



Councillor Danny Thorpe
Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Robert Jenrick,
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA

via e-mail : robert.jenrick.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Jenrick,

31st August 2021

Support for Afghan Refugees

We are writing to you to express our significant concerns about the lack of central government support being provided to Afghan refugee families who are currently self-isolating at a hotel in Greenwich.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a welcoming Borough, having previously welcomed many Syrian refugees, when some of our neighbours have decided not to assist the government in providing any support to either recently arrived Afghan refugees or Syrian refugees for whom the government has previously sought assistance. We have supported 81 refugees in Greenwich, whilst Bexley and Bromley have supported zero.

Approximately 500 adults and 200 children have arrived in less than a week, often with little more than the clothes they are wearing. As we are sure you can appreciate, these families are in desperate need and require significant, immediate support.

So far, the government has provided effectively no support, with no logistical or translation support being provided, requiring the Royal Borough of Greenwich to redeploy large numbers of staff and spend significant amounts of money to support

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these families. This has included a number of staff giving up their bank holiday weekend to provide urgent support, while the civil servants sent to assist simply observed and provided no help.

The scale of this is astonishing and we are now mobilising 3 shifts a day, via a gold command structure.

There have been no translators provided by the government, making it extremely difficult to identify and assist with people's often complex needs. A form that has been placed under doors to assess needs (which our teams are then trying to respond to) has multiple barriers. Basic information such as the structure of family groups in each room has not been forthcoming.

No supplies of clothing, sanitary products or other key items have been provided, requiring the Council to either collect donations or spend its already limited resources on purchasing these items to ensure that the conditions experienced by these families are bearable and that they feel welcome.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is happy to support these refugees, but we need the resources to do so. As you will be aware, local government has experienced extensive cuts, and we are expected to make further cuts to our budget. Our staff have sourced everything from Moses baskets to underwear within a week.

The lack of support from the government makes this situation increasingly difficult.

We urgently require the following from the government:

1. Translators on the ground.
2. Civil servants to actually assist with efforts, rather than simply observe.
3. A guarantee that the costs already incurred will be reimbursed and that sufficient funding to support the level of support expected of the Council will be provided.
4. Additional supplies of clothing and sanitary items
5. Clear communications with families about the support they can expect.

We have not forgotten the humanity of the men, women and children that we are assisting, and as a borough with significant connections with the military, are doing all we can to support those who supported our forces on the ground.

However, we urgently need the government assistance outlined above to ensure that they are safely accommodated and treated with the with the care, dignity and

support to which they are entitled.

Furthermore, it is not at all clear what happens next and although our staff have been loosely told about a 4 step strategy, we are days away from step two and are none the wiser.

We hope to receive an action plan from you setting out how the government will address these points within the next 24 hours and provide the support we need on the ground.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Thorpe', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Danny Thorpe,
Leader of the Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Scott-McDonald', written in a cursive style with a large flourish at the end.

Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald
Deputy Leader of the Council

