

December 2023

Dear Councillor Will Cooper, Cabinet Member for Housing

Reference: digital inclusion for everyone in temporary accommodation in Lewisham

We, the undersigned, represent over 40 Lewisham & Greenwich civil society organisations comprised of thousands of community members.

Lewisham has truly become a refuge for sanctuary seekers over the years, and we are proud to be based in a borough that follows through its promises with actions. Every single one of you has stood up for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and we thank you for it.

We applaud the effort made by Lewisham Council to become a Borough of Sanctuary. However, our work is far from over. Together we must continue fighting for safer housing and accessible healthcare for all. Our alliance recently secured commitments on housing and access to healthcare from the South East London Integrated Care System. Today, we are writing to you about ensuring that everyone in temporary accommodation is able to engage fully in our communities through digital inclusion.

Access to the internet is essential to ensure that temporary accommodation residents can stay in contact with their families, pay their bills, access the vital services that Lewisham offers, even to do their homework. Being in temporary housing can already be precarious and isolating, and this instability is only compounded by barriers to digital inclusion.

However, the nature of temporary accommodation means that it is difficult for families to stay safe. Families do not know how long they can stay in their new accommodation and can be moved at a moment's notice - which can be extremely difficult for sanctuary seekers who are trying to rebuild their lives in safety and security. Therefore they cannot commit to long term contracts, which eventually leave them with expensive bills. Many families rely upon mobile data, which can be limited and also expensive.

A member of our community told us: *"Having access to the internet should be considered a basic need and a human right nowadays. Without internet, we are even more isolated and unable to rebuild our lives."*

Today, we're asking you to break down this barrier and to ensure that everyone in temporary accommodation, regardless of their immigration status, is able to access the internet. What we are asking today is in line with the commitments of being a Borough of Sanctuary.

We know digital inclusion in temporary accommodation is possible. Across the border, in Greenwich, the Council has been working in partnership with Creating Ground—a member organisation of both Lewisham & Greenwich Citizens and Greenwich Borough of Sanctuary—to share free SIM cards with people in temporary accommodation, giving them



access to the internet. As you can see [here](#) their efforts have been celebrated by the press and community members alike.

Our ask today is simple: As part of Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary, will you commit to providing internet access in all temporary accommodation in the borough from 2024?

It is crucial to people in temporary accommodation for Lewisham Council to commit to a timeline. We look forward to collaborating with you on this matter to secure a safer and more sustainable future for our communities.

We look forward to hearing from you, and to working together to support our wonderful community in 2024.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed,

Rosario Guimba-Stewart, CEO, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network

Janet Emmanuel, Community organiser Citizens House, Lewisham Citizens ,London Community Land Trust

Laura Marziale, Director, Creating Ground and Creating Ground Leaders

Tom Neumark, CEO, 999 Club

Lewisham and Greenwich Citizens Alliance

Olivia O'Sullivan and Kathy Cruise, Co Secretaries, Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign/Lewisham Save Our NHS

Amber Lyseight, Mental Health and Pastoral Lead, Phoenix Federation - Grinling Gibbons and Lucas Vale Primary Schools

Christine Graham, Headteacher, St Mary's Lewisham CE Primary School

The Rev'd Jim Perry, Vicar of St Bartholomew's Church, Sydenham and Area Dean of West Lewisham

Sophie Wickham, Executive Director, Action for Refugees in Lewisham



Kathleen Knight. Reader, St. Saviours Church Brockley

Caron Loudy. Executive Produce, Luca Silvestrini's Protein

Agnieszka Lokaj, Chair and Trustee, Lewisham Polish Centre

Ray Woolford, We Care Food bank

Rev Stephen Lawrence, New Testament Church of God, Lee

Lewisham Migration Forum

Lisa Williams, Headteacher, Rushey Green Primary School

Loxane Wallace, Assistant Headteacher, Rushey Green Primary School

Gemma Devitt, Pastoral Lead, Rushey Green Primary School

Libero Colimberti, Lewisham resident

Fatima Jama, Volunteer Coordinator, Greenwich Inclusion Project

Becky Dell, CEO, Citizens of the World Choir

Claire Papazidis, Trustee, G.R.A.C.E

Andreas Papazidis, Trustee, G.R.A.C.E

Nathanael Hitch, Chair of Greenwich Citizen Housing (GCH)