



# Home Office

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Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau /  
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee  
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John Griffiths AM  
Chair of the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
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Dear John

## **INQUIRY INTO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN WALES**

Thank you for your letter of 24 November to the Home Secretary requesting evidence for your inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Your letter has been passed to me as Immigration Minister, and I am pleased to contribute to this important inquiry.

You have asked for written and oral evidence on our assessment of three issues:

- 1) The extent to which there is seamless integration between devolved and non-devolved public services provided for refugees and asylum seekers;
- 2) How intergovernmental cooperation in Wales compares with other parts of the UK; and
- 3) The extent of the UK Government's involvement in intergovernmental working to inform the preparation and implementation of the WG's delivery plans.

The primary focus of the inquiry is the role of the Welsh Government (WG) and Welsh bodies, and whilst we recognise that the UK Government's asylum policy is relevant to the inquiry, we consider that we can best serve the committee by providing written evidence. Please find our written evidence attached.

Yours sincerely

**Robert Goodwill MP**

## INQUIRY INTO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN WALES

### **1. The extent to which there is seamless integration between devolved and non-devolved public services provided for refugees and asylum seekers**

In Wales, where health, education and local government are devolved, it is essential there is close collaboration between devolved and non-devolved public services for all asylum seekers and refugees. The Home Office has, over a number of years provided a small annual enabling grant to Newport Council to run the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP). This grant requires that a partnership exists to bring together all relevant agencies, including the third sector organisations and political leaders with the Home Office to collaborate on planning migration issues in Wales. Both devolved and non-devolved public services are represented on the executive management board, as are officials from the WG.

In the last 12 months, the enabling grant funding mechanism has been supplemented with a small development grant of £60k so that the existing partnership infrastructure can be enhanced in support of the Syrian resettlement scheme. This has allowed for the funding of a coordinator post to help develop a 'pan-Wales' approach to resettlement; looking at the local, regional and national opportunities to collaborate and achieve economies of scale, as well as effective joint working between public services. UKVI is also negotiating whether to make a similar development grant payment for the role of the partnership in delivering the UK's vulnerable children scheme, however a decision on this has not yet been reached.

An example of successful joint working between governments is the Wales health funding framework for the Syrian resettlement scheme. This has been developed in partnership by the WG and UK Government (the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme) to ensure that Local Health Boards in Wales can access relevant funding for the medical costs incurred during year one following the arrival of Syrian nationals under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The WG has also developed a mental health pathway for asylum seekers and refugees, which it developed in consultation with UK Government officials as well as experts and wider partners.

There are four established asylum dispersal areas in Wales, Cardiff, Newport Swansea and Wrexham, all of whom have developed considerable expertise in a strong, multi-agency approach to delivering services, and monitoring that service delivery. All 22 Local Authorities (LAs) in Wales have agreed to contribute to the resettlement of Syrian refugees and are considering their response to the vulnerable children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) national transfer scheme. LAs who have previously had little experience of asylum seekers or refugees in their communities have resettled families and young people, drawing on the many years of experience in the dispersal areas but also with a strong supporting structure from the UK Government Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme and dedicated 'contact officers' to work directly with LAs, the WSMP and from the WG ministerial task force the operational board, children sub group and communications group. This structure enables UK Government and WG to work together with all strategic partners in Wales to identify issues and barriers to the delivery of public services for asylum seekers, resettlement and refugees.

The UK Government recently pledged up to £10m over five years for a jointly funded Department for Education and Home Office programme to enable refugees arriving



on the Syrian and vulnerable children resettlement schemes across the UK to access language tuition and integrate into British society, together with funding for regional coordinators to support the delivery of Educational Services Overseas Limited (ESOL). The additional funding for English language training will mean all adults (aged 19 or above) arriving through the schemes anywhere in the UK will receive 12 hours a week of tuition, for up to six months. We are near completion on guidance to Welsh LAs. We have consulted with the WG, Welsh Local Government Association and wider devolved and non-devolved partners through the WSMP in developing this.

The Home Office has a dedicated Senior Civil Servant lead based in Wales, who is responsible for managing the relationship between the Home Office and non-devolved partners around Home Office priorities, including immigration, and has been directly involved in the work on asylum seekers, refugees and resettlement. The Home Office Director of Asylum Operations and the Director of the Resettlement Programme for the UK Government have visited Wales on a number of occasions over the last twelve months to meet and consult with partners, and further support the collaboration between public services, wider partners and the third sector.

## **2. How intergovernmental cooperation in Wales compares with other parts of the UK**

Although immigration and asylum are reserved matters each of the devolved administrations (DAs) have developed their own integration strategies.

The Northern Ireland Executive published a racial equality strategy in December 2015 which commits to a refugee integration strategy. The “New Scots” integration strategy, a three year plan, was published in 2013. The WG published a refugee and asylum seeker delivery plan earlier this year. There are some key differences with the DAs in the approach to integration; in particular the DAs see integration as happening from arrival, whereas in England integration only starts once particular status has been awarded.

Officials in the Home Office and WG work very closely on all matters relating to asylum seekers, resettlement and refugees. The Home Office has senior dedicated representation based in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, responsible for managing the relationship between the governments and strategic partners. Since the start of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme there has been a monthly call chaired by the Director of the Resettlement Programme with officials from the three DAs, and dedicated contact officers have ensured that at the operational level, the relationship is further supported to make it collaborative.

The Home Office has held two ‘engagement events’ in Scotland and Wales where senior officials from both governments have come together to discuss intergovernmental cooperation; the joint work on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme was an example of best practice at both events.

Wales has chosen to continue with the Ministerial task force on asylum seekers and refugees and the associated supporting structures, whereas the other DAs have chosen to discontinue that approach. It provides an important opportunity to ensure cooperation at all levels is maintained.

### **3. The extent of the UK Government's involvement in intergovernmental working to inform the preparation and implementation of the WG's delivery plans**

UK Government officials have been kept informed on the development of WG delivery plans. The collaborative working on the resettlement schemes has provided an opportunity to strengthen the relationship. UK government officials have welcomed and supported the work of the WG in developing the 'Welcome to Wales' pack and the mental health pathway for asylum seekers and refugees. The UK government look forward to continuing the joint working in the development of future plans; in particular Wales' response to the vulnerable children resettlement scheme and the UASC national transfer scheme being taken forward via the children sub group of the Ministerial task force.