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Essex Police Reject Claims of Escalating Protest Tensions Over Asylum Hotel Clashes

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Essex Police have strongly denied claims that officers transported pro-refugee demonstrators to a protest outside The Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex, calling the accusation “categorically wrong” amid mounting political scrutiny. The protest, held on 17 July, followed the arrest of an Ethiopian man residing at the hotel, who was charged with sexual assault, harassment, and inciting a girl to engage in sexual activity, allegations he

denies. The incident triggered a series of demonstrations on 13, 17, and 20 July, drawing over 1,000 participants and leading to violent clashes between opposing groups. Ten arrests were made, with eight police officers and two hotel staff injured. Four individuals have been charged with violent disorder, and another faces charges for damaging property and refusing to remove a face covering.

Reform UK leader Nigel Farage publicly accused the force of disgracefully inflaming tensions and called for Chief Constable Ben-Julian Harrington's resignation. However, Essex Police maintained their officers neither transported nor supported any specific group, stating that those escorted by vehicle were at risk of harm and were moved purely for safety reasons.

Chief Constable Harrington condemned what he described as "thugs and vandals" who turned peaceful protest into violent disorder. "What has been unacceptable has been the people who have come to Epping and committed violence, attacked hotel staff and officers, damaged property, and caused fear and disruption to the local community," he said during a press briefing in Chelmsford.

The force has since implemented a dispersal order in Epping from 14:00 British Summer Time (BST) on Thursday until 08:00 on Friday. This empowers officers to remove individuals suspected of anti-social behaviour to prevent further unrest. Senior officers stressed the order does not prevent lawful protest but is necessary to ensure public safety.

Police also warned the public against spreading misinformation online, citing its real-world consequences. Essex Police said additional enforcement powers may be used in future if unrest continues.

Elsewhere, concerns have spread to London's Canary Wharf, where the Britannia International Hotel was recently designated for asylum accommodation. Local sources confirmed the development, although the Home Office declined to comment directly. Tower Hamlets Council acknowledged the decision, urging transparency amid rising community tension.