

RAS 27

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Caerfyrddin

Response from: Carmarthenshire County Council

1. Carmarthenshire County Council is committed to welcoming 60 households over a five year period from April 2016. Council members voted unanimously in favour of participating in the Home Office scheme, and this has received firm backing of Executive Board, with the Deputy Leader of the Council taking a personal interest and involvement in the success of the scheme.
2. The scheme is co-ordinated by a multi-agency steering group, which meets monthly. Chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, it has high-level representation from Hywel Dda Local Health Board, Education, Housing, Dyfed Powys Police, Communities First, Job Centre, Coleg Sir Gâr, Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services, the Project Manager and our support agency, Ethnic Youth Support Team.
3. The Council sources suitable homes through our in-house social lettings agency (soon to be re-named Simple Lettings). The properties are all well-maintained, carpeted and decorated to a high standard by the property owner. Furnishing is paid for by the Council, but arranged by the support agency. Rents are paid at Local Housing Allowance level. Simple Lettings charges a management fee from this, and the remainder is passed on to the property owner. Simple Lettings arranges minor repairs, heating maintenance and so on once the tenant is in the property.
4. So far, three families have arrived in Carmarthenshire, with a total of 15 family members. Four more families are due to arrive in November and December, and a further six properties are due to come into the scheme in the next few weeks, ready for occupation early in the New Year. We are therefore on target for more than 12 families in the first year of the scheme in the County.
5. Our Project Manager checks that any properties that are proposed to be brought into the scheme are suitable. This includes that the location has a good range of local facilities; that there are available places in local schools and that there is availability in the local GP practice. Dyfed Powys Police checks that there is no known reason why the property might be unsuitable from the perspective of crime or social cohesion. Where there is a shortage of school places for particular ages of children, we inform the Home Office of this, who try to match a family with the property in the light of this information.

Robin Staines BA (Hons.), MA, MChD

Pennaeth Tai & Diogelu'r Cyhoedd
Adran Cymunedau

3 Heol Spilman, Caerfyrddin, SA31 1LE.

Tŷ Elwyn, Llanelli, SA15 3AP.

Neuadd y Dref, Heol Iscennen, Rhydaman, SA18 3BE.

Head of Housing & Public Protection
Department for Communities

3 Spilman Street, Carmarthen, SA31 1LE.

Tŷ Elwyn, Llanelli, SA15 3AP.

Town Hall, Iscennen Road, Ammanford, SA18 3BE.



BUDDSODDWYR | INVESTORS
MEWN POBL | IN PEOPLE

6. A local panel, drawn from 5 representatives on the steering group (Education, Housing, Mental Health / Learning Disabilities, Health, Project Manager) checks that Carmarthenshire is able to provide for the needs of the family nominated, based on biographical and medical details from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, passed on via the Home Office's secure website, Movelt. Liaison with Home Office has been good, with swift responses to our requests for information and advice.
7. The Coleg Sir Gâr representative also represents Syria Sir Gâr, a voluntary support group which has been set up to provide informal support to the refugee families, which is over and above what can be provided through the Home Office scheme. Syria Sir Gâr has held open meetings in areas where refugees are about to arrive. This allows members of the local community to ask about how the scheme works and to have their questions answered in a relatively informal setting. It also informs local people about how they can get involved in supporting the families.
8. This has proved very successful, with Syria Sir Gâr being able to put out a call for things that are needed by the families, such as a bicycle for a teenager, or homework support after school. It can also reduce the amount of inappropriate support being offered.
9. Syria Sir Gâr also organises social events for the local community, to which the Syrian families are invited. This helps to introduce the families to local people, and it is fun too! The last social event had another spin-off benefit, as one local couple decided to offer their property for rent to the scheme.
10. Carmarthenshire County Council awarded the support contract to Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) on a five year contract. Two experienced and dedicated staff provide the day-to-day support. This starts before the family arrives, by ensuring that children are registered in advance with local schools and GP practices. As mentioned above, EYST also furnishes the property, ensuring that beds and bedding are appropriate for the specific family. EYST arrange transport from the airport and ensure that a welcoming meal is provided. An appointment will have already been made for the family to see the GP and the Job Centre in the first two days after arrival. The schools where the children are registered are also visited as soon as possible after arrival. EYST has a number of volunteer Arab interpreters, who are needed most in the first few weeks after arrival.
11. Adults attend bespoke English lessons three times a week, which start the week after the family arrives. Sessions are being organised in different parts of the County, as the families are not all in the same part of the County. A local nursery is provided to look after pre-school children so that the adults can participate fully in these classes. To date, we have not provided Welsh language tuition, although this will be offered to the families at the right time. This is particularly important as some of the families will be living in areas where Welsh is the main language of the local community.
12. The families have been receiving a good service from local GPs. Dental appointments have been arranged as necessary also. Emergency hospital treatment was also needed for one refugee. One adult refugee is

unfortunately still waiting for an appointment with a specialist surgeon to treat a bullet lodged in his neck. The referral was made by the GP surgery shortly after arrival in Wales in June 2016. The adult concerned is unable to look for work, as the bullet is causing extreme pain, and it could be dangerous to engage in manual work as it is close to the spinal cord, so this is affecting the person's job prospects.

13. We have not experienced any significant social tensions to date, although we remain vigilant about this. With all the partners working together closely, we are in a position to react quickly and appropriately to any issues that may arise.
14. Welsh Government 'Welcome to Wales' packs have been provided to all the families in Arabic and English, and in adult and child-friendly versions. Carmarthenshire has also provided a local supplement in Arabic and English, which covers the basics about local services and how to access them.
15. Carmarthenshire has few facilities for Moslems, as there is only one mosque, which is part time. There are no halal food shops. The families tend to make a once a week trip to Swansea on the bus, where they can attend Friday prayers and stock up on halal food. After the first couple of weeks, they have been travelling on their own. As we re-settle families further away from Swansea, we will be taking extra measures to enable the families meet their cultural and religious needs. For instance, we will be providing a larger freezer, so that halal food can be stored. Although bus transport is available, we are ready to work flexibly with the local community to help our families where needed. We are looking into alternative arrangements for sourcing halal food without a trip to Swansea. We believe that these issues should be recognised and tackled, but they should not be used as a reason not to help refugee families.

16. Summary Carmarthenshire has set up and delivered an effective support system for the Syrian families, and is well-placed to meet our commitment of receiving 60 families within five years. We have compensated for a lack of experience in this area of work by bringing all the relevant agencies together, and a willingness to learn from others. There will undoubtedly be challenges ahead, but we are ready to face them successfully, for the benefit of people who are in urgent need.

Yours sincerely

Matt Miller
Arweinydd Anghenion Tai / Housing Needs Lead