



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Response by the Portfolio Holder:

Thank you for the following questions which relate to an important aspect of our work as a Council, with apologies for the delay in responding. There is no specific service area working solely with asylum seekers and refugees and, therefore, the following information has been gleaned from different service areas.

1. How many people seeking sanctuary (asylum seekers and refugees) did Powys County Council support to resettle in Powys in 2019 – 2020?

The Housing Support Grant providers reported supporting 1 refugee in 2019, and 1 refugee in 2020 in terms of housing related support (as set out in The Welsh Government's Outcomes Framework reporting).

The situation for asylum seekers is different. Those seeking asylum, who come to Wales, are required to reside in four dispersal areas (Newport, Swansea, Cardiff and Wrexham). Asylum seekers, unlike refugees, are not permitted to work or to claim benefits. They are accommodated and provided with a weekly allowance by the Government. To date there has been no specific accommodation provided for asylum seekers in Powys, although it is believed that some may have found accommodation with private individuals.

During the year 2019 to 2020 Powys County Council was able to offer sanctuary to 7 Syrian families (typically two adults and two to three children) under the Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS). This scheme, funded and run by The Home Office, has been running since 2016 and aimed to settle 20,000 Syrian refugees across the UK over a five-year period. All Local Authorities in Wales were invited to participate in the scheme. Powys CC opted to be a part of it and gave a pledge to resettle 18 Syrian families across Powys. Currently there are 15 families settled across Ystradgynlais, Llandrindod and Newtown.

Powys County Council did not support any unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children during the period.

2. Does Powys County Council have a willingness to support people seeking sanctuary and if so how many people does it intend to support this year?

Support via the Social Service's Department's Housing Support Grant is available to anyone seeking support to find and sustain suitable accommodation, as a result of a range of issues. This can include, but is not limited to, fleeing domestic abuse and sexual violence, substance misuse, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, and other vulnerabilities.

As set out in the response to question 1 above, Powys County Council is committed to the Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS) programme and can resettle a further 3 families under its existing pledge during the coming twelve months, subject to available accommodation.

3. Is PCC willing to support and resettle unaccompanied children seeking sanctuary?

It is possible to access support through Social Services' Housing Support Grant, as local connection criteria do not apply, allowing greater flexibilities with the support sourced. However, resettling unaccompanied asylum-seeking children requires specialist services and appropriate placements, to provide the necessary support. This specialist service is not currently available in Powys as the settlement of UAS children is managed by Home Office through the National Transfer Scheme.

The National Transfer Scheme which has been under review in recent months and a new voluntary national rota system reflecting pressures relating to children's services and the supported asylum population has been agreed across England and Wales.

Leading up to this agreement there have been discussions pan Wales following the request from the Home Office to help the Team in Kent with the number of UAS children coming into the country. The agreed approach is for a national transfer scheme across Wales whereby each County will take their turn on a rota to take responsibility for the children being transferred through the Home Office national scheme, with Cardiff and Newport leading on this.

We are told that from experience most of the UAS children choose to live in more urban locations because of language, religion, culture and to live in clusters from the same geographic area.

However, for those who may want a rural setting, we continue to strive to increase the availability of suitable placements for all children including supporting lodgings, increased inhouse fostering and development of small care home provisions. We are passionate about being able to support wherever possible as we have a moral duty to do so especially recognising the difficulties these children have experienced, seeking asylum and being separated from or losing their parents.

In the lead up to this new national rota system being agreed Powys has been engaged with other local authorities in the Mid and West Wales region in looking for local placements into which children can be matched. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to match any children into an available placement. Foster carers have been invited to attend specialist training with the intended purpose of increasing the number of placements able to care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The All Wales Heads of Children's Services have made a commitment to work collaboratively across Wales in relation to unaccompanied Children. This ensures that those areas, such as Newport and Cardiff, whilst leading on this work, do not carry a disproportionate responsibility and all Local Authorities will contribute appropriately. Children may be placed within their areas, but the responsibility will be across Wales.

4. If PCC is willing to support people seeking sanctuary have they communicated this commitment to the UK Government?

As set out in the answers to questions 1 and 2 above, Powys County Council is fully engaged with Welsh Government and The Home Office in respect of refugee resettlement.

From a Housing Support Grant perspective, refugee status is a 'Lead Need' and the programme is open to providing housing related support to refugees, however possibly due to Powys' geographical location and rurality, Powys would not generally be the first point at which refugees and asylum seekers would seek support; hence from a Housing Support Grant perspective, services would be reliant on referrals that assessed our providers as being best placed to meet the support need. Referrals in the context of refugees and asylum seekers have therefore been very low in number.

Officers involved in preparing this information were from Social Services Commissioning, Children's Services and Housing Services.