



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Baroness Symons,
Foreign & Commonwealth Office,
Whitehall,
London SW1A 2AH

24 November 1997

Dear Baroness Simons,

DISPLACED MONSERRATIANS ARRIVING IN THE UK.

I am growing increasingly alarmed about the utter lack of consideration being given to the housing needs of Monserratians arriving in the UK.

They are simply being expected to join the queue along with all other homeless people, at a time when there is a huge shortage of temporary accommodation in the London Boroughs they are arriving in. This means that for many families, bed and breakfast is likely to be the destination for periods of up to a year or so. Frequently this is outside of the borough, since all in-borough temporary accommodation is already used up. Much of this bed and breakfast accommodation is of a shocking standard, and quite unsuitable for those arriving from Montserrat. This is also creating problems as regards schooling for many families, who are having to send children back to the receiving borough in order to go to school.

Let me take a case in point. Mrs Verna White, of 89, Wallwood Road, E11, has been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation in Waltham Forest by Redbridge Council. She has been placed in one room, along with her 14 year old daughter (I believe she has learning difficulties) and 17 year old son, which in itself is quite disgraceful. The children are attending two separate schools back in Redbridge, and Mrs White has to accompany her daughter to school and back every day every day, at considerable expense. Redbridge tells me that it has a crisis of temporary accommodation, and that it cannot foresee being able to move Mrs White in the near future.

In my view it is quite unacceptable that traumatised Montserratians are being treated in this way, and that the Government must now look at prioritising their housing needs, either by giving appropriate instructions and resources to local authorities, by securing the co-operation of housing associations (I know that some of the black associations would be willing to assist), or by commissioning suitable temporary accommodation in some way.





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One possibility would be to alter the rules in the case of Montserratians, so that if they are able to find suitable temporary accommodation in the private sector, they can still be regarded as homeless from the point of view of eventual re-housing by local authorities.

You testified before the Select Committee recently that local authorities are to be given a grant of some £1500 to assist them in housing Montserratians. I was pleased at the time to hear this. However it appears that this grant is only available to those who arrive here through the MAPS scheme, and who are directed to a local authority by Travelcare. Those who present directly to a local authority do not attract this subsidy. This really is most unfair on the very boroughs who have borne the brunt of receiving Montserratians in recent months. In Haringey, and I believe Hackney, for example, already under severe pressure because of their position as major refugee "receiver" boroughs, most Montserratians have reported directly to the local authority Housing Departments, having arrived there because of the presence of friends and family in the resident population. These boroughs will therefore receive this subsidy in very few cases indeed, and yet these are the very ones who need assistance.

Presumably those local authorities who condescend to accept the odd Montserratian here and there, will receive the subsidy, whereas those who are taking the bulk of them will receive little. I know that my own local authority is extremely angry that despite all its efforts in recent months to assist in the Montserratian crisis, they are being discriminated against so far as the subsidy is concerned. Perhaps you could tell me how many subsidies have been paid, and to which boroughs, and also press the Department of the Environment to review the position urgently.

I would be most grateful if you would liaise with the relevant departments on both these issues, and let me know as a matter of urgency what can be done.

Yours sincerely,

BERNIE GRANT
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR TOTTENHAM

