

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP  
Home Secretary  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

CC. Minister of State (Minister for Border Security and Asylum) Alex Norris MP

12th November 2025

**Open Letter to the Home Office Regarding the Use of Cameron Barracks as  
Asylum Accommodation**

Dear Home Secretary,

**BEMIS Scotland** is an ethnic minority membership and human rights organisation based in Glasgow, committed to promoting equality, human rights, and community cohesion across Scotland. **The Ethnic Minority Race Equality and Human Rights Network** is a collaborative platform bringing together organisations and individuals working to advance race equality and human rights in Scotland. Many of the signatories to this letter are members of this network and share a collective commitment to upholding human rights standards and promoting dignity for all.

While we acknowledge the Home Office's responsibility to provide safe and dignified accommodation for people seeking asylum, we have serious concerns about the proposed use of Cameron Barracks in Inverness to house around 300 asylum seekers over the coming months. The below briefing states our collective

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assessments and concerns about the action.

### **The Use of Barracks as Accommodation**

Military barracks are not appropriate for housing vulnerable individuals. In its 2021 inquiry into large-scale institutional sites, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Immigration Detention cited army barracks as ‘Quasi-detention’ settings due to their replication of harmful features of confinement such as isolation from wider communities, and surveillance.<sup>1</sup> Many studies have shown that detention is widely considered the most damaging form of housing for asylum seekers, linked to severe mental health impacts.<sup>2</sup> We are concerned that housing asylum seekers in these settings not only risks retraumatising people but also reinforces harmful narratives that asylum seekers are a security issue; undermining efforts to promote dignity and compassion for those seeking sanctuary.

### **Lessons from Napier Barracks**

The High Court judgment in *NB & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department* (2021)<sup>3</sup> found the use of Napier Barracks unlawful and irrational, failing to meet minimum standards under the Reception Conditions Directive and breaching human rights obligations. Conditions were overcrowded leading to an outbreak of coronavirus, deemed unsafe, and detrimental to mental health. The Court emphasised that asylum accommodation must respect dignity and avoid detention-like environments.

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<sup>1</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention. (2021). *Inquiry into quasi-detention: The use of large-scale institutional sites to house people seeking asylum*. Published December 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Spira, J., Katsampa, D., Wright, H., & Komolafe, K. (2025). *The Relationship Between Housing and Asylum Seekers' Mental Health: A Systematic Review*. Helen Bamber Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> *NB & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2021] EWHC 1489 (Admin), High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division (Administrative Court), judgment dated 3 June 2021.

## Human Rights Obligations

Under the Human Rights Act 1998, the UK Government must uphold:

- **Article 3 ECHR: Freedom From Inhumane or Degrading Treatment**
- **Article 8 ECHR: Right to Private and Family Life**
- **Article 14 ECHR: Freedom From Discrimination**

International obligations under the Refugee Convention and CERD also require accommodation that promotes dignity, safety, and equality. We therefore seek clear assurances that past failures have been fully addressed and that the Home Office has implemented measures to prevent any future violation of human rights.

## Alternative Approach to Housing

Conversely research consistently shows that housing asylum seekers within communities has significantly better outcomes for mental health<sup>4</sup>, wellbeing and social cohesion.<sup>5</sup>

We recommend that the Home Office moves away from quasi-detention style accommodation for asylum seekers and prioritises stable, secure housing within communities. This enables people to rebuild their lives, integrate, and form meaningful connections while fostering dignity and mutual understanding. In doing so, we lay the foundation for a fairer, more compassionate society while also minimising community disruption and reducing policing costs.

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Bamber Foundation. *Like a Prison: The Negative Impact of Barracks Accommodation on the Health of People Seeking Protection*. August 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Spira, J., Wright, H., Komolafe, K., & Kushnir, C. *The Impact of Hotel Accommodation on Asylum Seekers' Mental Health*. Helen Bamber Foundation, July 2025.

### **Community Cohesion Risks**

In addition, housing large numbers of asylum seekers in an isolated, quasi-detention style site poses serious risks to community cohesion. This challenge is compounded by the fact that Cameron Barracks is located in a postcode ranked in the third decile of deprivation under the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). In this area, local services are already under strain, and without significant investment, introducing a large number of vulnerable people risks fuelling community tensions.

Another key concern is the lack of meaningful engagement with local residents and ethnic minority communities. Recent protests seen outside hotels housing asylum seekers in Falkirk and Aberdeen have demonstrated what happens when communities are left uninformed; misinformation spreads, tensions rise, and far-right groups work to exploit the situation. This creates fear and further division among communities. Since the announcement of the barracks being used to house asylum seekers, we have already been made aware of divisive rhetoric being used by MPs citing asylum seekers as a safety risk.

While moving away from the use of hotel accommodation is welcome, relocating asylum seekers to a quasi-detention style site within a residential area could trigger similar tensions and become a rallying point for extremist activity. Police operational planning must therefore take these community cohesion challenges into account. This includes anticipating potential protests, mitigating risks of far-right mobilisation, and ensuring that safeguarding measures are in place.

In addition, we must recognise that increasing tensions have wider consequences beyond the accommodation sites- they filter into the local, regional and national communities and increase feelings of vulnerability and fear

among racially minoritised groups more broadly.

If the current plans are to go ahead, clear, proactive communication is essential. Local communities-including ethnic minority groups, faith networks, and community organisations, must be involved from the outset, to prevent misinformation, build trust and provide assurances that both vulnerable people and the wider community will be supported throughout.

Therefore, we urgently seek answers to the following:

- **Welfare and Safety:** What measures will ensure dignity, welfare, and safety for residents in the accommodation, and how will standards be monitored and enforced?
- **Trauma-Informed Approach:** What steps will The Home Office take to prevent re-traumatisation for those fleeing persecution or detention-like environments?
- **Community Engagement:** How will transparent communication with the local community and those being housed in this accommodation be maintained and misinformation avoided?
- **Accountability:** Who is responsible for managing the site, and who ensures compliance with safety and human rights obligations? Frequent and severe accountability and contractual failures have been observed in the asylum hotel accommodation system, and if not taken into account, these risks will likely be exacerbated in quasi-detention style facilities.

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• **Relocation Process:** Will all individuals currently in hotel accommodation be moved, or only some? How much notice will be given, and how will disruption to their education, healthcare, and community ties be mitigated?

• **Support and Resources:**

How will existing services be supported to increase capacity, and what additional resources will be provided to avoid overburdening already stretched systems?

Will individuals have access to culturally and weather appropriate food, clothing, recreation, transport, and community integration opportunities? Who will provide these resources, and how will funding be allocated?

**Conclusion**

Now more than ever, Scotland needs an asylum system that is humane, compassionate, and trusted. One that works for everyone: for the communities already living in Scotland and for those seeking refuge and protection-not one that undermines human rights and social cohesion.

We therefore strongly encourage the Home Office to reconsider the use of Cameron Barracks to house asylum seekers. Regardless of the outcome, we urge you to engage in meaningful dialogue with affected communities and stakeholders to ensure that all decisions respect and protect the human rights and dignity of those impacted.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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