# Hillingdon’s rising asylum seeker crisis fuels tent city growth and council funding fears



As mini 'tent cities' sprout in Hillingdon, a West London borough increasingly overwhelmed by an unprecedented surge of asylum seekers, local councillors are stirring to confront the implications that this influx has for both residents and the newcomers themselves. By the end of last year, Hillingdon has been saddled with an astonishing ratio of 89 asylum seekers for every 10,000 residents, a statistic that starkly highlights the immense pressure facing the community.

Residents are rightly raising alarms about the financial strain imposed by housing these asylum seekers. Many are infuriated by the apparent negligence of the central government, with taxpayer funds funneled into housing at the expense of vital local services. Councillors can't overlook the staggering estimated shortfall of £5 million annually, jeopardizing essential amenities. The borough’s location near Heathrow Airport exacerbates these issues, as hotels are reappropriated for asylum accommodation, effectively offloading responsibility onto an already strained local council.

The growing number of rough sleepers, particularly among those deemed ineligible for housing support, has ignited further discontent among local residents who, while sympathetic to the plight of asylum seekers, are grappling with their own financial hardships. Lisa Stevens, a local resident, reflects the frustration that her daughter struggles to find permanent housing while others reside in hotels funded by taxpayers. This sentiment is emblematic of a widespread dissatisfaction with the government's failure to effectively manage immigration flows across the Channel.

Gina Forse, a mental health services worker, emphasizes the dire need for specialized support for those arriving with traumatic backgrounds. While she advocates for compassionate care for asylum seekers, she underscores that the financial implications should squarely rest on the central government, not burden local councils. This sentiment resonates with Hillingdon’s councillors, who argue that local taxpayers should not shoulder the brunt of governmental policies that directly impact their community.

The strain on public services is starkly real, reflected in data indicating a tripling of individuals seeking support in Hillingdon over just the past year. This trend aligns with the national escalation of asylum claims, intensifying demands on housing and basic services. Refugee charities have echoed concerns about the backlog in asylum applications, calling for the Home Office to take decisive action to mitigate these pressures.

Sharon Harries, a hospital worker in Hillingdon, embodies the frustration felt by many—that asylum seekers are unjustly blamed for systemic breakdowns in public services, particularly within the NHS. Complaints about extended waiting times and deteriorating service quality highlight the challenges faced by both local residents and asylum seekers alike. Harries insists that prioritizing urgent care should be the focal point, rather than misplacing the blame on vulnerable newcomers.

In light of these escalating challenges, Hillingdon Council has urgently appealed for increased government funding to manage their growing obligations to both residents and those seeking asylum. Councillor Steve Tuckwell has made it clear that the current funding is woefully inadequate, warning that by November, financial support could dry up, potentially landing the entire burden squarely on local taxpayers.

Amidst these pressures, Afghan asylum seeker Tory Alai candidly expresses his precarious situation, noting, “I am not worried about being thrown out of the hotel. I am going to a friend's home.” His resilience reveals the harsh realities faced by those seeking refuge, realities shared by many on similar paths.

As the government pushes for expedited asylum claims and promises of taxpayer savings, analysts caution that merely addressing surface-level issues will not resolve the systemic failings. The unsightly emergence of 'tent cities' starkly underscores the pressing need for substantial reform and lasting solutions rather than temporary fixes.

The experiences of Hillingdon residents and asylum seekers alike highlight the urgent demand for a cohesive and sustainable approach to asylum policy—one that prioritizes local concerns while also addressing the humanitarian need to provide refuge for those fleeing violence and instability. These are not merely fringe issues; they demand immediate and serious political attention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14716251/Hillingdon-asylum-seeker-pressures-mini-tent-cities.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/12061/Council-calls-on-government-for-dedicated-financial-support-for-asylum-seekers> - Hillingdon Council has called on the UK government to provide exceptional funding to support boroughs with higher numbers of asylum seekers. The council highlighted the financial challenges faced due to the increased influx of asylum seekers, especially given Hillingdon's proximity to Heathrow Airport, which has led to a significant rise in arrivals. The council's request aims to ensure sustained support for both local residents and those seeking asylum in the area.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/09/11/sadiq-khan-is-turning-londons-parks-into-illegal-tent-city/> - An opinion piece in The Telegraph criticizes London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, for allowing the proliferation of homeless encampments, referred to as 'tent cities,' in the capital's parks. The article highlights the contrast between London's affluent areas and the growing number of rough sleepers, emphasizing the challenges posed by the housing crisis and the strain on public services. It also discusses the broader implications of these encampments on the city's image and the well-being of its residents.
4. <https://www.hillingdontimes.co.uk/news/105126.hillingdon-treats-asylum-seekers-well-says-report/> - A government report by the Audit Commission has recognized Hillingdon as one of London's best-performing boroughs in the care and treatment of asylum seekers. The report highlights Hillingdon's significant support for unaccompanied minors and its generous financial assistance to asylum-seeking families. The council has implemented most of the report's recommendations and has plans in place for the treatment of asylum seekers, including the construction of a 500-capacity hotel for asylum seekers at the Harmondsworth Centre.
5. <https://www.londonworld.com/your-london/hillingdon/number-of-asylum-seekers-receiving-support-in-hillingdon-more-than-tripled-in-last-year-3856312> - Figures from the Home Office reveal that the number of asylum seekers receiving support in Hillingdon has more than tripled over the past year, rising from 595 to 2,023 by the end of June. This surge reflects a broader increase in asylum applications across the UK. Refugee charities have expressed concern over the growing number of individuals awaiting asylum decisions and have called on the Home Office to address the application backlog and provide greater financial support to those affected.
6. <https://www.londonworld.com/your-london/hillingdon/hillingdon-home-to-almost-1000-asylum-seekers-3609993> - As of December, Hillingdon was home to 850 asylum seekers, with numbers expected to rise due to the war in Ukraine. The UK has launched a new sponsorship scheme to provide safe spaces for Ukrainians without family ties in the country. Asylum seekers in the UK are entitled to financial assistance and accommodation through Section 95 support while awaiting decisions on their claims. The Refugee Council emphasizes the need for a fair and efficient asylum system to address the increasing numbers.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/11/home-office-housing-provider-to-make-urgent-repairs-to-asylum-seeker-flats> - The Guardian reports that Clearsprings, a private contractor managing asylum seeker accommodation on behalf of the Home Office, is undertaking urgent repairs to flats in Uxbridge, west London, after poor conditions were exposed. Issues such as damp, mould, water leaks, and pest infestations were found in 18 flats housing dozens of asylum seekers. The Home Office acknowledged that the conditions fell short of expected standards and stated that improvements were underway.