

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing  
and Local Government  
Shona Robison MSP



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The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 4DF

25 November 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing to set out the serious concerns of the Scottish Government regarding the UK Government's intention to mandate Scottish local authorities to participate in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). These proposals are a retrograde step which will create needless bureaucracy and do little to support the welfare and wellbeing of these highly vulnerable children.

On 14 July you wrote to all UK local authorities asking for more placements to be made available. Scotland has answered that call by creating a Scottish rota which has successfully been in operation since October.

The rota is ensuring that Scotland meets the target set by the Home Office but in a manner which prioritises the welfare of these children and gives them the best possible chance to integrate into our society.

Based on Home Office calculations, Scotland has been asked to accommodate 45 of every 650 children entering in the UK. This figure was arrived at following detailed discussions and takes account of the large numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UASC) already in Scotland. While this rolling target represents a significant increase in Scotland's current annual numbers, Scottish local authorities showed their commitment and willingness to support these vulnerable children and voted unanimously to participate in the Scottish rota. Nineteen placements have already been successfully made in addition to the 22 children who arrived under the NTS scheme from January to September. This is in addition to around 200 UASC already cared for by Scottish local authorities.

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I understand that the proposals will allow a local authority who has been legally mandated to take a child through the NTS to formally agree to transfer that child to a new receiving authority. This principle is in line with the spirit of the Scottish rota whereby the local authorities who are best placed at any given time will accommodate these children. However, I am concerned by the added bureaucratic and legal complexities inherent in the UK Government's plans and the significant risk that these children will experience should they be passed needlessly between local authorities.

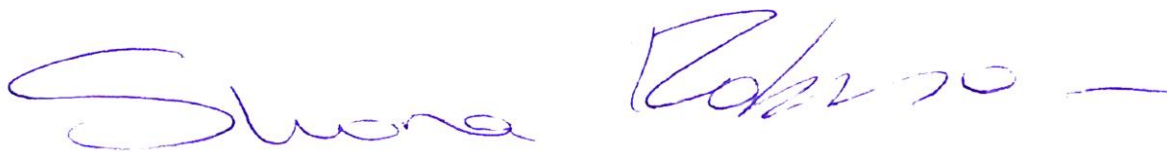
In the interest of prioritising UASC welfare I urge you to not mandate Scotland's 32 local authorities to take 45 children per cycle, and instead support the Scottish rota with the flexibilities and benefits this brings. In addition, I would be grateful for clarity on when mandating will come to an end as while the UK Government have stated these are temporary changes to the voluntary model I am unaware of any review points or sunset clauses.

Finally, I also have significant concerns about the financial burden you are placing on local authorities. The lack of any new funding attached to mandating the scheme will cause significant challenges, in particular for local authorities who do not currently have specialised skills and resources to accommodate UASC. A system cannot be mandated without the necessary financial support

Whilst I welcomed the uplift in Home Office funding received during the summer, it is not nearly enough and does nothing to address start-up costs. The Scottish Government has already provided £0.5m to local authorities to help with this burden, despite the NTS being a wholly reserved scheme.

The UK Government must do more now and not place a new financial burden on Scotland's local authorities.

Yours sincerely,



**Shona Robison**

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