

Jane Hutt MS,
Minister for Social Justice,
Welsh Government

26 May 2022

Dear Jane,

You may be aware that the Committee recently held an evidence session with Housing Justice Cymru on the work it is doing to provide homes for Ukrainian refugees in Wales. Following that session, Members agreed to undertake further work on this, we therefore intend to hold evidence gathering sessions with relevant stakeholders on 22 June. Members also agreed that I should write to you now outlining our immediate concerns.

We heard support for the approach in Wales of using welcome centres to initially house people arriving through the Homes for Ukraine scheme super sponsor route before they move either to a host placement, or ideally into a tenancy. We also heard about some of the risks unsuitable hosting arrangements can bring.

Assessing the suitability of hosting placements to ensure that people are given safe places to live is the most important aspect of the scheme. We were told that ensuring a home visit is undertaken with every potential host before placing someone to live with them is a crucial element of the assessment; are you able to confirm whether every host will receive a home visit and, for those who are already hosts, whether a visit was undertaken in advance? Could you also outline what training has been or will be provided to those undertaking the assessments?

We also heard that those local authorities who do not have their own housing stock may not have the capacity and expertise to undertake the necessary home checks and provide the support needed by vulnerable families. The third sector can play an important role in providing that support on the ground, particularly around recognising potential difficulties within placements and stepping in when needed. Please can you provide further information on how the Welsh Government is working with local authorities to identify capacity issues and supporting them to address these? How are you ensuring that the expertise within the voluntary sector is being used?

We heard that assessing the suitability of hosting placements should also include access to schools, medical services and social services, where needed. Although a local authority will be given £10,500 by the Welsh Government to provide wraparound services and support, it will be vital to make sure that the local public sector services can respond to those individuals' needs. We heard concern that, despite the additional money, it may be challenging for public services to respond to the increased demand, given their existing pressures. How is the Welsh Government working with public services to ensure they can respond to the increase in demand for services?

We are particularly concerned at the availability of appropriate accommodation to enable people to be given a tenancy of their own. We are aware of the acute demand on housing services with around 10,000 people currently in temporary accommodation as well as refugees from Afghanistan still awaiting permanent accommodation. We are concerned that people from Ukraine may have to stay at the welcome centres longer than three months or remain with host families longer than the envisaged six months. Longer periods could impact the sustainability of host placements as hosts may require their space or relationships could become strained, particularly if living costs continue to increase. We were told that "we're going to have to look outside of the box at how we will accommodate people post welcome centres or hosting." What plans does the Welsh Government have in place to ensure people from Ukraine are able to move in to longer-term accommodation within six months and how do these plans fit with arrangements for securing permanent accommodation for homeless households already living in temporary accommodation?

We would be grateful for clarity on the financial assistance being offered to hosts. We understand that £350 is being offered to hosts for up to twelve months. Are you confident that this is sufficient given the increases in living costs? Are you able to confirm what financial support will be available to hosts should their placement be extended beyond twelve months?

We were told that Housing Justice Cymru run information sessions for people who put themselves forward to be hosts, and the importance of these sessions in raising awareness of the commitment required and in ensuring access to suitable training and support. Are you able to clarify what information, training and support is being provided to hosts and whether everyone who volunteers to be a host in Wales can access information sessions?

Having a person to contact within a local authority is another key feature of ensuring a successful placement. We heard that, ideally, the point of contact would be the person who has been involved throughout the process, including having undertaken the home visit. This should help people to build a relationship so they feel comfortable and confident in raising issues of concern. Please can you outline how the Welsh Government is ensuring that every placement is able to access a suitable person at a local authority and what role can the voluntary sector playing in providing additional support?

People sign up to host for six months, however circumstances may change during that period resulting in placements falling through, therefore it is crucial that resilience is built in to respond. We heard that having respite hosts in place is key provision to respond to such situations. Recruiting people to host for a couple of weeks to offer a respite placement alongside recruiting those who can offer a home for six months is important in ensuring successful placements. Are you able to outline the Welsh Government's plans in relation to recruiting people to provide respite placements?

We would be grateful for a response by 10 June so that it can be considered alongside our evidence sessions with stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letters are cursive and connected.

John Griffiths MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.