

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

24th August 2021

Dear Robert,

Following your letter in June, a number of us have risen to the challenge to house Afghans coming to the UK.

The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary to those in need. We are pleased that the Government, albeit belatedly, seems willing to go further and admit more Afghan families following the tragic scenes the world has witnessed over the last week. As you know, the UK accepts a very small number of refugees compared to other similar countries and we believe that even more should be done.

As Council Leaders we are keen to help. But, as your department is well aware, there is a huge housing crisis in this country already. Contrary to popular myth, people do not just arrive in the UK and get offered a free house.

There is a desperate shortage of affordable and social-rented housing and, since developers tend to only build small properties for social rent, larger homes to rent are almost non-existent; just a handful per year are available (especially in southern England). We need a long-term commitment to support us to build thousands of social-rent homes.

In the medium-term we need you to lobby the Home Office and Treasury to change Local Housing Allowance rates to something nearer to actual rents. For example, in places around London like Chelmsford or Guildford the LHA rate for a two-bed property is £750-800 a month but actual rents are £1000-1300 a month. For reference, the attached table shows you the Government's Local Housing Allowance Rates in Chelmsford and the lower quartile, median and upper quartile rents that the Private Rented Sector actually charge.

Housing benefit amount compared to actual rent levels

Indicator 6. Market rent table

Rent	Q2 2020/21				Q3 2020/21				Q4 2020/21				Q1 2021/22			
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed
LHA Rate	£650	£795	£985	£1,295	£650	£795	£985	£1,295	£650	£795	£985	£1,295	£650	£795	£985	£1,295
PRS LQ	£725	£995	£1,196	£1,650	£813	£925	£1,173	£1,613	£800	£995	£1,296	£1,525	£775	£925	£1,250	£1,863
PRS Median	£805	£1,160	£1,300	£1,750	£850	£1,025	£1,200	£1,775	£850	£1,150	£1,300	£1,600	£850	£1,050	£1,300	£2,200
PRS UQ	£875	£1,250	£1,488	£1,900	£950	£1,219	£1,300	£1,813	£956	£1,250	£1,500	£1,725	£938	£1,250	£1,386	£2,500

In the very short-term, to help the Afghan families now arriving, we need you to ensure that the Home Office guarantees an ongoing top-up to meet ALL the costs of housing these new residents i.e. covers actual rent costs not LHA rates. If this doesn't happen, they risk being stuck in deeply unsatisfactory temporary accommodation. This is very expensive and some of the costs will fall on local councils (including subsidy loss that we have to cover) unless the Home Office steps in.

All of this assumes we can even find temporary accommodation, which we have to assess as viable before passing on to the Home Office. This, of course, is a further cost to our already overstretched Housing departments. There are also the wider costs of supporting new arrivals. Most councils have no spare capacity and, as the Syrian scheme showed, support from dedicated council staff is required over years - not short term.

Some of the Afghan families arriving have five, six or more children. Therefore, even if they find a house to rent, they could be caught by the benefit cap and be back in the homelessness system quite quickly.

It would probably save quite a lot of money if they were supported into employment as soon as possible and are then able to look after themselves, as I am sure they would wish. We hope you can press for that too.

In short, Secretary of State, we want to help; we believe that we have a duty to help. But we need your assistance to make it happen.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Harris

LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leader

Leader of Cotswolds District Council

Bridget Smith

LGA Liberal Democrat Group
Deputy Leader
Leader of South Cambridgeshire
District Council

Stephen Robinson

Leader of Chelmsford City Council

Chris White

Leader of St Albans City & District
Council

Amanda Hopgood

Leader of Durham County Council

Alan Connett

Leader of Teignbridge District
Council

Caroline Kerr

Leader of the Royal Borough of
Kingston

Keith Aspden

Leader of City of York Council

Ruth Dombey

Leader of London Borough of
Sutton

Ros Wyke

Leader of Mendip District Council

David Worden

Leader of North Devon Council

Emily Smith

Leader of Vale of White Horse
District Council

James MacCleary

Leader of Lewes District Council

John Boyce

Leader of Oadby & Wigston
Borough Council

Jonathan Brook

Leader of South Lakeland District
Council

Keith House

Leader of Eastleigh Borough
Council

Kevin Guy

Leader of Bath and North East
Somerset

Liz Leffman

Leader of Oxfordshire County
Council

Lucille Thompson

Leader of Winchester Council

Lucy Nethsingha

Leader of Cambridgeshire County
Council

Virginia Taylor

Leader of Eden District Council

Mayor Dave Hodgson

Bedford Borough Council

Mike Bell

Deputy Leader of North Somerset
Council

Paul Clark

Leader of North Hertfordshire
District Council

Mayor Peter Taylor

Watford Borough Council

Peter Thornton

Deputy Leader of Cumbria County
Council

Robin Bradburn

Deputy Leader of Milton Keynes

Rowena Hay

Cheltenham Borough Council

Sarah Butikofer

Leader of North Norfolk

Sarah Nelmes

Leader of Three Rivers District
Council

Steve Carr

Deputy Leader of Broxtowe
Borough Council

Steve Darling

Leader of Torbay Council

Stuart Bray

Leader of Hinkley and Bosworth
Borough Council

Susan Prochak

Deputy Leader of Rother District
Council