



[Information Redacted]
Home Secretary

18 September 2020

I am writing urgently about the Home Office's plans to house a group of young asylum seekers in the Penally army training camp in Pembrokeshire, to commence next Monday.

The Welsh Government is concerned about the suitability of this camp for this purpose, and about the way the Home Office is conducting its planning in respect of these matters in Wales, and I will write separately on this.

But if the proposal for Penally is to proceed, it is essential that proper arrangements are made to meet the needs of the individuals concerned and provide reassurance to the local community. This cannot be done by next Monday.

This camp in a small rural community presents multiple challenges which cannot be adequately mitigated in the amount of time we have had to plan. Public services in Wales have responded magnificently over the past week to convene emergency planning meetings, collate requests for information from the Home Office and undertake site investigations. But this planning has only just begun. I formally request a delay in your plans to occupy the site, for at least a two week period, to enable effective plans to be put in place.

Postponing for two weeks would enable the local authorities to properly understand the operational model which the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes intend to implement. This is essential so that they can manage community incidents, fulfil social services responsibilities and respond to enquiries from the general public. Hywel Dda Health Board will need to put in place measures to respond to the health needs of asylum populations, on which they have very limited prior expertise. Crucially, this additional time will enable Public Health Wales properly to ensure site compliance with Welsh Covid-19 Regulations.

These preparations are essential to counter the rise in far right activity in and around, Penally as a result of these proposals. There have been local protests against the proposed location in nearby Tenby and outside the camp itself (along with concerned local residents) and far right groups from across the UK are turning their attention to the proposal. A further significant protest is expected tomorrow.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400
YP.PrifWeinidog@llyw.cymru • ps.firstminister@gov.wales

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.

If the Home Office proceeds to commence occupation on Monday it may put asylum seekers, Clearsprings Ready Homes contractors and staff, and local residents at risk. A postponement would enable community engagement, to increase local understanding and reduce tensions, and enable occupation at a later date not known to far right groups. Yesterday, we had a constructive Policing Partnership Board for Wales, which included the Secretary of State for Wales. It was agreed that a partnership approach with a mutually agreed communications handling plan was essential.

The Penally camp presents challenges which will not be surmounted by this short delay. This is a rural location with none of the specialist services which asylum populations require, and addressing this will involve significant additional costs for the local authorities concerned. I would welcome your assurance that the Home Office will make reasonable funding available to meet these.

To conclude, the Welsh Government has been, and will continue to be, a constructive partner in the support and resettlement of asylum seekers in Wales. The Penally proposal presents significant risks which can be mitigated by a two week postponement and I seek your confirmation that this will be implemented.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Wales and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, [Information Redacted] MP.

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