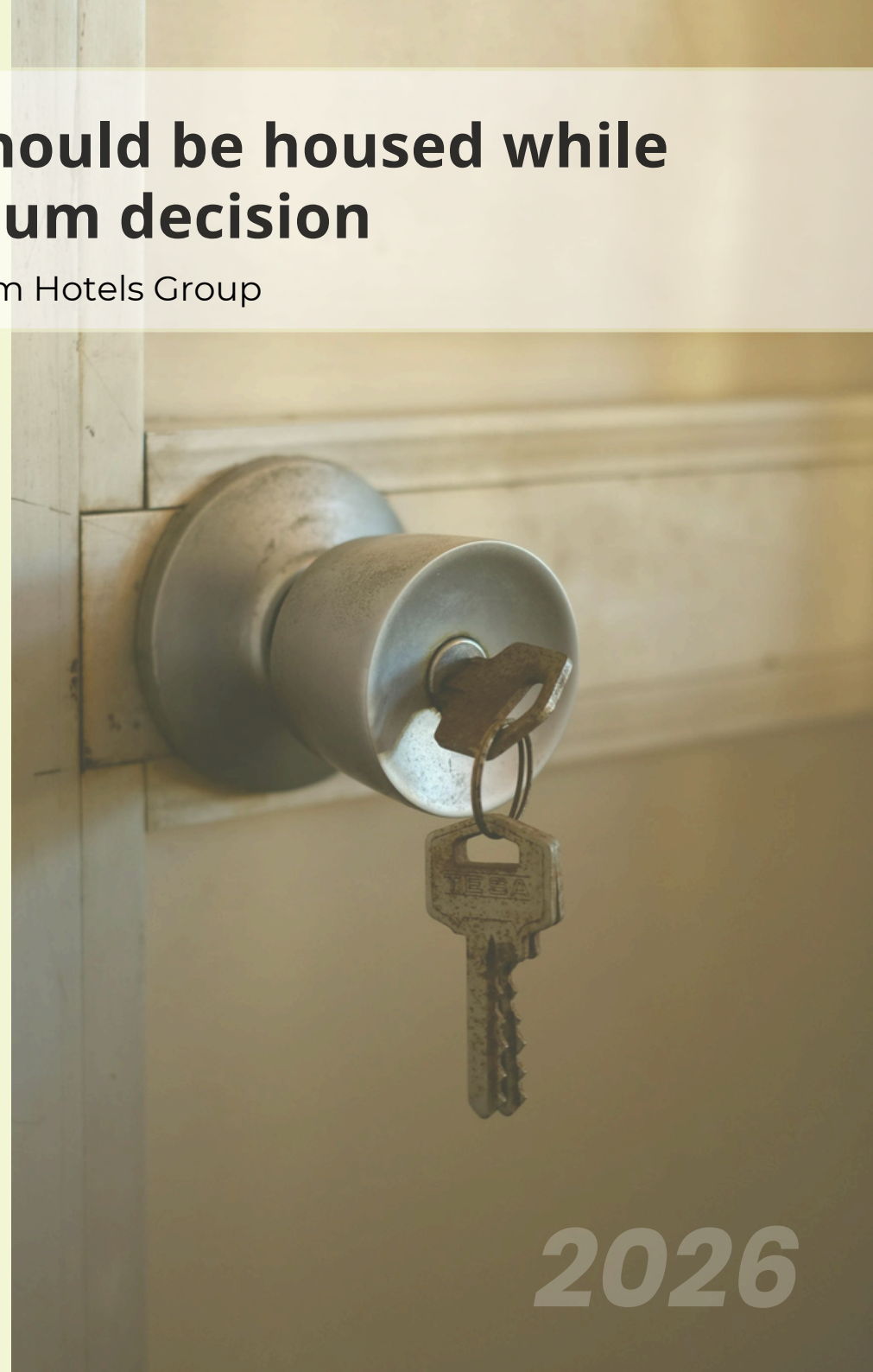


Our vision for how people should be housed while waiting for an asylum decision

by Greater Manchester Asylum Hotels Group



2026

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Our vision for how people should be housed while waiting an asylum decision

We are writing as a group of people who have come to the UK seeking safety and have spent time living in asylum hotels and other forms of asylum accommodation. We want to **support ourselves**, but we are **not allowed to work** – so instead, we are housed by the government. Like many others in the system, we have experienced difficult feelings while waiting for our asylum decision, and many of these feelings are connected with how we have been housed.

This document sets out **our vision** of how people should be housed while waiting for their asylum decision. **We are not looking for luxury** – but every human being needs a basic space they can call **home**, where they can **live with dignity**.

What we need to feel as people seeking safety

Coming to the UK, we are full of **hope for the future** in a safe place. When you come here you are like a new-born baby. You have left everything behind – family, friends, career, connections back home. You have to create everything from zero. As you create a new life here, it's like baby steps - sometimes you fall.

But waiting for an asylum decision is full of **stress** and **uncertainty**.

During this period of waiting, we need to feel:

SAFE

it should feel like a breath of fresh air: even if our problems are not solved yet, we want to feel safe.



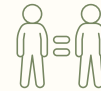
LISTENED TO

we want to feel cared for, respected, and our voices valued.



SEEN AS HUMAN BEINGS

we want to feel protected, wanted, and welcome in our new home.



A SENSE OF BELONGING

we want to feel useful, like we are contributing, and connecting with the rest of British society.



INDEPENDENT

we want to feel liberated and respected, and have our basic rights met with ease.



A SENSE OF CERTAINTY

we want to have more clarity about the system, our rights, and have some control over our lives.

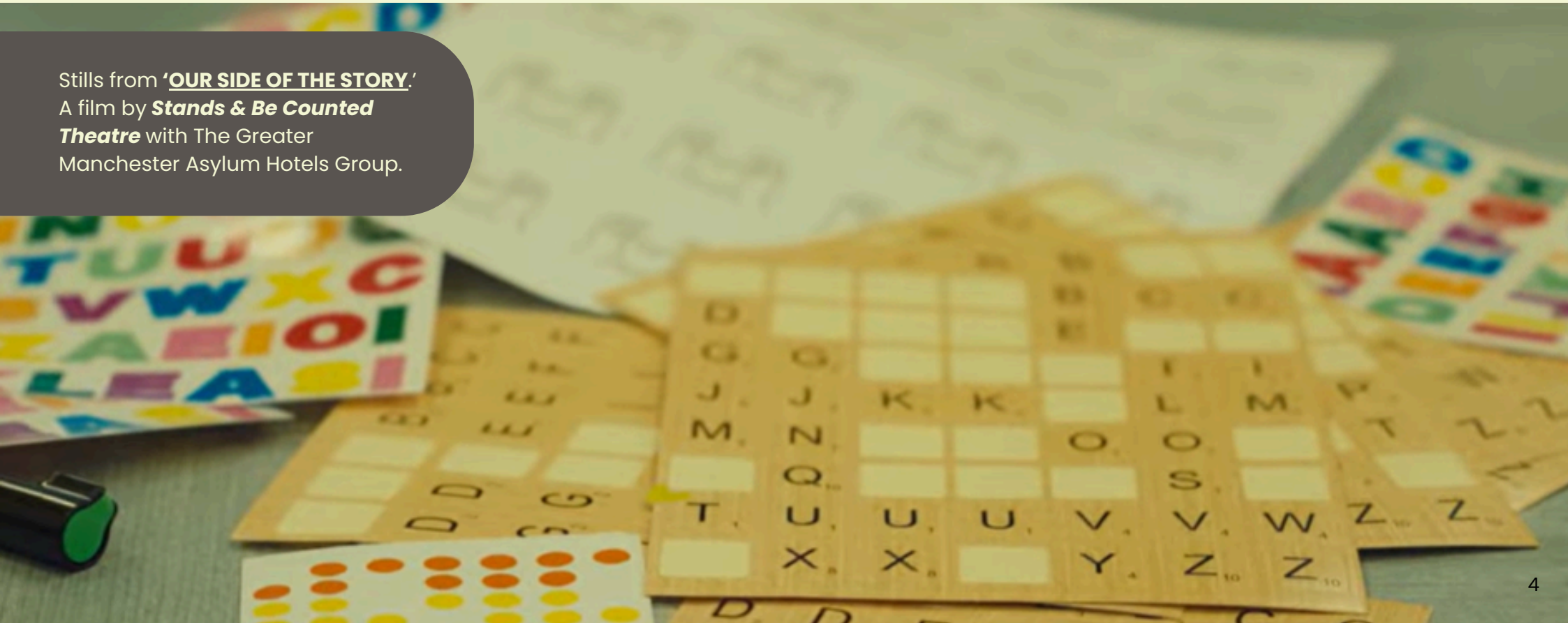


If we have these feelings while we are waiting, then we can be **productive**, and do **positive things** for the **community**. We can focus not just on our asylum case, but on the **wider society** and on **our future plans** contributing to this country.

How and where we are housed, and how we are treated by staff, is crucial for those positive feelings. **We do not need luxury** – but if we are **settled** and **confident** in where we are living, then it **clears the path** to focus on other things.

So here is our vision of how people should be housed while waiting for an asylum decision. Some of this is already happening in places, but too often, the opposite is happening. We want to see a system where these principles are built in.

Stills from **'OUR SIDE OF THE STORY.'**
A film by **Stands & Be Counted**
Theatre with The Greater
Manchester Asylum Hotels Group.



THE ACCOMMODATION

Wherever possible, people should be living in **shared houses**, rather than hotels or other large-scale accommodation.

- In a shared house, you can come and go as you please; you can have visitors; you can eat when you want to, and cook for yourself and your children. You can feel **independent**, and you can start to feel **at home**.
- In a shared house, you can **connect with** your neighbours, but you are **not focused on** like you are in a hotel. You can feel **safe** and **seen as a human being**.

“Spending many months in hotels with nothing to do, we feel useless. If you have an empty life, no one will value you.”

Whether it's a shared house or another sort of accommodation, here are some basic things we expect:

- **Private space**, so we can cope with difficult times
- **Communal spaces**, to connect with others, with some simple resources/activities to keep us busy, such as ESOL materials
- Adequate space and facilities for **children to study and play**
- A **basic level of comfort** with facilities in a good state of repair
- **Enough money** to look after ourselves and our children, keep ourselves healthy, and cover transport and phone credit to connect with others and get to essential appointments

While people are housed in hotels, this period will be easier if:

- The **food** is varied, healthy, with an element of choice, and appropriate for people from different cultural backgrounds

“Food is a big issue in hotels. We are not allowed to choose what to eat, and we’re not allowed to cook for ourselves. Sometimes the staff admit to us that they are looking for the cheapest option. Often the food is the same every day. They tell us that the food meets NHS nutritional guidelines, but we know that it doesn’t keep us healthy. Some of our children have stopped eating because of this.”



- There is **space for organisations** to deliver information sessions and activities
- There is **flexibility** to respond residents’ needs and concerns – e.g. meal times, laundry, being allowed to clean you own room

“Staff are inflexible. We’re not allowed to do our own laundry, and if the laundry is done badly, they just say ‘this is our process, we can’t change it.’ Sometimes processes do change - but that’s to suit the staff. It’s flexible for them, not for us.”

- People have their **own rooms** wherever possible
- Where people have to share rooms, there is an **element of choice**, so people can live with people from the same background, similar age, etc.

Moving accommodation while waiting for an asylum decision

We understand it may be necessary to move accommodation while we are waiting for a decision. This is difficult for us, because you have to start afresh. But if the system for allocating accommodation is **transparent**, **supportive**, and has a **degree of flexibility**, then we will have **mental peace**, and it will be easier for us to accept when we have to move.

This can happen if:

- There is a clear **time limit**, less than 4 months, on how long you will stay in a hotel before being moved to a house

“When we first arrive, we are just seeking safety. We don’t know whether to enrol in college because we think we might move any time. But after 3 or 4 months, we start putting down roots – and it becomes harder to move.”

“My family stayed in the hotel for nearly two years. My daughter was always asking me when we will be leaving the hotel. All her friends had moved on. She felt we had been abandoned. I felt I was losing my daughter.”

- The system is **responsive** to an individual’s needs (e.g. age, disability, medical condition, location of family members)
- There is an **element of choice** where you live – even if the first choice can’t always be met
- People are only moved when absolutely necessary
- **Information** is provided about the area where you’re being moved to
- For single people, there is an option to be moved into a shared house **with a friend**
- Where people do not want to move to a new area, they are **listened to** and treated with **dignity** and **empathy**, even if they still have to move

“We feel that staff manipulate us – they say they will paint a bad picture of us to the Home Office if we refuse a move, they threaten that the support will stop, and it will affect our asylum case.”

STAFF AND RULES

How we are treated by staff makes a big difference to how we feel. In hotels, staff are present all the time. In shared houses, housing officers are not present on site all the time, but have a role to check up on the property and respond to any issues. If there is a culture among staff of **care, respect** and **responsibility**, then we will feel **listened to, and recognised as human beings**. We will be more comfortable with what we have, even if it's little – and we'll be able to focus more on the **big picture** and on the **future**.

Therefore, staff should:

- Treat everyone **equally**

“Once an organisation gave some vouchers to the hotel to distribute to residents. Staff only distributed them to their favourites. When I offered to help them hand them out to everyone, they said, ‘Don’t interrupt our work’.”

- **Listen** to residents and take them seriously
- Communicate with residents **professionally** and with **kindness**
- Respect **privacy** e.g. always knock if they need to enter rooms
- Respect residents’ **confidentiality**
- Be trained in **trauma-informed practice**

“We feel like we are known by our room number.”

Clarity over our **rights and responsibilities** in the accommodation is also important to develop **trust** between staff and residents. For this to happen:

- It should be clear who holds **responsibility** for the accommodation, and staff should be easily identifiable and contactable

“Between Migrant Help, Serco and the Home Office, you will be in a loop – each one tells you to go speak to one of the others.”

- Staff should know all the policies and procedures
- Residents should have a **clear induction** outlining rights and responsibilities, which is delivered in people's own languages
- There should be a **clear complaints process** and follow up
- Rules should be **consistently** applied, without discrimination or favouritism, but there should **flexibility for staff to show discretion** in response to an individual's needs

"It feels like staff are tired of listening to us, like we should always be saying 'sorry' and 'thank you' when we ask for the most basic things. This makes us feel unwelcome, like they are only doing it because they have to do it. We might avoid asking for something because you're afraid they might be in a bad mood – so we feel trapped."

"If there's a dispute, staff often cover each other. There's a culture of mistrust towards us."

"If staff are smiling when you go to eat, we appreciate this as we go back to our room. These little things make a difference in our empty lives."



CONNECTING WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

How we can connect with the local community while waiting for a decision is crucial to our **sense of safety**, and our **sense of belonging**. This is one reason why shared houses are preferable to hotels or other large sites – in shared houses, we are less focused on or judged as people seeking asylum, and can be seen instead as **human beings**.

“Living in hotels, we feel cut off from communities.”

“Some of us have faced regular protests happening outside our hotels, by people who do not want us here. We feel unsafe. We are not allowed to leave the hotel while protests are happening. We feel like prisoners.”

Whatever the type of accommodation, it should be located near:

- Volunteering opportunities
- Colleges and schools
- Charities and support organisations

“When there are organisations looking out for us, it really helps. We come with a lot of things in our heart, and leave feeling better. It’s like a family, like we’re at home.”

- Residents should receive a full **induction** to the area and community, including information on the local area, healthcare, education, public transport, libraries, where to access support and essentials

If we have opportunities to get to know local residents, and they get to know us, then we can build **trust** and **understanding**:

- With opportunities to study or volunteer, people can be **busy** and **make connections**
- Local communities should have the opportunities to learn about people seeking asylum in their area – about our struggles and our culture, so they can know us as **human beings** with **feelings** and **dreams**
- People seeking asylum should have the opportunity to learn about the **values of British society** and the values of the local community around them

RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

The organisations providing the accommodation need to listen to feedback. If there are effective mechanisms for monitoring how accommodation is provided and for hearing residents' feedback, then we can make **positive changes** for residents and will ensure government money is spent **effectively**.

"We see the van delivering fresh food – but it's cooked badly. Residents try to complain but no one listens, so they get into arguments with the staff about the food. There's a box for suggestions about the food, but it's hidden away. Living in the hotel for several months, we don't see any changes. People don't eat the food, and lose weight. And the food is thrown away – it's wasted."

For this to happen, the following groups need to be included in overseeing how the accommodation is managed:

- **Residents** – because we are the human beings living in the accommodation
- The **local council**
- **Healthcare providers** – where they are present on-site, they see how accommodation is affecting our health
- **Charities** working with residents
- The **Home Office**, who are ultimately responsible for us and fund the accommodation



Conclusion

Some of our vision is happening is the moment – but it's a long way from how it should be. We know that private companies running the accommodation are making **big profits**. And yet our **basic needs** are not being met. Often the accommodation feels **like a prison, not a home**.

“
We never say, ‘We’re going home’, we just say, ‘We’re going back to the hotel’.
”

We want to see a system where people waiting seeking sanctuary are able to live as **human beings with dignity**, in a place we can call **home**.

