

No room at the inn for homeless in Livingston

West Lothian Council has been told it cannot book homeless people into a Livingston hotel during the week of the COP26 conference.

The move affects 30 people, both individuals and families, and has sparked criticism of the hotel group, with one councillor calling it 'pure greed'

Thousands of delegates and protesters from around the world are set to descend on Glasgow for the critical global climate summit, and hotels in and around the city have been fully-booked, while Edinburgh is also reporting high demand.

The council, like many in Scotland, has to use hotels as emergency accommodation as it has a statutory duty to house the homeless. It is up to hotels whether they take bookings from councils.

In a statement this week deputy group leader Frank Anderson said: "The council has been given notice by the hotel that they can't accept anyone from the 30 October for the period of COP26.

He added: "This is absolutely unacceptable. Homeless people are being decanted so that the Mercure can charge exorbitant prices to profit from COP26 delegates, rather missing the point of reducing carbon footprint. This is pure greed on the part of the Mercure and says a lot about their attitude to corporate responsibility.

“The fact that homeless people are in the middle of a crisis and need a roof over their head as quick as possible but are being decanted from this hotel, to who knows where, is totally unacceptable and beggars belief that a large company such as Accor, the owners, have even implemented this action.”



He added: “I urge the Mercure to change this decision, show that corporate greed is not the moral business way to do business and continue to cooperate with the council in tackling the homeless crisis we have in West Lothian.”

A spokesman for West Lothian Council said it was moving people because it had to, and alternative accommodation had been sought.

He added: “West Lothian Council has not chosen to decant anyone from privately owned accommodation as a result of COP26

“Owners of hotels control their bookings and advise us of their availability. Councils have no control over that aspect and will place people into temporary/emergency accommodation where it becomes available.

“Over several weeks we have had to move approximately 30 individual clients to alternative accommodation. The council has a legal obligation to find alternative temporary accommodation for anyone identifying as being homeless.”

A spokesperson for the Mercure Livingston Hotel, said: “During the pandemic, we were contracted by West Lothian Council to provide temporary accommodation for vulnerable people from a range of different backgrounds.

“We were proud to support those in need during the crisis. The contract ended in August and we have been working closely with the Council to support the transition of guests into more permanent accommodations extending their stay at the hotel where necessary until their new accommodation was ready. The hotel has been open to business and leisure guests throughout.”

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter

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