

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
23rd January 2020**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Rosemarie Harris, Leader

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor William Powell

Whilst acknowledging the resource, both financial and human that is being committed by Powys County Council to its Brexit External Working Group and the significant amount of partnership working, both with public and private sector agencies and elected members, there is one area where we could – and arguably should – do more.

As the newly elected UK Government has refused to grant EU Nationals the automatic settlement rights that were promised by the Vote Leave Campaign in the 2016 Referendum, and all amendments to the Withdrawal Bill to reinstate these rights – and even to create an appeals mechanism - were rejected by HM Government, many EU, EEA and Swiss Nationals in Powys and throughout Wales face a daunting challenge in seeking to secure Settled Status from the Home Office.

I am aware of the Settled Status information link to Gov.UK on our PCC website – and of a ‘first come, first served’ booklet for interested Councillors. However, given the huge challenge that we have recognised over time on our PCC Corporate Risk Register in terms of the sharp decline in Powys residents of working age, it would surely be appropriate for the Authority to adopt a ‘best in class’ approach to supporting this vital category of workers. Proactive measures have already been undertaken in neighbouring authorities, notably Monmouthshire, Carmarthenshire and across the border in Herefordshire, involving drop in sessions, community meetings and a link with the respective library services, all to support EU Nationals wishing to continue living, working and contributing to our communities.

Will the Leader give consideration to a more proactive programme of support, in line with Powys’ reputation for hospitality, humanitarianism and fair play?

Response

According to the latest figures (7th November 2019) since the European Union Settlement Scheme opened 790 applications have been received from Powys. Powys County Council have been promoting the scheme through our social media channels and the Brexit pages on our website. In addition corporate communications have been sent to all staff and elected members. All messaging has been based on Home Office advice. In recent weeks publicity materials provided by the Home Office

have been distributed and displayed in libraries throughout Powys, and library staff have received a briefing pack on the scheme.

Support has been made available to Powys County Council staff in applying to the EU Settled Status Scheme, if requested.

Since the referendum we have been in constant contact with the commissioned service providers, in order to ensure their business continuity, and that any EU national staff are supported in applying for settled status. As Powys County Council receive updates from UK and Welsh Government, these are distributed to relevant service areas and service providers to ensure that there is clear, authoritative information on the rights of EU citizens.

The Welsh Government have now appointed Community Cohesion Coordinator (hosted by Carmarthenshire County Council, working throughout Dyfed-Powys) and a Community Cohesion Officer (working throughout Powys and Ceredigion). These are able to offer advice and assistance to citizens, and will be organising a series of events to help with EUSS applications and other community cohesion based information. These first of these will be held in Ystradgynlais Welfare Hall on 31st January 2020 from 09:30 to 13:30. Communications around this have been issued, with further activities planned.

These new appointees are also currently in the process of arranging EUSS scheme training for frontline staff (in collaboration with Travelling Ahead). Once details of this have been confirmed with the Learning and Development team, details will be made available to staff.

Other local authorities are undertaking different activities, however based on the number of EU national citizens in Powys, the Strategic Brexit Coordination Group deems this level of support appropriate, this position is regularly reviewed.