

Essex Asylum Hotel Sparks Protests and Government Crackdown

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— Categories: Human Rights



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The Home Office has announced that asylum seekers who refuse to move from hotel accommodation to suitable alternatives without valid reasons will have their housing support and £50 weekly allowance withdrawn under a new “failure to travel” policy. This move is part of a wider government effort to reduce reliance on hotels for housing migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Border Security and Asylum, said the policy is designed to “close hotels, restore order, and put fairness and value for money at the heart of our asylum system”.

The announcement follows unrest at the Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex, after Ethiopian asylum seeker Hadush Gerberslasie Kebatu, 38, was charged with sexual offences involving a 14-year-old girl. Kebatu denies the allegations and will face trial in August. Protests broke out between anti-immigration demonstrators (including far-right groups) and counter-protesters, escalating into violence. Nine people have been charged in relation to the disturbances, with eight officers injured.

Protests have also occurred at the Britannia Hotel in Canary Wharf, planned by the Home Office to house asylum seekers, prompting both anti-immigration and pro-migrant counter-demonstrations. Police have boosted their presence in Epping ahead of further weekend protests to maintain public order.

Under the updated Failure to Travel guidance, single adult male asylum seekers who refuse suitable accommodation moves without a valid reason will lose their right to hotel housing and the weekly £50 allowance. Charities argue that these rules largely mirror existing policy, with refusals often due to communication breakdowns or logistical problems rather than deliberate non-compliance.

Epping Forest District Council unanimously passed a motion urging the closure of both the Bell and Phoenix hotels as asylum housing. However, the decision remains under the jurisdiction of the Home Office.

Public figures and local councillors have weighed in. Some councillors expressed concern over the impact on local communities, while others were seen participating in protests. Authorities have reiterated the importance of maintaining public order and ensuring that safeguarding measures are followed.

The situation continues to evolve as the Home Office moves forward with its broader immigration reforms aimed at reducing hotel dependency and reinforcing migration control.