

RAS 38

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Ceredigion

Response from: Ceredigion County Council

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

1.1 Ceredigion County Council was one of the trailblazing Authorities in delivering the SVPR and has committed to resettle 50 individuals over five years with a phased approach of 10 individuals per year. By end December 2016 we will have resettled 23 individuals and are on target to deliver our commitment.

1.2 The SVPR scheme is overseen by a local Task and Finish group based on the membership of the Public Service Board. The group meets regularly and is chaired the Leader of the Council. The group produced a 'Lessons Learnt' document (see Appendix 1). This supported the partnership working at Local Authority level as well as on an all-Wales level.

1.3 We welcome the partnership approach that the Welsh Government has taken to this Scheme. The WLGA and the WSMP have been also been key in liaising with Local Authorities to support the scheme and are particularly effective in enabling the sharing of good practice and working through issues as they arise.

1.4 The Welcome to Wales pack, including the Child Friendly version, have been very well received by the refugees.

1.5 The continued funding of the regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators means that our local Co-ordinator has been able to share good practice between the Local Authorities in the region and act as a conduit between Welsh Government, WLGA and Ceredigion Public Service Board partners.

1.6 As Ceredigion was a trailblazing authority, much of the initial processes to support the first 12 months are now established. It would be useful to have additional support around ongoing needs, for example access to mental health services and advice to refugees who are trying to help family members join them in the UK.

1.7 We have found that refugees resettled in Ceredigion thought they were coming to Manchester or Bristol (the receiving airports) and were unaware that they were coming to rural mid-Wales. This has been passed on the UNHCR and the IOM during the recent research project. It would be useful if the Welsh Government continued to work with the Home Office to make sure that the expectations of refugees about their resettlement location are managed appropriately.

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

2.1 Many of the proposed actions in the plan appear to refer to actions which mainstream services would deliver in any case. There are additional costs attached to ensuring these services are also available to refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. translation and specialist advice). This does not appear to have been addressed throughout the plan and where it has been addressed the services are focused in South Wales.

2.2 Housing & Advice Services

The Intended Outcomes in this action area are fit for purpose but immigration advice and legal support seems to be focussed in South Wales and this makes it more time consuming and expensive for refugees resettled in mid-Wales to access.

Case Study: A refugee resettled in Ceredigion requested immigration advice and was accompanied to Swansea to see a solicitor trained in this area. The solicitor was funded to provide 30 minutes of free advice. This involved a 4 hour round trip by the refugee and the support worker for 30 minutes of advice.

2.3 Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Refugees resettled in Ceredigion have experienced a good level of support from Health services, some needing a weekly GP appointment. Translation services can pose a problem however; the service is available but some front line staff do not know how to access it. We commission the Red Cross to deliver our case work support service and they are often asked to make sure they provide translation for health appointments – Google translate is often utilised.

2.4 More work is needed to raise awareness of mental health services available. There is a need to manage the expectations of refugees about NHS waiting lists for both physical and mental health services. Assessment take place in good time but there can be a waiting time for delivery of treatment e.g. physiotherapy and talking therapies/counselling.

2.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The committee should be aware that there is a danger of placing UASC in areas where there are a low number of people of their own race or culture. There is a risk that children in this circumstance will find it difficult to develop a network of support and friendship. This is very likely to have a negative impact on their mental and emotional health.

2.6 Education

We welcome the idea of a monthly surgery at Cardiff Metropolitan University to provide advice for refugees on possible routes into higher education. This would be difficult for refugees in Ceredigion to attend however as it is a 9 hour round trip by public transport. Aberystwyth University has been proactive in this area albeit on an ad hoc basis and with no additional funding.

2.7 Employment

Refugees resettled in Ceredigion have accessed employment opportunities via the Job Centre and volunteering opportunities via casework support service provided by the British Red Cross.

2.8 Gender Based Violence, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery and Community Cohesion
Our Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator has been very proactive in this area. He has organised Hate Crime training and liaises with Dyfed Powys Police via the Community Safety Partnership.

2.9 Refugees in Ceredigion are able to access Families First services like any other resident in Ceredigion. The Team around the Family process and the Flying Start Outreach service can be accessed through completing the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF). To date this has not been deemed necessary.

2.10 Arts Culture and Sport

Refugees in Ceredigion have taken part in events and exhibitions at Ceredigion Museum and Aberystwyth Arts Centre. Some of the female refugees have joined the gym. To date we have not experienced any issues with regard access of female refugees to sport.

3. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales

This is not a point we can comment on as we have little experience in this area. See point 2.5 above.

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

4.1 A Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator is in post to facilitate the implementation of the Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17. The Co-ordinator covers mid and west Wales comprising Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys County Councils.

4.2 The relevant area of work with regards to refugees has been the ongoing delivery of the Syrian Resettlement Programme, (SRP). Ceredigion does not fall within an asylum seeker dispersal area.

4.3 The Co-ordinator assisted with primary planning with Ceredigion partners as a trail-blazing authority for the SRP. Specifically this included advice and guidance on integration and service provision for refugees and also sharing best practice from other migration integration work within the region, (for example engagement work with the Nepalese community in Brecon).

4.4 The Co-ordinator has been able to share best practice and experience between the four local authorities in mid and West Wales. The Co-ordinator sits on the four respective Syrian Resettlement Programme Multi-Agency Task Groups. Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys were very appreciative that Ceredigion was able to share best practice as a trail-blazing authority under the Syrian Resettlement Programme. The Regional Co-ordinator has also been a link with the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership and Welsh Government.

4.5 The Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator has also offered specialist support in three areas.

- Supporting the production of a Syrian Resettlement Programme Communications Strategy. As a trail-blazing authority and also as a largely rural county, there was considerable press interest.
- Hate Crime, including co-ordinating hate crime awareness raising training and information and strategic work with Dyfed Powys Hate Crime Forum and Ceredigion Community Safety Partnership.
- Tension monitoring. The Co-ordinator linked in with Dyfed Powys Police and Ceredigion CC Communications Team to monitor for any tensions. No significant tensions were identified.

Appendix 1 - Ceredigion Syrian Persons Relocation (SPR) scheme – Lessons Learnt

What went well?

1. The SVPR scheme in Ceredigion is facilitated via a multi-agency task and finish group based on Local Service Board membership. Members include the Local Authority, the Health Board, Higher Education, DWP, the Police, Fire & Rescue, the Third Sector and Registered Social Landlords. Adopting this multi-agency approach from the beginning has been very beneficial.
2. The process of procuring the case work support service went quickly and smoothly. Expressions of interest in the work were invited from existing Supporting People providers. Quick Quotes were obtained from 3 providers via the Sell2Wales website and the contract was based on Home Office Statement of Requirements. The process took three weeks.
3. The Press Office prepared a list of key messages and circulated to members of the multi-agency SVPR group for further distribution. They were also sent to all elected Members and all senior Local Authority officers. This helped to provide clear consistent messages that had been agreed by the whole group.
4. The Press Office managed enquiries from the media effectively, and continues to do so. A good relationship has been maintained with the local press. Enquiries from the media are evaluated and a very small number are invited to come and film and/or interview. Our Press Officer has worked in partnership with our Support Service Provider's Press Officer to achieve this.
5. A Local Panel, with separate Terms of Reference, has been established to consider whether we have the resources locally to meet the needs of those refugees referred to us by the Home Office. Local arrangements associated with panel decisions are transparent and robust. National guidance and structure, especially those associated with Health Finance have been slower to be tested and put in place.

Lessons Learnt

1. A workshop was offered to County Councillors to share information about the SPVR scheme and progress to date. This took place around 2 months after the initial multi-agency Syrian Refugee task and finish group. In retrospect we should have offered this workshop earlier in the process.
2. Ceredigion Housing stock has been transferred to a Housing Association. Our Housing team delivers the Local Authority's statutory duty with regard housing and homelessness. Environmental Services inspect local housing to ensure it is fit for purpose. It is essential that both Housing and Environmental services are happy with the accommodation being offered.
3. The Welcome to Wales leaflets were a good idea but they should have been checked for accuracy before they were presented to the refugees.

Other Points

1. Ceredigion's multi-agency SVPR group was chaired by the Leader of the Council; this helped facilitate multi-agency engagement with the process.
2. Telephone translation facilities have been set up for a range of public facing services within the Council (including Social Care, Education, Town Library, Housing and main reception). We know that these services won't all need the facility but they have the confidence of knowing that they have it should they need it. There are separate cost codes so we can monitor the use.
3. The Local Authority Delivery Group, facilitated by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership has been a useful forum for group discussions and creating informal links between officers in other counties with whom to share good practice and helpful hints.
4. Concerns have been raised relating to the quality of information sent from the home office in relation to medical forms; examples include inaccurate vaccination records. Whilst this has not caused a major challenge as yet, new guidance which suggests that medical costs need to be calculated from the medical forms prior to arrival and not from assessments undertaken on arrival does cause concern.
5. We are working with the local population to help with integration and are managing the offers of support from local residents. The aim is to enable the local community to show that refugees are welcomed without overwhelming the group. Examples are shown below:
 - two part time teaching assistants have been recruited from the local Arabic speaking population to support the children in school
 - the Local Muslim Society has been involved with welcome meetings
 - offers of accommodation are passed on to Environmental Services
 - welcome cards were made by children and families and given to the refugees when they arrived in Ceredigion