

# **The summary note from the roundtable discussion with Migration and Resettlement Leads as part of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry into social cohesion**

**24 March 2025**

Four migration and settlement lead officers participated in this discussion from different areas of Wales.

The following are the main messages from the discussions:

## **Challenging context**

- Migration and resettlement leads are operating in difficult circumstances and it's changing, having to deal with increasing misinformation and disinformation, Freedom Restricting Harassment, national debates around migration and wider geopolitical issue and narratives which have local impact.

## **Housing and support for asylum seekers and refugees**

- National debates around migration including the housing of asylum seekers in hotels and wider geopolitical issues and narratives can have an impact on local communities and can lead to community tensions.
- The private sector has not been able to meet the demand and provide sufficient accommodation which has led to the use of hotels. There are also pressures on local housing supply. The Council is impacted by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) about what it can and can't pay for housing, whereas Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH) will offer a percentage above what the LHA and local authorities are automatically being priced out of that market. CRH are offering contracts for potentially 5 years. As this level of security can't be matched by local authorities, this often leads to private housing providers signing up with CRH.
- The impact of full dispersal has been particularly challenging for rural areas. Issues include asylum seekers and refugees being unable to access face-to-face support and services. Access to transport can be an issue, particularly as asylum seekers are only able to access financial support for one return journey per week. This causes an inequitable offer for asylum seekers depending on where in Wales they are accommodated.
- It was noted that there needs to be a rural model to offer appropriate support to asylum seekers, an issue which has been discussed with colleagues in Scotland and the Southwest who have similar issues. One suggestion is that rural councils would benefit from an uplift to the tariff. They are waiting for the Home Office's response. Whilst there was a recognition that there are great

services, but they are generally only available to those based in proximity to them.

- When procuring accommodation there is consultation with local government and the police, but in reality, asylum seekers are housed where there is availability of housing and where there are possible community tension presents.
- Compared to the planned resettlement of asylum seekers (e.g. Homes for Ukraine scheme and Afghan resettlement scheme), the dispersal system creates challenges for local authorities, particularly given the lack of information they receive about the asylum seeker from the Home Office following their initial assessment in the processing centre.

## **Responding to community tensions**

- The lessons learned report after the protests around the accommodation of asylum seekers at Penally was shared with the Home Office. The lessons learned report from the protests in Llanelli is not publicly available due to the sensitivities, but this has been shared with the Home Office, Cabinet Secretary, and partners (e.g. the Council). The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership is keeping the recommendations under review. The Home Office have been told about the continued impact on the community and the need to deal with these legacy issues.
- There are concerns that, given far-right activity in the area prior to the Stradey Park protests, Welsh Government and others should have realised this issue could arise. In other instances nothing happened – *“it’s almost as if they had a cigarette lighter and they were click, click, click clicking until it hit some dry grass and when it hit Stradey Park hotel there was a lot of dry grass and it went up”*. There is a level of urgency around this to prepare for any future issues and a need to work closely with the Home Office to prepare future emergency responses.
- *“We need brave leaders in the local authorities and Welsh Government to champion these issues...”* It was highlighted that elected members have a clear role to share information, help to support and manage people’s expectations, often fuelled by fear and misinformation. They need to be vocal, sharing facts to provide clarity to those in their locality.

## **The role of Welsh Government, local authorities and the Home Office**

- The Welsh Government and local authorities should be taking a strong lead, ensuring there is a strategic approach which reflects the current challenges and threats to social cohesion within Welsh communities.
- Concerns were noted about the lack of a strategic approach to cohesion at a local level. A local strategy which focuses on local issues and is responsive to the needs of the different communities and issues would be very helpful.
- Whilst the community cohesion teams have a valuable role, local authorities and Welsh Government need to lead on this issue. They need to take a proactive role by supporting and communicating the nation of sanctuary policy. They should be involved in myth busting when misinformation and disinformation occurs. Local organisations, for instance schools, should not be left alone to deal with issues.
- The guiding principles of the Nation of Sanctuary is helpful, but it is at an early stage. The Nation of Sanctuary narrative has got slightly twisted with the Penally and then Llanelli context. That message needs to be updated – more work needs to be done with organisations to get them to that place.
- It is important that the lessons learned are embedded into practice. WSMP is asking the Home Office to demonstrate how the learning has been embedded into their current operation around their contingency sites and the learning from the summer riots.
- Examples of migration leads working effectively with the community cohesion teams were shared, such as the northwest Wales team, based in Ynys Mon. They meet regularly, inviting all charities, discuss best practice and are working well.
- The cohesion teams are working well, however through the ‘lessons learned work’ some organisations felt the community cohesion teams did not go far enough. There may be a need to look at what their role is in the different context they are dealing with now and whether it is strategic enough and whether it is working effectively in partnership with the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership throughout Wales.
- There is a need to be more proactive, rather than waiting for something to arise in communities. Local authorities should be involved in this.
- When decisions are taken to house asylum seekers there is a need for early community engagement, so communities do not feel decisions are made

without them. The community engagement model which was adopted in St Athens by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) was seen as an example of good practice: The MOD led a town hall meeting, invited the community along and explained what would be happening and why. They developed a media strategy and community strategy which could be replicated elsewhere. Whilst communicating the story about people who had supported the British army in Afghanistan was positive, it could be adapted. Whilst crucial, there is no provision in the dispersal process for community engagement.

- Planned resettlement and asylum-seeking works in completely diverse ways, in terms of the mechanics and funding. Planned – there is time to prepare for the family, and it's organised and reasonably well funded. With dispersal, workers are unlikely to know about them until a day after they arrive and the information collected at the processing centre often doesn't flow with the person.

### **Data and tension monitoring**

- There are gaps in data sharing and an inconsistent approach to tension monitoring across Wales. Hate crime data is only available at a county level. More data at the local level could inform a more targeted approach to dealing with very localised tensions.
- During the protests last summer, the community cohesion team picked up a lot of what the far-right groups were doing and were able to get good intelligence. Whilst there are skilled staff, their role is not always clear. They are not in a leadership role; this was the Council and the police. They provide support and allocate small grants.
- The lived experience of those who are being targeted (e.g. asylum seekers) should form part of the data collection and tension monitoring process.