

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD

18 MARCH 2022

QUESTION No. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tom Lake to ask the Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board:

Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers  
(on behalf of Reading Refugee Support Group (RRSG))

We have concerns for the potential for radicalisation in the dispersal hotels and accommodation for refugees, especially as a result of the lack of mental health support for the dispersed asylum seekers in Berkshire.

The hotels for Afghans are better supported but concerns are not dissimilar in the context of frustrations that may build up at the length of time people have to stay there against what they were originally told. People's expectations are the key factor to be managed here.

In the other dispersal hotels, on top of the trauma people are dealing with resulting from experiences in their home country and their journey to the UK, there is the huge ongoing traumatic burden of their impending asylum application and decision, and potential deportation, ever-present on top of the complete lack of any meaningful support for people's mental health and wellbeing.

Our concerns are not evidenced as such but instinctively born out of experience leading RRSg through the Forbury Gardens tragedy.

A week after Forbury, an asylum seeker with mental health problems living in hotel accommodation in Glasgow killed 6 people before being killed himself by the police. Justice for Refugees is lobbying the government to investigate fully the conditions in the hotel and the lack of support, that may have led to this man losing control.

We suspect those conditions are not dissimilar to the conditions faced by people living in dispersed accommodation here in Berkshire.

The longer this situation continues, where hotels are used to accommodate people, which will possibly be exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis further stretching resources, the greater the potential is for something to go wrong. At the very least, wider interagency conversations need to be discussing this, in our opinion.

Mental Health support for this vulnerable group is key to the conversation.

Refugees and asylum seekers who have not received a final refusal of asylum are fully entitled to NHS services.

Who will take responsibility for adequate mental health services for these vulnerable people?

**REPLY** by the Vice-Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board (Dr Andy Ciecierski) on behalf of the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board (Councillor Hoskin):

BOB ICS is in the process of establishing a team that will lead and co-ordinate the NHS response to the Ukrainian refugees and our asylum seekers who are already living in our local communities.

With regard to access to Mental Health services, the CCG has funded a Mental Health worker post through the Reading Refugee Support Group which will provide an initial screening service and help to network across statutory services.

The CCG recognises the complexity of the mental health issues that people may be experiencing and that may be outside the experience of current Mental Health Services. We will be seeking to learn from other areas who have greater experience of this and developing an offer to meet these needs.