# Coroner finds asylum hotel staff lacked training before migrant’s death amid complex subcontracting



Staff at an asylum hotel, where a resident tragically took his own life, have been found lacking in the necessary training to care for vulnerable individuals, according to a coroner's ruling. This case highlights significant concerns regarding the welfare of asylum seekers amid growing scrutiny of the Home Office's management of private accommodation contracts.

Victor Hugo Pereira Vargas, a 63-year-old Colombian migrant, was discovered dead in his room at the Boships Lions Farm hotel in Hailsham, Sussex, on 13 October 2023. Just weeks before his death, Mr Pereira Vargas had attempted to leave the UK by requesting immigration officials to return him to his home country. This desperation was exacerbated by fears of being relocated to the Bibby Stockholm barge, which he disparagingly referred to as a “maritime prison.” In an unsettling twist of fate, evidence presented during the inquest revealed that senior Home Office officials were unaware of the identity of the hotel’s staff, having relied on complex subcontracting arrangements that left critical welfare checks overlooked.

The management of the Boships Lions Farm hotel was subcontracted by Clearsprings Ready Homes, the private firm holding the £700 million government contract for asylum accommodation in southern England, to Crown Lodge Accommodation Limited. In turn, Crown Lodge had appointed Becker Hoffman Facilities Management Limited to oversee staffing at the hotel. It was revealed that this chain of contracting created a worrying distance between the Home Office and the actual care provided to vulnerable residents, rendering officials oblivious to fundamental operational failures.

During the inquest, it was disclosed that while Mr Pereira Vargas had expressed signs of increasing paranoia and distress, staff members were inadequately trained to detect and respond to such indicators. One staffer responsible for conducting welfare checks disclosed having received no formal training. Their reports indicated Mr Pereira Vargas was "in good condition," a stark contrast to the observations of fellow residents who noticed his deteriorating state. Michael Spencer, the assistant coroner, cast doubt on the authenticity of the welfare checks, particularly questioning the accuracy of a check purportedly conducted on a day when Mr Pereira Vargas had actually left the premises.

Further compounding the tragedy, staff failed to arrange a mental health appointment Mr Pereira Vargas had requested, which was not scheduled until more than two weeks after it was sought. By this time, he had inaccurately notified a general practitioner that he had no mental health issues, leaving many to question what preventative measures could have potentially altered the fatal outcome.

The coroner concluded that Mr Pereira Vargas died as a result of self-inflicted injuries occurring while he suffered from extreme anxiety and distress. However, it remains uncertain whether he had intended to end his life. Becky Hart, a solicitor representing Mr Pereira Vargas's family, stated that the Home Office "failed to put in place proactive systems" to ensure appropriate training for staff in asylum accommodation, warning that the risks to life remain significant.

These events unfold against the backdrop of mounting criticism of the profit-driven model underpinning asylum accommodation in the UK. Clearsprings Ready Homes, which has seen its profits soar to £90 million annually, faces increasing scrutiny from MPs and refugee advocates who allege that the company is benefitting from inadequate living conditions endured by asylum seekers. Reports of complaints surrounding poor treatment and substandard housing continue to surface, revealing a more extensive issue within the system that prioritises profits over welfare.

Dame Karen Bradley, chair of the home affairs select committee, echoed these sentiments, stating that the concerning circumstances surrounding Mr Pereira Vargas's tragic death raise alarms regarding the operational integrity of asylum accommodation contracts. With significant taxpayer funding involved, there is a clear expectation of adequate oversight and support mechanisms for those seeking refuge.

In light of this incident and the broader issues it illuminates about the treatment of asylum seekers, there is a pressing need for systemic reform. Stakeholders are left grappling with the moral implications of profiting from the vulnerabilities of those in desperate need—a pressing issue that demands urgent attention and action from both governmental and private entities. As the Home Office contends that the health and safety of asylum seekers is paramount, the stark reality of inadequate training and oversight reveals a disconcerting gap between policy and practice.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, there are resources available for confidential support, including the Samaritans in the UK and the 988 Lifeline in the USA.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-asylum-seeker-colombia-b2750800.html), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/03/profits-of-home-office-asylum-housing-provider-rise-to-90m-a-year)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-asylum-seeker-colombia-b2750800.html), [[4]](https://www.theconversation.com/asylum-housing-tycoon-is-among-the-uks-wealthiest-heres-what-conditions-are-like-inside-the-properties-his-company-runs-230428)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/27/investigation-prompts-rapid-upgrades-to-asylum-seekers-homes), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/27/investigation-prompts-rapid-upgrades-to-asylum-seekers-homes)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-asylum-seeker-colombia-b2750800.html), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/03/profits-of-home-office-asylum-housing-provider-rise-to-90m-a-year)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/03/profits-of-home-office-asylum-housing-provider-rise-to-90m-a-year), [[7]](https://www.theconversation.com/asylum-housing-tycoon-is-among-the-uks-wealthiest-heres-what-conditions-are-like-inside-the-properties-his-company-runs-230428)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-asylum-seeker-colombia-b2750800.html), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/03/profits-of-home-office-asylum-housing-provider-rise-to-90m-a-year)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-asylum-seeker-colombia-b2750800.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/03/profits-of-home-office-asylum-housing-provider-rise-to-90m-a-year> - This article reports that Clearsprings Ready Homes, a company providing housing for asylum seekers, has seen its profits rise to £90 million annually. The surge in profits has raised concerns among MPs and refugee groups, who argue that the company is profiting from the poor living conditions of asylum seekers. The article also highlights the high costs associated with hotel accommodations for asylum seekers and the numerous complaints about ill-treatment and poor conditions in asylum housing.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/27/investigation-prompts-rapid-upgrades-to-asylum-seekers-homes> - An investigation by The Guardian revealed poor living conditions in asylum seeker accommodations managed by Clearsprings Ready Homes. Following the exposé, the Home Office conducted inspections and announced plans to issue notices to inspect all properties as soon as possible. The article criticizes the Home Office's inspection regime and highlights the need for urgent action to address the substandard conditions faced by asylum seekers.
4. <https://www.theconversation.com/asylum-housing-tycoon-is-among-the-uks-wealthiest-heres-what-conditions-are-like-inside-the-properties-his-company-runs-230428> - This article discusses the privatization of asylum accommodation in the UK and the role of Clearsprings Ready Homes in managing asylum housing. It highlights concerns about poor living conditions, lack of accountability, and the company's significant profits. The article also notes that despite repeated failings, private firms continue to run asylum housing, raising questions about the effectiveness of outsourcing these services.
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