

[‘I used to be someone’ – Assembly to debate committee report on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales](#)

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On Wednesday 21 June, the Assembly will debate the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee’s [report into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales](#), and the [Welsh Government’s response to its recommendations](#).

The Committee made 19 recommendations, of which eight were accepted, 10 were ‘accepted in principle’, and one was rejected.

A summary of the Committee’s key recommendations and the Welsh Government’s response is below:

[Recommendation 1](#): The Welsh Government should commit to a timescale for **reviewing the current Refugee and Asylum Seeker Action Plan**, and include within it standards for service provision.

This recommendation was accepted, and the Welsh Government said the new plan will be published in January 2018, following a consultation this year. It did not commit to including standards for service provision.

[Recommendation 3](#): The Welsh Government should undertake an immediate assessment of the **impact the UK Immigration Act 2016 will have on Wales**, including the ‘Right to Rent checks’, and the impact on failed asylum seekers.

The Government accepted this recommendation, saying that the assessment has begun, but it did not commit to a timescale for completion.

[Recommendation 4](#): *The Welsh Government should work with partners to review the **Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016–17**. It should include a communications strategy and commit to running a Wales-wide publicity campaign, similar to Scotland.*

This recommendation was accepted; the Welsh Government noted that the Plan is currently being updated, and will be published this summer. It also noted that the Plan



will include specific actions relating to refugees and asylum seekers. The response does not commit specifically to a Wales-wide publicity campaign.

***Recommendation 5:** The Welsh Government should expand the role of the **community cohesion co-ordinators (CCCs)** beyond the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (SVPRP) to all refugees and asylum seekers.*

The Government accepted this, saying that the CCCs already support refugees and asylum seekers in a number of ways not limited to the SVPRP. It noted that the new Community Cohesion Plan will formalise this role, although “the role of CCCs is to support sustainable integration within the local authority rather than to play a permanent operational role in supporting refugees and asylum seekers”, suggesting that the role of CCCs in supporting refugees and asylum seekers is not permanent.

***Recommendation 6:** The Welsh Government should consider extending **concessionary transport schemes** to refugees and asylum seekers, including children, to enable them to have greater access to education, employment, and volunteering opportunities.*

This was rejected. The response states that “the Welsh Government would not be able to mandate concessionary travel for asylum seekers without legislative change”. It does not specify what the legislative change would be, or if it has been explored.

***Recommendation 7:** The Welsh Government should publish a detailed analysis of the **current provision of ESOL courses** and its assessment of future demand. It should then work with local authorities to join up skills and capacity within both Further Education colleges and Higher Education institutions as part of a new action plan to be published before the start of the 2017/18 academic year.*

This recommendation was accepted in principle. The Welsh Government’s response states “it is too late in the planning process for 2017/18 provision to be able to make the requested changes before the start of the academic year”. It committed to updating the ESOL policy for Wales by March 2018, and highlighted that the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership was currently mapping provision.

***Recommendation 9:** The Welsh Government should undertake urgent negotiations with the Home Office to reform the **asylum accommodation system** in advance of the contract renewal process in 2019.*



***Recommendation 10:** The Welsh Government should ensure that asylum seekers' landlords are **covered by a registration scheme**, either as an extension of or complement to Rent Smart Wales.*

These two recommendations were accepted. The response highlights that the Welsh Government wrote to the UK Government in December 2016 requesting various changes to the system, including that the quality of asylum accommodation is scrutinised by the Welsh Government or local authorities on a regular basis. It also requested that the new contract “should be [delivered] on a non-profit basis, via housing associations, third sector organisations or local authorities” and include an independent complaints process.

It does not specify how or when the registration scheme for asylum seekers' landlords will go live.

***Recommendation 11:** The Welsh Government should ensure through the new **Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Inclusion Service**, that there is sufficient provision of legal advice; regular reminders about the importance of health screenings as well as help for people to attend them; and mental health support, overseen by a 'Freedom From Torture' mental health professionals group.*

***Recommendation 18:** The Welsh Government should ensure **minimum standards of mental health support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with trauma**, in line with the British Psychological Society's recommendations.*

Both of these recommendations were accepted in principle. The response says that the Welsh Government's Asylum Rights Programme has been funded to provide advice and advocacy support to refugees and asylum seekers. The programme will provide caseworkers with specialist knowledge on asylum support, housing, health, social services, education, employment, bullying, hate crime, discrimination and destitution.

Tros Gynnal Plant will provide advocacy support to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) with the age assessment process and assisting them to access appropriate support. Asylum Justice will be funded to provide legal advice and representation, and City of Sanctuary and Displaced People in Action will host an advocacy forum.



***Recommendation 12:** The Welsh Government should include specific actions to help asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers avoid **destitution** in its revised Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, including creating a small grants fund for asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds, through the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF).*

This recommendation was accepted in principle, but the response states “asylum seekers and those with no recourse to public funds are not eligible to apply” for the DAF as it relies on verification through National insurance numbers through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It acknowledges that “some people who have been newly granted refugee status experience delays in receiving National Insurance numbers from DWP, which may increase the likelihood of their experiencing destitution”. It commits to working with the DAF delivery partner (Northgate) to explore flexibilities.

The response also says: “we will consider, in the light of experience in other parts of the UK, whether a small grants fund for asylum seekers and those with no recourse to public funds is achievable or desirable”, but does not provide a timescale for this.

***Recommendation 15:** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should do more to **help refugees and asylum seekers access education and employment** by promoting the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) as widely as possible, both to refugees and asylum seekers and service providers, and requiring Welsh universities to treat refugees as home students.*

This recommendation was accepted in principle; the Welsh Government has proposed, as part of a CQFW Communications Plan, additional key promotional messages targeted at refugees and asylum seekers and service providers.

It also notes that “refugees who meet the residency requirements and who are ordinarily resident in Wales are eligible for student support funding from Student Finance Wales”.

***Recommendation 16:** The Welsh Government should establish a **Guardianship service for Wales**, supported by peer networks, as part of reaffirming Wales’ commitment to welcome unaccompanied asylum seeking children.*



This was accepted in principle, with the Welsh Government stating that “work is underway to explore how such a service could be developed in Wales whilst also recognising that there are existing legal duties to provide advocacy support to these children”. There is no timescale for this work, or **indication** of what role peer networks could play.

***Recommendation 19:** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should take the Wales Refugee Coalition’s [Seven Steps to Sanctuary](#) to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary.*

The Government accepted this in principle, noting that “some aspects of the ‘Seven Steps to Sanctuary’, as detailed in the Coalition’s manifesto, may be difficult to achieve due to the reserved nature of asylum policy. For example, without control over immigration policy or asylum decisions it would not be possible to commit to ‘end destitution in Wales.’” However, the response states that “there is scope to make significant progress in relation to each of the seven steps and the key issues they highlight.”

More information about how the Committee undertook its inquiry and came up with its recommendations is available [in this report](#).



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