

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wreccsam

Response from: Wrexham County Borough Council

14 December 2016

**Welsh Government's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.**

Feedback from Wrexham County Borough Council

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**1. The pace & effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to
resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable
Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).**

Wrexham Council is committed to the principles of humanitarian protection. Wrexham has been a dispersal area for asylum seekers since 2001 and we are continuing to co-ordinate support for these vulnerable people. We take a lead role in co-ordinating positive partnership arrangements across the local public, voluntary and community organisations. Our ambition is that Wales is rightly seen as a nation of sanctuary and protection for vulnerable people.

Work to progress our role in the Syrian Resettlement Programme is continuing. With partners we have agreed to accommodate five families during 2016-17; four families are now resident in Wrexham. Ongoing partnership working with local groups and the wider community is central to our overall support arrangements. A highlight has been the 'Welcome Wall' created by school children from across the County Borough. This is a wall of letters and artwork in Wrexham library to welcome Syrian Refugees.

In December our Executive Board will discuss and agree how Wrexham may appropriately support the Scheme in 2017-18.

We welcome Welsh Government's coordination role regarding the SVPRS. We recommend that:

Recommendation 1: Welsh Government facilitates an evaluation of SVPRS in Wales so far, in order to develop and share good practice / good integration practice across public services and third sector support organisations. This is especially important in relation to local authority areas without diaspora communities.

We are concerned that the level of financial and organisational support for Syrian refugees supported through the SVPRS compared with the financial support and coordination for asylum seekers and refugees in Wales via the Home Office dispersal programme has created a two-tier system. This has created tensions between different groups of refugees and asylum seeker and the perception of different levels of 'welcome'. Potentially this could increase the negative discourse around 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants.

Recommendation 2: That the committee seek commitment from the Welsh Government to promote positive messages about *all* refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration to Wales.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government to fund a long-term refugee move-on service to support all refugees.

2. The effectiveness of the Refugee & Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.

This Plan and Welsh Government's proposed budget and outline specification for work they would like to see delivered under the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant strand of their Inclusion Fund from April 2017 are welcomed. There are however some areas for further consideration which include:

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should reiterate that integration begins on day one of arrival (rather than upon receipt of status or approaching the point at which people are eligible to apply for citizenship or naturalisation).

Recommendation 5: Welsh Government to actively engage with the UK Visa and Immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation to ensure that any new contract for asylum housing in Wales brings housing quality standards, complaints procedures, monitoring and enforcement in line with Welsh Quality Housing standards.

Recommendation 6: Welsh Government insist that the quality of asylum housing in Wales is scrutinised by either Welsh Government or local authorities.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government to support and enable staff in partner organisations across the statutory and voluntary and community sectors to understand the barriers faced by refugees with a particular emphasis on Jobcentre Plus staff, to increase their understanding of the barriers faced by refugees in job seeking. This would lead to more person-centred services with improved longer term outcomes.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should ensure that 3rd sector organisations providing support to asylum seekers and refugees under contract have access to translation and interpretation services. This would improve outcomes for the service area and for the families.

3. The support & advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

There are no specialised advocacy services for UASC. Advocacy support is especially important now that Wales is likely to see an increase in it's UASC population due to the National Transfer Scheme.

UASC in Wales do not have a system of Guardianship or support of the Refugee Children's Panel so it could be argued they are especially disadvantaged. It is therefore essential that they are informed about and able to access an advocate, and that the advocate uses interpretation where necessary, if UASC are to be afforded the same UNCRC rights as other looked after children in Wales. Advocacy becomes even more important in the context of age disputes.

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government are recommended to make appropriate arrangements for advocacy support for UASCs in Wales.

4. The role & effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees & asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

Funding for the Community Cohesion Co-ordinators for 2017-18 is welcomed. This has enabled a more co-ordinated approach to be taken in relation to the Syrian Relocation Scheme in north Wales.

Recommendation 10: Welsh Government should monitor and review public service organisations and particularly local authorities in relation to their engagement in the Community Cohesion agenda and commitment to the national Delivery Plan.

Recommendation 11: Welsh Government support and enable Public Service Boards to include the consideration of longer term migration impacts as part of their Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Wellbeing Assessment.

End