# UK faces mounting crisis over housing support for displaced Chagos Islanders amid sovereignty disputes



The UK government is under growing pressure to provide increased support for Chagos Islanders arriving in Britain after a surge in numbers has stretched local housing resources to breaking point. Since last July, more than 600 Chagossians have arrived at Heathrow Airport, many of whom come with no accommodation plans, placing a severe financial and logistical strain primarily on Hillingdon Council, where the airport is situated. The council estimates it will spend around £2 million this year fulfilling its legal obligation to house homeless British-Chagossians, a cost it says is overwhelming local taxpayers and threatening to push it toward effective bankruptcy.

The arrivals largely consist of families fleeing Mauritius, where many Chagossians feel unsafe following the UK government's controversial 2025 agreement to transfer sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. Under the deal, the UK will pay Mauritius an estimated £101 million annually for 99 years to maintain control of a key UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island in the archipelago. However, the displaced islanders view the agreement as a betrayal, fearing prosecution in Mauritius if they openly support continued UK sovereignty and wishing to eventually return to their homeland—a British Overseas Territory since 1814.

Damien Dursonial, a former police constable from Mauritius who recently arrived in the UK with his family, stated that they sought safety and recognition as British citizens in the UK, where they feel respected but face threats in Mauritius for their political views. He criticised the UK government for not making housing arrangements for new arrivals, leaving local councils like Hillingdon to shoulder the costs and organisational burden. The council, governed by the Conservative Party, has repeatedly called on the government to provide additional funding, but so far these requests have largely gone unanswered.

Hillingdon Council faces an unprecedented savings target of £38 million this year amidst this challenge and estimates a shortfall of approximately £5 million in government funding to cover the costs of supporting asylum seekers and Chagossian arrivals combined. While the UK government does provide limited funding—covering only the first ten days after arrival—the council argues it is insufficient to meet ongoing housing and support needs, thus forcing the use of local taxpayer funds to plug the gaps. Steve Tuckwell, Hillingdon's cabinet member for planning, housing, and growth, warned that the financial pressure is "breaking the council" and urged ministers to "do the right thing" by relieving this burden.

The history of the Chagos Islands adds a complex layer to the current situation. The population was forcibly evicted between 1967 and 1973 by the UK government to establish a joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia. This displacement has left an estimated global population of around 10,000 Chagossians, many living in Mauritius, the Seychelles, or the UK. Advocacy groups argue that the government’s decision to hand over sovereignty without meaningful consultation with the islanders disregards their rights and aspirations. Vanessa Mandarin Calu, working with the Biot Citizen group representing Chagossian interests, stressed the need for a clear governmental pathway for British-Chagossians to return to their homeland.

Adding further complexity, the UK High Court recently issued a temporary block on concluding the sovereignty transfer deal, citing concerns over the rights of displaced Chagossians. This legal intervention casts uncertainty over the future of the agreement and highlights the contentious nature of the entire issue.

As the humanitarian situation unfolds, Hillingdon Council continues to provide temporary accommodation to families like the Dursonials while seeking urgent government intervention. The financial strain on local authorities managing the consequences of international diplomatic decisions underscores the challenges faced by displaced communities caught between geopolitics and basic human needs.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-hillingdon-council-chagos-islands-arrival-homelessness-heathrow-b1251526.html), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp3kk623r3xo)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/b6f02636c9bc858a06926090d1a8cb5c), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/22/high-court-judge-blocks-uk-from-concluding-chagos-islands-deal)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/chagos-islands-heathrow-airport-hillingdon-london-homeless-b1215392.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/14584/Council-calls-for-fairer-funding-to-support-asylum-seekers), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-hillingdon-council-chagos-islands-arrival-homelessness-heathrow-b1251526.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/14584/Council-calls-for-fairer-funding-to-support-asylum-seekers)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/b6f02636c9bc858a06926090d1a8cb5c), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/22/high-court-judge-blocks-uk-from-concluding-chagos-islands-deal)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/chagos-islands-heathrow-airport-hillingdon-london-homeless-b1215392.html), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-hillingdon-council-chagos-islands-arrival-homelessness-heathrow-b1251526.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd721j8390zo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp3kk623r3xo> - Hillingdon Council has reported a significant increase in Chagossian arrivals at Heathrow Airport, with over 400 individuals arriving in the past year. The council estimates that supporting these arrivals has cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, with an anticipated annual cost of £1.2 million. The UK government provides funding for the first 10 days after arrival, but the council is calling for additional support to manage the ongoing financial burden.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/b6f02636c9bc858a06926090d1a8cb5c> - In May 2025, the UK government signed an agreement to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control over the Diego Garcia military base. The deal involves the UK paying Mauritius approximately £101 million annually for a 99-year lease of the base. Critics, including displaced Chagossians and some politicians, argue that the agreement represents a betrayal and weakens the UK's territorial sovereignty.
4. <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/14584/Council-calls-for-fairer-funding-to-support-asylum-seekers> - Hillingdon Council is campaigning for fairer government funding to address the financial pressures from supporting a high number of asylum seekers and Chagossian UK nationals arriving at Heathrow. The council estimates an asylum funding shortfall of approximately £5 million in 2024/25, with the grant expected to be exhausted by November, necessitating the use of council taxpayers' funds to support government policy.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/chagos-islands-heathrow-airport-hillingdon-london-homeless-b1215392.html> - Hillingdon Council has warned of a growing number of Chagossians arriving at Heathrow Airport without planned accommodation, leading to increased homelessness support costs. Between July 2024 and mid-February, 171 Chagossians sought assistance, comprising 51 households, primarily with children. The council anticipates spending over £1 million by the end of the year to support these arrivals.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/22/high-court-judge-blocks-uk-from-concluding-chagos-islands-deal> - A High Court judge temporarily blocked the UK government's plan to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, citing concerns over the rights of displaced Chagossians. The deal involves the UK paying £101 million annually for a 99-year lease of the Diego Garcia military base. The ruling has raised questions about the future of the agreement and the rights of the Chagossian people.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-hillingdon-council-chagos-islands-arrival-homelessness-heathrow-b1251526.html> - Hillingdon Council is facing significant challenges due to a surge in Chagossian arrivals at Heathrow Airport, with 621 individuals (168 families) arriving since July 2024. Most have no accommodation plans, placing immense pressure on local support services. The council predicts spending up to £2 million of taxpayer money on these arrivals by the end of the year, in addition to the £5 million already allocated to support asylum seekers.