

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Accommodation for Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) has put together a response to some frequently asked questions in relation to asylum seekers and refugees which will hopefully help widen the understanding of this issue and provide objective, factual information on the misinformation that is currently being shared. These FAQs will be updated on a regular basis.

### **Definitions:**

**Refugee** – a person who has been granted refugee status outside their country of origin, due to fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership or a certain social or political group. Refugees have the same rights as any other British Citizen, including the right to housing, work and benefits.

**Asylum Seeker** – a person who has left their country of origin and has formally applied for protection in another country but has not yet received a decision on their application. Asylum seekers have no recourse to public funds which limits their ability to claim benefits or seek housing assistance.

### **Why have Asylum Seekers been placed in hotel accommodation in Stevenage?**

The Home Office makes the decision on which properties and locations are used to house asylum seekers and are currently using two hotels in Stevenage as contingency accommodation for people awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications. The use of hotels is happening across the country and not just in Stevenage.

### **Who is responsible for housing Asylum Seekers?**

The Home Office is responsible for housing asylum seekers and contingency accommodation is being managed in our area by Home Office service providers. Asylum seekers cannot choose where they live. The hotel operators are responsible for the day-to-day running of premises, such as the provision of meals, cleaning and maintenance of the external areas. Stevenage Borough Council does not provide social housing or temporary accommodation to asylum seekers.

### **What happens when refugee status is granted to Asylum Seekers?**

There is a 28 day move on period and refugees have 28 days to:

- Leave their Home Office accommodation
- Find alternative housing
- Apply for benefits such as universal credit

Refugees can be housed by the local authority if they become homeless or are at risk of homelessness, this is the law. The council must assess their needs and possibly provide temporary accommodation whilst a longer-term solution is found.

Refugees do not get 'automatic council housing' and must follow the same procedures as UK nationals and other eligible residents.

SBC allocates properties according to its Allocation Policy and based on Reasonable Preference and priority need. Housing advice and support is provided to hotel occupants prior to them receiving settled status. SBC has in-reach workers who visit the hotels to give advice. This is paid for by Government Grant and not directly by Stevenage Borough Council.

## **Do Asylum Seekers get housed by the local authority after receiving settled status?**

Not automatically. If an asylum seeker is granted refugee status or settled status (indefinite leave to remain) they are no longer supported by the Home Office and become eligible to apply for housing and benefits and they can work, like any UK resident. But they must go through the standard processes like anyone else.

It is a misconception that all local social housing provision goes to refugees. If refugees present as homeless to the council, and many do not, they are primarily assisted into hostel accommodation or into private rented properties. SBC may have a duty to provide temporary accommodation whilst a refugee is being assessed for homelessness. Most councils, like Stevenage, have long housing waiting lists for housing and most single males will not be considered priority need.

## **Key Facts**

The council let 494 council owned properties during 2024/25 and 74 housing association properties, so 568 in total. The vast majority of the 568 properties allocated, were let to Stevenage residents with some exceptions where legislation provides for veterans, care leavers and survivors of domestic abuse.

Asylum Seekers are housed by the Home Office in contingency accommodation or dispersed accommodation units and are not allocated social housing by the local authority.

Refugees are not given preferential treatment for social housing and must meet the criteria of the local Allocations Policy and legislation, like any other applicant registering for social housing.

## **What is being done to ensure appropriate behaviour inside and outside asylum seeker hotels?**

All arrivals receive an induction and information about UK culture, values and law. This includes information on British values, such as respecting and obeying the law, respecting the rights of others and treating others with fairness.

The police are working with the council and other agencies to promote community cohesion and prevent crime in the local area. Feedback from other areas where asylum seekers have been accommodated is that there have been low levels of crime and disorder during their stay.

The council is in regular contact with the operators of asylum seeker hotels as well as the Home Office, which will enable us to raise any concerns and monitor issues as they arise. Any concerns about noise and anti-social behaviour from hotels should be emailed to [community.safety\\_sbc@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety_sbc@stevenage.gov.uk) where it will be raised with the hotel and relevant partners.

Any concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime in the local area should be reported to the police. The police will deal with any such reports or concerns as they would normally do, supporting the victim and dealing with the perpetrator. If you have a crime to report, please contact the Police in the usual ways by either calling 101 or using their online reporting form. Only use 999 if you or someone else is in immediate danger or if the crime is happening right now.

All criminal incidents are reported to the Home Office immediately by the provider. The Home Office will then work with the provider to put additional measures in place, if required. This will include working with other statutory bodies including the police to investigate any potential criminal activities.

The council is aware of various protests taking place in Stevenage in connection with the asylum seeker hotels. These protests are taking place across the Country and are not limited to Stevenage. The council is working hard with the police and other partners to monitor community tensions and ensure that any protests take place peacefully, respectfully and without incident. If you have any concerns, please contact us at [community.safety\\_sbc@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety_sbc@stevenage.gov.uk).