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Y Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Social Justice



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JH-/10435/21

Jenny Rathbone MS & Delyth Jewell MS  
Chairs  
Welsh Parliament

[Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales](mailto:Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales)

10 September 2021

Dear Jenny & Delyth,

Thank you for your letter of 20 August on behalf of both Senedd committees regarding the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and support being provided by the Welsh Government to Afghan refugees.

On 26 August, I published a Written Statement setting out what we know and what our next steps are in relation to supporting those evacuated from Afghanistan, you can read more in the link below;

[Written Statement: A distinctive Welsh response to the Afghanistan evacuation \(26 August 2021\) | GOV.WALES](#)

I intend to also address the Senedd next week to provide a further update on our work so far. Wales is a Nation of Sanctuary and we must do all that is possible to ensure Afghan interpreters, refugees and their families are able to find a warm welcome and integrate effectively in our communities.

We are working closely with the Home Office, Welsh local authorities and others to help sufficient accommodation and ensure appropriate integration support is put in place. Two weeks ago, the First Minister and I met and listened to key stakeholders across Wales, including representatives of the Afghan community, to look at how we can all work collaboratively to provide the best support possible for those fleeing Afghanistan. This work will continue over the coming weeks.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

## **How many Afghan refugees do you anticipate will be given sanctuary in Wales and is there a timeline for their resettlement?**

It is important to note that there are two schemes with different eligibility criteria being progressed. The Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) provides accommodation and support to those who worked directly alongside British Armed Forces in Afghanistan. Separately, the UK Government has announced an Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) the scope of which is yet to be defined. Only the ARAP is currently in operation and, although families arriving could be said to have a well-founded fear of persecution if they remained in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan (the UN definition of a refugee), the UK Government does not bestow 'refugee status' upon these arrivals.

We understand that approximately 8,000 people have arrived in the UK with ARAP eligibility and the UK Government has also announced that 5,000 people per year will be supported under the ACRS. We intend for Wales to play a full part in both of these schemes and every Welsh local authority has pledged to provide support. As with most asylum dispersal and refugee resettlement operations, Wales will seek to embody our commitment to being a Nation of Sanctuary by at least meeting, and aiming to exceed, our 4.7% population share of the UK. This means a minimum expectation of supporting 611 individuals within the first 12 months of operation of the schemes. At this point it is not possible to give a more accurate number on those we intend to resettle as a nation.

It is important to note that Welsh local authorities all supported families under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and our asylum dispersal areas have been in the top areas of asylum seekers supported per head of population for many years. Wales is committed to the Nation of Sanctuary vision and only the challenging availability of larger properties will limit our progress.

Resettlement operations have already begun in Wales and the initial work to relocate ARAP eligible families will continue throughout September. The timetable for resettlement work for the ACRS cohort will depend on UK Government decisions for when the scheme becomes operational.

## **What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the adequacy of accommodation arrangements for refugees arriving in the UK, particularly in light of the tragic death of an Afghan child in Sheffield earlier this week?**

The tragic death of 5 year-old Mahammed Munib Majeedi on 18 August was a sobering reminder of the need to ensure temporary accommodation arrangements are carefully considered and risks are minimised. We have worked closely with all partners over recent weeks to seek accommodation standards which will provide good quality temporary support for families. On 16 August, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government to make clear that any hotels procured in Wales would need the consent of both Welsh Ministers and the relevant Welsh local authority. Unfortunately, we are aware that one hotel has been procured in Wales and the consent of neither key stakeholder was sought. We are working at pace to assess the adequacy of support arrangements at this location and work with partners to put in place the support needed.

## **Has the Welsh Government secured the additional funding needed from the UK Government, as described in your comments to the BBC?**

We have written to the UK Government to pledge our commitment to help in any way that we can and to seek urgent clarity on a number of important issues, from potential

consequential funding for health and education, to contingency accommodation planning arrangements to the scope and support to be provided under the new Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. I have also raised these matters directly with UK Government Ministers at recent Four Nations meetings but we are yet to receive satisfactory responses to our queries. On 6 September, the Prime Minister gave a commitment in the House of Commons to write to Devolved Administrations setting out the funding details available in Wales and we await that letter.

### **What arrangements are being made for the UK's four-nations' summit, confirmed by the Prime Minister to Parliament on 18 August?**

On 27 August, I attended the Four Nations meeting, chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove MP. I raised the concerns expressed by members of Welsh Afghan community members about the evacuation efforts and worries about the safety of their families, urged the involvement of Welsh Government officials in the design and operational planning of new schemes, and sought urgent clarity on a number of matters.

A second Four Nations meeting was held on 6 September with the new UK Afghan Resettlement Minister, Victoria Atkins MP, to provide an update on recent developments. Further engagement with Devolved Administrations has been committed but our officials are yet to be engaged properly in the design or operational planning of these schemes. We also note that the Prime Minister committed to meeting with representatives of the Welsh Government during his statement to Parliament on 6 September.

### **How many Welsh local authorities have offered support and can you please provide details of the types of support offered by each local authority?**

Every Welsh local authority has pledged support for these schemes and work is underway to ensure pledges turn into firm property offers as soon as practicable. Around half of our local authorities have already welcomed in at least one Afghan family under these schemes and will be working carefully to put in place the wider support package needed – as they have done so well under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. It is also worth noting that our asylum dispersal areas will also be supporting many more Afghans in their areas and have done so consistently throughout the conflict in Afghanistan.

It is a source of great pride that every Welsh Local Authority has committed to supporting Afghan nationals. Wales has a long tradition of supporting those seeking sanctuary and we will continue that tradition under these new schemes.

### **How do plans to support Afghan refugees compare to the support offered to Syrian refugees in 2015?**

We have yet to receive any firm details from the UK Government about how the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) will operate. We have urged the UK Government to effectively mirror the arrangements which operate under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in terms of funding level and method of operation.

We have also asked that the UK Government consider the ACRS as part of the UK Resettlement Scheme (also known as the Global Resettlement Programme) which Welsh local authorities had already signed up to support. The UK Resettlement Scheme was intended to provide a more generic and responsive scheme to ensure crises in any part of the world could be directly linked to a safe and legal route to sanctuary. Establishing yet another new scheme may mean that local authorities have to navigate democratic processes again before placements can be offered.

**What is the Welsh Government's view on the eligibility criteria for priority support for Afghan refugees and do you support the UK Government position to give priority to women and girls?**

I have already urged the UK Government to ensure that the newly announced Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme takes special consideration of the vulnerability of women, children (including boys), LGBTQ+ individuals, religious and ethnic minorities (including the Hazaras), and those with family members already resident in the UK. Inevitably, given the scope of the ACRS (5,000 beneficiaries per year) and the number of those who may fear persecution at the hands of the Taliban, some more nuanced eligibility criteria are likely to need to be employed to ensure those most at-risk can be supported in the UK. We want the UK Government to engage with us on this and also seek the advice and support of the UNHCR.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the first letter.

**Jane Hutt AS/MS**

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