

**Councillor Judith Blake CBE**  
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**Priti Patel MP**  
**The Home Secretary**

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Our ref: SH\JB\BU\PATEL

23 October 2020

Dear Home Secretary

Re: Halting of evictions process for Asylum Seekers with negative decisions

We are writing to urgently request that the Government do not evict people from accommodation for asylum seekers at this time. This request is made in light of the rising COVID infection rates in Leeds and across the Country as a whole. Voluntary and statutory services remain under intense, increasing strain at this time and it is clear that this course of action would be in the interests of the safety of people seeking asylum and of the wider public health.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Leeds provided emergency urgent accommodation to all street homeless people in the city under the governments directive in the letter from the Homelessness Minister on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to “bring everyone in” and provide self-contained accommodation and social care basics such as food an hygiene items and clinical care to those who needed it. This was done to protect rough sleepers from COVID-19 and prevent wider transmission and was specified by the government to include people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) including asylum seekers not entitled to asylum accommodation.

The Council is now trying to work with those accommodated under this directive to move people on, into other accommodation and to prevent a return to rough sleeping. People with NRPF are often reliant on charitable and voluntary organisations for accommodation and those organisations currently have limited capacity to support this group. A number of the normal accommodation options for people with NRPF, such as night shelters, cannot be safely re-opened by the providers. Ultimately this will lead to a potential public health risk if the only option is to return to rough sleeping.

Adding to the numbers of people requiring this support locally by evicting further people from their asylum accommodation will only increase the risk to both those people and to public health at this time, therefore we urgently request that the Government consider a further hold on evicting people from asylum seeker accommodation.

Negative cessation

We are also aware that refused asylum seekers may now be given cessation notices to leave their asylum accommodation.

The Home Office has informed us that the Council does not have a statutory duty towards refused asylum seekers and therefore will not share any meaningful data around these cases.

In normal circumstances refused asylum seekers are supported by local voluntary destitution housing projects but due to Covid-19 they have limited capacity to support this group. The Council is concerned if evicted without VCS support, this could lead to an increase in destitution and homelessness in the city, as well as barriers to accessing healthcare and the likelihood of Covid-19 transmission within this group.

To evict people during the pandemic is a major cause for concern and I would urge you to reconsider your decision to evict these people during this time. The eviction process needs to be planned in consultation with Local Authorities ensuring adequate support is in place for them to access accommodation and support.

Yours sincerely



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cc: The Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government - Robert Jenrick MP