/removal-housing-protections-asylum-seekers>

³ Alarming increase in refugees ending up homeless in London, December 2023, <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/40974>

build a safe and decent home. Furthermore, the Red Cross estimates that by the time the backlog of asylum seekers' claims has been fully completed, around 50,000 people will have been made homeless.⁴

We would like to share just one example of this growing humanitarian crisis that we have direct knowledge of, from the New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC), which has been visited by a number of Assembly Members as well as the Mayor of London over the last year. The centre is based in Camden, near Euston Station, but serves a wider constituency of young people who find themselves homeless, specifically under-25-year-olds, and as of March 2023 had a 98 per cent success rate at preventing future rough sleeping.

The NHYC has now informed us of a growing problem. In September they had been approached by 20 young people in this position seeking help. In October this number had risen to 28, in November it was 55, and in December by the week before Christmas, the number that month was up to 70. On 4 January, the NHYC reopened to its busiest day ever with 76 young people coming for help. The NHYC is now in a situation where 43 per cent of its users are refugees and the increased demand on their services means many of those seeking help are now ending up back on the streets.

Therefore, we are writing to request an urgent further increase in the move-on period for successful asylum seekers. This should be 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is also what a range of charities and organisations that support people facing homelessness or rough sleeping are asking for.⁵

The London Assembly has a history of investigating the practical problems faced by asylum seekers and refugees, recognising the positive contribution they make to London's culture, society and economy. For example, the Assembly supported ending the ban on asylum seekers from legally working for 12 months from arrival with a cross-party motion that was passed unanimously on 7 September 2023.⁶

The relevant parts of the motion were:

"This Assembly also recognises the clear benefits of allowing asylum seekers to join London's workforce, especially in addressing labour shortages in sectors which include education, social care, healthcare, construction, and hospitality."

[...]

"This Assembly commits to supporting the aims of the Lift the Ban Coalition and its efforts to remove barriers facing asylum seekers in accessing work in the capital and across the UK."

[...]

"This Assembly also calls on both the Mayor and the Chair of the Assembly to write to the government jointly, urging them to amend the law to allow asylum seekers the right to work."

In addition, the London Assembly Economy Committee investigated the barriers to work for asylum seekers and refugees. The committee's letter to the Mayor in April 2023 highlighted that:

"[...] refugees and asylum seekers face several barriers to employment, including language barriers; workplace discrimination; lack of specialist services to guide them through the process; lack of knowledge and experience of the UK labour market; limited provision of skills and training; digital

⁴ More than 50,000 refugees could become homeless by the end of the year, British Red Cross warns, 5 Oct 2023, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/press-releases/refugees-could-become-homeless>

⁵ Move-on period: more than 50,000 refugees could be homeless by the end of the year, 5 Oct 2023, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/migration-and-displacement/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/move-on-period-more-than-50000-refugees-could-be-homeless-by-end-of-year>

⁶ Lift the Ban Coalition, 7 Sep 2023, <https://www.london.gov.uk/motions/lift-ban-coalition>

exclusion; costs of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests and having qualifications translated; and long periods of isolation on very low levels of asylum support.”⁷

Given the challenges faced by refugees upon arrival in a safe country, as well as the increasing crisis of homelessness that has left support services at breaking point, urgently increasing the move-on period to 56 days would help to alleviate the burdens faced by refugees and support charities alike.

Above all, it would enable a larger number of successful asylum applicants to start their new lives in our country with dignity and the fair chance they deserve.

We urge you to take this vital step and look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Sian Berry, Green Party Londonwide Assembly Member



Andrew Boff, Chair of London Assembly, Conservative Londonwide Assembly Member



Hina Bokhari, Liberal Democrat Londonwide Assembly Member



Sem Moema, Labour Assembly Member for Hackney, Islington and Waltham Forest

⁷ Barriers to work for asylum seekers and refugees, 21 Apr 2023, <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Economy%20Committee%20-%20Barriers%20to%20Work%201%20-%20Letter%20to%20the%20Mayor.pdf>