

# Newport Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy Forum Minutes

29th January 2020 - 12:30-2:30pm

Venue: Welsh Refugee Council, 6 Lower Dock St, Newport NP20 1EF

Minutes taken by: Sarah Allen

**Forum Topic:** Clearsprings and Migrant Help

**Guest Attendees:** Simon Wall from Clearsprings and Migrant Help (Did not Attend)

*Much of this forum was translated through Welsh Refugee Council Caseworkers. Points made by members marked with [T] were translated to the group.*

*Names and specifics have been removed in some areas to preserve the anonymity of members and guests. Where these remain, permission has been granted.*

*Feel free to contact me at [sarah@dpia.org.uk](mailto:sarah@dpia.org.uk) or on 07496 840 479 if you would like to make any comments or amendments to the minutes.*

## **Minutes:**

1. Sarah Allen welcomes and introduces the topic of the forum and the attendee. She explains the purpose of advocacy forums and invites individuals to ask questions of the guest. She apologises as Migrant Help's representative had agreed to come but did not attend.
2. Simon introduces his role as a support manager and explains that he often supports housing managers if there are any issues. He explains that he started as a local manager (housing officer) 18 years ago and has been in the company ever since. He says that he can help answer any issues relating to housing, housing managers and accommodation.
3. Sarah asks the group for questions. Simon asks if members' managers visit them regularly.
  - At least two members reply with a no
  - Simon asks when was the last time they spoke to their manager

- One member explains that there has been a leak in her kitchen ceiling. She tried to get this sorted out but has had difficulties.

- Simon asks how she attempted to tell them about the problem

- The member says that she got in contact with the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) caseworker and they reported it

-Simon says that this is a potential method of reporting, but that they can also get in touch with Migrant Help. This can be called 24/7. He notes that Migrant Help isn't here today, but he knows there has been problems getting through to Migrant Help in terms of call waiting times. If this happens, you can do as you are doing now and seek other options such as finding support at the WRC.

After this your housing manager will come to the house and see what your problem is. She will report these to the maintenance team or landlord who will be able to get these sorted.

4. [T] One member is unaware of what the Migrant Help number is to report housing issues.

-Simon informs the forum that this can be found on the notice board of the house.

5. [T] Members says that she called Migrant Help twice and said it was an emergency. They said that they were coming but it has taken three days so far. There was a leak under the sink and water was coming out into the kitchen. The problem has still not been fixed. Another problem has been that there is a rat. She has reported this for the last three days in a row.

- Simon says that if she gives him her address at the end then he will check on their system firstly whether the problem has been logged, and secondly that he will chase it up and ensure that whoever is responsible comes and fixes it. He would expect a pest control contractor to come by at least tomorrow. Don't worry about being at home as your housing manager will let the pest control in.

6. [T] One member says her house is damp and that she has been living there for 6 months. The doctor has written a letter explaining how her husband is suffering with asthma and the damp is impacting their health. She has been trying to contact her housing manager to give the letter. She has been going to WRC for support and they have been trying to contact the manager or complain but it still has not been sorted.

- Simon agrees to take their details and take a look at the case after the forum. He says if he takes a copy of the letter he can take that away. A doctor's letter is good as it is evidence for the home office that there are medical reasons that a move should take place.

Simon warns her that there aren't any empty houses in Newport. She may have to wait for a house to become vacant or accept a house in a different area.

7. [T] One member's house is on a slope. She is older so this provides difficulties. She has been waiting 6 months (as soon as they moved in) to be able to move.

-Simon says there may not be available houses in the area, but if she gives her details at the end they can look at what might be possible.

8. A WRC caseworker says how people come to them with housing issues, but ultimately if the housing manager isn't doing it or they can't get in contact then it won't be sorted. She highlights that the WRC in Newport have a good relation with Clearsprings which helps with assisting clients with reporting issues.

9. One member says she has to leave her house next month as she has got refugee status. The issue with this is she and her husband are both undergoing medical treatment. She is anxious about having accommodation for that month.

- Simon says that unfortunately you are not allowed to stay in the house beyond the eviction date. Essentially the Home Office pay Clearsprings your rent. After that date they stop paying for you. The Home Office will rebook that house for another individual.

Newport City Council will probably provide you with temporary accommodation until they find a suitable house. There will be disruption, but unfortunately there's nothing we can do about that.

- The member asks whether an alternate arrangement can be made in meantime.

- Simon say he is regularly asked this question, but he can't do anything. It is a problem everywhere as there aren't enough houses available. It would be possible to ask the home office, but it is very unlikely they would accept so it is best to prepare for leaving on that date.

10. The same member asks if she can stay if the housing manager doesn't turn up on the eviction date.

- Simon says that he knows the manager and she is very efficient. He would be surprised if she is not there.

- The member says that she has liked the house that she has been provided with.

10. [T] One member's husband is suffering with health problems and they need a bus pass for him and a companion. They have a doctor's letter.

- Simon explains that this is not something that as accommodation providers they can do.

- WRC caseworker says the GP letter doesn't mention the bus, but rehousing. Once the appropriate letter is written they can apply to the council.

11. Sarah says how Migrant Help were supposed to attend but has not. If anyone has any questions that they would like her to take to Migrant Help, to still ask and she will pass them on.

12. WRC caseworker says it takes a long time to call Migrant Help when they need to call on behalf of a client.

-Simon says he cannot speak for Migrant Help but that he knows they have improved the time taken to originally pick up the phone. On the side of Clearsprings they have been getting reports of housing issues coming through.

-WRC caseworker says he tried last week. They were put through by the first responder then waited for 45 minutes before Migrant Help hung up. He said it's also frustrating

that, on top of the waiting times, they have to go through contact permissions again each time the call is put through to another Migrant Help operator.

- WRC caseworker felt that using the online chat was taking too long to be able to get across information.

- It is noted how these issues are even harder in places where organisations like the WRC are not there to support, and that the Migrant Help service should be set up so people can access it independently.

13. An individual is mentioned who was not given a NI number until after the date their support ended. Simon noted that the Home Office has a duty to reinstate the support of someone who's Biometrics or National Insurance Number is not given before the end of that support through no fault of their own. Migrant Help would have to assist in talking to the Home Office to reinstate that.

14. Sarah asks about whether over time the service in terms of housing provision has improved. One member says that she is really happy in NASS accommodation and that she likes Newport and living there. They said that their stay in initial accommodation was very brief whereas others had been waiting for months, and that Migrant Help were very supportive.

15. Another individual provides a good report. He says his children are studying at [school name] so he requested that they got housing in Newport that would be nearby because one was taking GCSEs. He said he is really grateful to the Home Office, Clearsprings and Migrant Help as they gave him nice housing and where he needed it.

16. One member thanks Simon for coming and listening, and says that she finds the help that WRC provides really useful.

17. One member notes how as an asylum seeker everything is controlled, so they don't have to worry. Once they get a positive decision all of those responsibilities and expenses are given in a small timeframe and its quite an adjustment.

- Simon and the caseworker notes some organisations that can help with this time period.

18. Sarah brings forum to a close. The group is encouraged to fill in membership forms and to talk to friends and encourage them to join. Sarah asks Simon if he has any concluding comments

- Simon encourages the group to make sure they tell someone if there is an issue, and from there things can be fixed.