

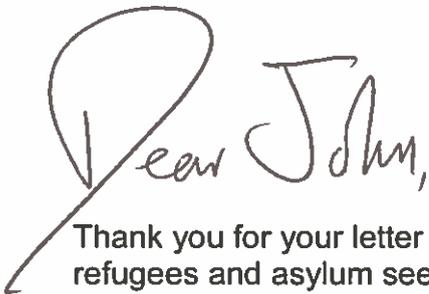


Home Office

**Robert Goodwill MP**  
**Minister of State for Immigration**

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John Griffiths AM  
Chair of the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee  
National Assembly of Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
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CF99 1NA



Dear John,

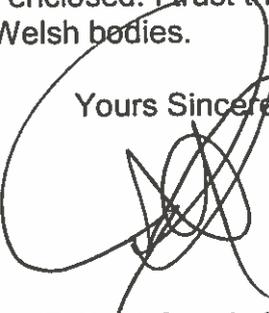
Thank you for your letter of 12 January requesting further evidence for your inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

You have asked for written evidence on our assessment of the following issues:

- The responsibilities specified in the contract between the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd in terms of the services which must be delivered to asylum seekers in Wales and the quality standards which apply.
- How the Home Office ensures that initial health screening takes place and English lesson are available to asylum seekers
- The Home Office's assessment of the quality of accommodation offered by Clearsprings, and the contractual or other performance measures upon which this assessment is made, including the nature and frequency of monitoring undertaken, and processes for investigating complaints
- Whether the Home Office would be prepared to extend the move-on period of 28 days to 56 days to bring it in line with the homelessness prevention duties introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, and to strengthen information-sharing with the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales and the expected number of successful applications.
- confirm whether the Home Office provides financial support to local authorities to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.
- provide details of the methodology for the decisions the Home Office makes on allocating such children to Wales, confirm whether there are any barriers from your perspective to increasing the number of such children coming to Wales.

Please find the written evidence enclosed. I trust that it assists into your inquiry into the role of Welsh Government and Welsh bodies.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Goodwill', written over a large, loopy scribble that partially obscures the text 'Yours Sincerely,'.

**Robert Goodwill MP**



## UK Visas & Immigration

### **To the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales**

#### **Contractual Responsibilities and Service Standards**

All of the COMPASS providers, including Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH), are contracted to provide Accommodation, transport and related services for asylum applicants. The contracts define the required performance standards expected of all providers and also contain prescribed responsibilities, performance and governance regimes.

For accommodation Clearsprings Ready Homes, are contractually required to provide safe, habitable, fit for purpose and correctly equipped accommodation that complies and the Decent Homes Standard and any further standards outlined in relevant housing legislation.

The Government expects the highest standards from our contractors and providers are monitored closely to ensure asylum accommodation providers meet these standards. Where a contractor is found to be falling short of these standards, we work with them to ensure issues are quickly addressed.

In line with government transparency commitments details of the contracts are already in the public domain is available on the Contracts Finder Archive on the Data.Gov.UK Website at: <https://data.gov.uk/data/contracts-finder-archive/contract/487962/>

The particular document that details the service standards is titled 'Schedule 2 - Statement of Requirements' and the document that details the nine key performance indicators (KPIs) used to monitor provider performance and improve the quality of service is titled 'Schedule 13 – Performance Standards'.

#### **Access to Health Services and Screening**

Health in Wales is a devolved matter and therefore responsibility for funding and service delivery principally sits with the Welsh Government. The Home Office however takes all reasonable steps to ensure the health and welfare of asylum seekers, and those asylum seekers (and their dependants) who receive asylum support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 are therefore entitled to free access to NHS medical services. I understand that in Wales, failed asylum seekers are entitled to free secondary healthcare which is not the case in England.

Under normal circumstances the Home Office discharges its duties on health matters by ensuring that relevant asylum seekers have all the necessary information, in a language that they understand, to access and register with their local health services delivered by relevant local healthy authority.

For those asylum seekers who are eligible the Home Office currently issues HC2 certificates on behalf of the NHS, conferring entitlement to Help with Health Costs via the NHS Low Income Scheme. A HC2 enables access to free NHS prescriptions, free dental treatment, free eye sight tests, help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses, free wigs

and fabric supports and help with the cost of travel to receive treatment under the care of a consultant. Asylum seekers who are not supported by the Home Office can themselves apply to the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) for a HC2 certificate.

Subject to the requirements of the local health authority and in Wales, the Welsh Government, asylum seekers accommodated by the Home Office are provided with an opportunity to undergo assessment by health officials upon first entering initial asylum accommodation. Where medical provision is not provided in the Initial Accommodation site, as is the case in the Cardiff, then Providers will take suitable steps to provide accommodated asylum seekers with access to appropriate medical treatment, including offering transportation to initial health screening. It is a matter for the individual asylum seekers as to whether this offer of access to health services is taken up. In addition, under the terms of the contract, any service user who immediately presents themselves with an obvious or urgent health care requirement on arrival into asylum accommodation is provided with direct action to ensure that the medical need is satisfied.

There have also been some positive examples of collaboration between the UK Government and Welsh Government; in 2016, a joint health funding framework for the Syrian Resettlement programme was agreed and published to support Local Health Boards in Wales, and Welsh Government has developed a mental health pathway for asylum seekers and refugees.

### **Access to Education**

Education in Wales is a devolved matter and therefore responsibility for funding and service delivery is a matter for the Welsh Government. The Home Office recognises that the ability to speak English is a key enabler for achieving more integrated communities and creating the conditions for everyone to live and work successfully alongside each other. That is why those who are granted refugee status are given access to the labour market and benefits, and are encouraged to access organisations who can assist with integration. In addition the Home Office provides integration loans to those who are recognised as refugees which is designed to help new refugees to integrate into UK society by offering support towards housing costs, employment and training. Adults who are granted refugee status or humanitarian protection are therefore eligible to access to educational services, subject to the restrictions and resources established by local educational authorities, such as Adult Learning Community in Wales.

The issue of education provision for children seeking asylum is also an important one and the Home Office makes every effort to ensure that families with children who claim asylum support have access to education at the earliest opportunity. All such children are entitled to free primary and secondary education. Adult asylum seekers however, whilst not prevented from undertaking courses of study, must meet the admission and funding criteria established by Higher Education Institutions and therefore a matter for local education service discretion.

Finally for those refugees who have entered the UK under one of the resettlement schemes, the Government has pledged up to £10m over five years for a jointly funded DfE and Home Office programme to enable refugees across the UK to access language tuition and integrate into British society.

## **Clearsprings Performance, Accommodation Standards and Complaints**

We demand the highest standards from our contractors and their accommodation and monitor them closely to ensure these standards are maintained. All Home Office contracts include performance standards which are defined in the contract and are managed using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Any failure of the critical service levels may result in deductions against submitted invoices in the form of service credits. Clearsprings have accrued no service credits for the standards of their accommodation during the term of their contract and have no major concerns about accommodation standards in Wales.

The Home Office has a rigorous contract compliance regime in place to ensure that the required performance standards expected of all providers, as defined in the contracts, are met. The contract requires providers to inspect each property when a new service user moves in and then at least monthly. Accommodation is inspected to ensure that what is provided is safe, habitable, fit for purpose and that the overall service described in the COMPASS contracts is being delivered including ensuring that Service Users feel safe, secure and know how to raise concerns should they occur. The Home Office also inspects, as a minimum, a third of all asylum accommodation each year to ensure that the Service described in the COMPASS contracts is being delivered. This includes UKVI led inspections, inspections with Providers and inspections with Local Authorities. We also use information from NGOs and feedback to target inspection and compliance activity. The compliance regime also includes monthly contract management and quarterly strategic review meetings, as well as regular daily discussions with COMPASS providers' operational delivery managers about day to day issues.

Within the contract there are three principal KPIs relating to property standards. Where faults are identified, providers have a set timescale in which to complete repairs according to the severity of the defect (for example urgent problems such as gas leaks have to be made safe within two hours). Provider non-compliance such as failure to complete repairs within the timescale constitutes a KPI failure, and the provider may incur service credits and financial penalties according to formulas set out in the contract. In 2016/17 the Home Office has inspected 44% of CRH Wales properties (332 of 749 properties) and all issues identified during these inspections were resolved in accordance with contractual timescales.

The Home Office has worked closely with our Providers, including CRH to improve property standards, through: conducting joint accommodation inspections; training to ensure consistency in monitoring activities; providers improved management policies and processes delivering the maintenance service and increased staffing levels of Housing Officers, and providers investing in existing stock and replacing properties that did not meet quality standards.

In respect of complaints, the contract with Clearsprings includes a clearly defined process including timescales for resolution. In the first instance Service Users are encouraged to report issues, concerns or complaints directly to Clearsprings for them to resolve issues within contractual timescales. Where this is not dealt with satisfactorily, or the response is inadequate, then the complaint can be brought directly to UKVI, including via Migrant Help or another representative. This applies to both COMPASS clients and third sector agencies. In addition, during Home Office housing inspections, the Contract Compliance Team measure service delivery via a short questionnaire with the Service User around level of contact, welcome briefing and support from the provider. In the last year, we have reviewed our complaints procedure following feedback from third sector organisations and Service Users and are making a number of improvements, including better visibility and signposting in how to make a complaint. A national Accommodation Advisory Board has

recent been established to bring together NGOs to discuss accommodation issues and provide a forum for feedback. Our providers have also established local forums for service users and NGOs to provide feedback on their accommodation. According to our local records since April 2016 we have received seven complaints regarding asylum accommodation in Wales.

### **Information following a grant of Refugee Status**

We are working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that new recognised refugees apply promptly for any welfare benefit for which they may be eligible and receive the first payment of any benefit for which they qualify before their Home Office support ends. We will evaluate the impact of this work later this year and bring forward a change to the current 28-day move-on period if the evaluation shows that to be necessary.

Each asylum case is considered on its individual merits in accordance with our international obligations and protection is granted where it is needed. Some decisions can be taken more quickly than others, for example if further information is needed to reach an informed decision it can take longer. Despite recent increases in the number of claims being made, we are continuing to meet our commitment to decide at least 98% of straightforward claims within six months of the date of claim. In cases where a claim is refused then the claimant usually has a right of appeal against that decision. In these circumstances it is not possible for the Home Office to provide a prediction on the expected numbers of successful asylum claims before a case has been fully and individually considered.

### **Support to Local authorities**

The Home Office maintains an active partnership with local authorities across the UK and funds Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) to plan for the most appropriate dispersal of asylum seekers. As part of these responsibilities these partnerships provide a forum for the impact on communities and local services to be considered so that adjustments can be made to dispersal patterns where appropriate. This ensures that community cohesion, social welfare and safety issues are properly considered. In addition SMP's support the consultation process for procuring new properties as well as providing support to widen asylum dispersal, Resettlement programmes and the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Home Office does not provide direct funding to local authorities for the accommodation and support of asylum seekers in their area, however funding is provided directly to local authorities for the support of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and for resettlement programmes.

### **Allocation of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

The Home Office takes its responsibility for the welfare of children seriously and we have very stringent statutory and policy safeguards in place regarding child welfare. There has been a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) arriving in the UK over the last 18 months and this has placed significant pressure on a small number of local authorities, particularly in the South of England. We are very keen to see a more equitable distribution of UASC across all parts of the UK. That is why we launched the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) on 1 July 2016 and legislated for the transfer of UASC between local authorities in England in the Immigration Act. The NTS is the mechanism by which all unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children arriving in the UK will be placed in local authority care. The Scheme seeks to encourage all local

authorities to volunteer to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and is based on a regional model with no region expected to look after more UASC and unaccompanied refugee children than 0.07% of the total child population in their area. The scheme also seeks to ensure that no local authority is required to look after more children than their services can cope with. Prior to the introduction of the NTS, the placement of UASC was principally defined by the location in which they are first identified or encountered, this in part explains why the numbers of UASCs in Wales is currently lower than many other parts of England.

Since the launch of the NTS the response from local authorities has been positive and we continue to engage with local authorities across the UK to encourage more to participate, including extending the scheme to local authorities in the devolved administrations. We are working to extend the transfer provisions in the Immigration Act 2016 to the devolved administrations by the draft affirmative procedure. This will make the transfer of the UASC to different parts of the UK a smoother process and will ensure that they are in accordance with devolved responsibilities such as children's services and safeguarding. However, until the regulations have been considered by Parliament we remain open to any offers of NTS places from local authorities in the devolved administrations. I am grateful for the positive way in which Welsh local authorities and the Welsh Government have engaged with my officials on the issue of unaccompanied children and remain committed to continuing that dialogue to work through any concerns and increase participation amongst Welsh local authorities.

As you are aware, at the end of last year the UK transferred over 750 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from France following the closure of the Calais camp. The transfer of children to the UK from France was a significant undertaking and I would like to express my gratitude for the efforts of Welsh officers in helping to manage the transfer of unaccompanied children to the UK at the end of last year.