



Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

DECS Reference: MIN/0517534/23

10 February 2023

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 27 January to the Home Office on behalf of a number of your constituents about the reports of missing migrant children. I am replying as the Minister of State for Immigration.

These reports are obviously extremely concerning. While we have not seen any evidence of children being taken against their will, if a child goes missing while in our care, we take it very seriously and we work with police and local authorities to find them urgently. We do this as soon as we become aware of an incident.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are only accommodated in hotels when there is no other option. We have seen a significant increase in the numbers of young people making their way to the UK and we need to find a safe place for them to sleep whilst a local authority makes preparations to take them into their care. We know that a hotel is not the right environment for an unaccompanied child and we encourage all local authorities to provide accommodation and support as quickly as possible.

If we do need to house a child in a hotel before they are placed with a local authority, there are support staff in the hotels 24 hours a day to make sure they are cared for, as we work around the clock to move them into long-term care as soon as possible. We also ensure that there are nurses and social workers on site, and the young people are able to engage in activities both in and out of the hotel.

The young people being housed in hotels are not detained and are free to leave the accommodation. They may choose to leave for a number of reasons, such as visiting family or friends and the Home Office has no power to hold children or adults in contingency hotels if they wish to leave. However, we are not complacent and to minimise the risk of a child going missing, records of children leaving and returning to the hotel are kept and monitored. Support workers accompany children off site on activities and social excursions, or where specific vulnerabilities are identified.

The local police forces are actively engaged with each of the hotels we are using to accommodate young people seeking asylum. In the event that a young person does go missing, the statutory guidance requires a local authority to share information in a multi-agency forum. Local authorities have a statutory duty to protect all children, regardless of where they go missing from. This can be from home, a care setting as a looked-after child

or from a Home Office run hotel. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key local authority duty and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. Safeguarding children includes protecting them from the risk of going missing.

The multi-agency forum will identify any potential leads to trace the young person and the police will take all steps to locate and ensure the safety of the young person, in line with the approach they would take for any missing child in the country. However, the lines of enquiry are often hampered as the child may have a limited footprint in the UK. The police will continue to review and investigate, particularly when new information comes to light.

I share your constituents' concerns about the use of hotel accommodation for these young people; however, the unprecedented rise in dangerous Channel crossings is putting extreme pressure on our asylum system, which has left us with no alternative but to temporarily use hotels.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration