

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref PO/JH/243/2023

Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Correspondence.RobertJenrick@homeoffice.gov.uk

13 July 2023

Dear Robert,

I am writing urgently about the Home Office's plans to house asylum seekers in the Stradey Park Hotel and Spa in Carmarthenshire.

I am sure you are aware of the community tensions in the community of Furnace, near Llanelli in Carmarthenshire. I am very concerned that the tensions and protests are escalating and there is a real risk to public safety, including the welfare of Clearsprings Ready Homes staff, Police officers, the general public and any asylum seekers moved into the site.

Public services in Wales have responded magnificently over the past few weeks to convene emergency planning meetings, collate requests for information from the Home Office and undertake site investigations. However, crucial clarity arrived very late on, accompanied by significant local job losses and event cancellations. The lack of effective community engagement has meant that the current situation is extremely confrontational, and we must now focus on de-escalating these tensions.

Right-wing groups are now protesting against the site, alongside local concerned resident groups who have no information about how this proposal will impact them and local services. We have seen connections made with the far-right across the UK, with others looking to Llanelli to be the blueprint for opposing Home Office plans elsewhere.

You were not in post during the Home Office's use of the Penally Army Training Camp in Pembrokeshire as asylum accommodation. However, the Home Office committed to learning lessons from that process. The Home Office apologised for the lack of engagement around the Penally proposal:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-54454519>

Although this is a very different proposal to Penally, we see similar hallmarks of community unrest which lead me to implore you to publicly commit to delaying occupation of the site. With the Penally site, the First Minister of Wales wrote to the Home Secretary asking for a two-week delay – a warning which was not heeded, leading to unacceptable scenes of violence and causing trauma for those occupying the site. We must avoid this happening again by committing to a delay of at least two weeks whilst we work in partnership to resolve

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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.

the current planning, legal and community cohesion issues. We know that there is currently spare accommodation capacity in the Home Office system to enable this.

We also urge you to work with us on an online community engagement meeting, with an opportunity for those concerned to submit questions in advance. This meeting will provide an opportunity for misinformation to be challenged, concerns to be heard, and a calmer explanation to be given than any officers at the site are able to deliver in the current context. A two-week minimum delay will provide time for this engagement to happen and for trust to start to be built with the community if the Home Office commits not to transfer any individuals into the site during that period.

A delay is essential to enable the situation to de-escalate. It is imperative that we have public Home Office commitments not to move people to the site, until the situation locally has stabilised, as well as a commitment to make a public statement about the pause and participate in online community engagement. It will also enable local services to plan their support for the asylum seekers so we can offer them the welcome they deserve.

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. We recognise the urgent need to provide accommodation and are committed to playing our part. I am keen to ensure the Home Office genuinely learns the lessons from this unacceptable situation in future and we have concrete proposals for how this can be achieved. Sadly, we have tried to communicate these previously but, to date, our suggestions have not been acted upon.

I am happy to discuss all of these matters with you when we meet on Monday but I would welcome a commitment to a delay in advance of our meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first few letters.

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