

Yma i helpu CROP (Camp Residents of Penally)

Paper prepared for the APPG on Immigration Detention, 26 November 2020

We are a union established among the residents placed in the former MoD site at Penally.

We believe that the barracks are like a detention centre and are not safe or suitable places for people to live. The use of the barracks are causing very high levels of distress among the people placed there, many of whom have had traumatic past experiences in camps or as political prisoners. The focus of this paper is on the health and welfare of residents.

We ask the UK government and Welsh Assembly to reconsider the inappropriate use of the camps, taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19

The people placed in the barracks are frightened about the risk from COVID-19. People are brought to the barracks from all over the UK without isolating first. We are very concerned about the spread of COVID-19.

Very little was done to manage the COVID-19 risk. we regularly found hand sanitiser dispensers that were either empty or not working. Outside the canteen, there was one small dispenser which needs to be used 3 times per day for Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner meals for more than 160 residents. Unfortunately, most of the time it is empty. Wearing a mask was only enforced while waiting on the queue for your turn while inside the dining area, no one was wearing it even the security guard. There was no enforcement to wear a mask in any other part of the camp, including in the communal TV room. Masks were only available by requesting it from the camp office. Social distancing is very difficult. The men would often move between sleeping quarters to visit friends. Some men would interact with

protesters at the metal gates, neither groups were wearing masks. Many of the men were required to share sleeping quarters with five other people. CROP was very concerned about the spread of COVID-19 within the shared shower blocks. The facilities for washing our plates and cutlery were very poor. We were provided with cloths to wash plates and cutlery which were shared between large numbers of people and washing up liquid was not provided. There was often a lack of soap and toilet paper. These essential items were dispensed by the camp office (Room 206) so it was necessary to go to the office to ask for these items rather than them being readily available. This would often create a long queue of people outside the camp office. There were signs on the floor reminding people to social distance, but these rubbed off after a day and were not replaced. The only Covid-19 safety measure CROP witnessed was taking the temperature of people as they leave the camp. We complained to Migrant Help about the lack of Covid-19 safety measures. For the social distance complaint, we made one to Migrant Help and we received a letter from Ready Homes but no further action was taken to improve the situation. The site has communal shower blocks with 7 or more showers in each block. Men have to shower together and there was no privacy or effective social distancing. The showers in the block some had to use according to the instructions from the camp managers were not in cubicles at all.

On Friday 20 November a man had COVID symptoms and residents were told that activities, external trips and volunteers for the next week would be cancelled as a result. This seems to still be happening despite the man having a negative COVID result. Residents know the death rates for COVID and the inability to socially distance or self isolate causes distress to residents. The situation becomes worse as more new arrivals get transferred to the barracks. Anxiety affects both mental and physical health, leaving residents feeling exhausted and increasingly hopeless.

Shower facilities

It is unsuitable for many men from different cultures and backgrounds to be required to shower together in this way. It made us feel deeply uncomfortable and privacy can never be guaranteed. The showers blocks are not cleaned very often. We believe they are cleaned once a day in the morning. We regularly found discarded razors or resident's underwear left in the showers.

Sleeping Quarters

The sleeping huts are within stand-alone buildings. The buildings numbered 201 to 205 are divided into four rooms with two people in each room. As new people arrived however, a different type of sleeping quarters were used. These stand-alone buildings were divided in to two rooms and each room housed six people (206 to 222 other than 206 which is used as a staff office, 207 used later as a classroom).

Later still, when more men arrived, the third type of sleeping huts started to be used. These are the "Nissen hut" style of barracks containing one room with 6 people in them (Huts 23 & 24). The rooms contain bunk beds with sheets of plywood cable-tied to the sides of their bunkbed to create an illusion of privacy but didn't help at all. There is no WIFI in the rooms and there were no lockers for our belongings just a single chest of drawers. Long thin rusty metal lockers were provided but the padlocks we were given would not fit them so they remained unlocked and unused. The rooms were only lockable from the inside and when I requested a key to be able to lock the room when it was unoccupied the office staff refused my request. The rooms were only cleaned once a week. The facilities in the camp are all within separate stand-alone buildings. For example, the toilets and showers are in other blocks separate from the living quarters; the washing machines are in another; and the TV room and dining room are within their own stand-alone buildings. This means that if residents want to use the toilet or shower, they need to leave their sleeping quarters, go outside and walk across the site to the toilet and shower blocks. Because all the facilities are in separate buildings, residents spend

a lot of time outside in the elements. Not only is this unpleasant because of the bad weather, it also means that the protesters outside the camp gates can see you moving around the camp and can film you. The camp itself is in a bad state of repair.

We believe the lack of privacy is inhumane and it contributes to the feeling of residents that they are being treated without dignity. Residents feel increasingly desperate and there can be misunderstandings and arguments which escalate, because there is no private space for people to feel safe.

Heating

Whilst living at the camp, the heaters in the sleeping quarters and communal areas would often not work. We reported broken heaters, both the one in our rooms to the camp staff many times. The broken heater in some rooms were only replaced on the day that Migrant Help staff visited for a second time after being broken for more than a week. Other heaters remained unrepaired. Because of the broken heater, our sleeping quarters were very cold. Many of the men in the camp would tell me that their rooms were very cold because their heaters were not working. In the communal areas it was also very cold. The radiators in one of the communal rooms never worked because the boiler for them was broken.

The doors in the communal areas were often kept open because of the amount of people in the room. CROP thinks the doors were kept open to try to avoid Covid-19 transmission. Because the communal areas were very cold, many tried to avoid using them. This increases feelings of boredom and desperation.

The camp had three communal washing machines which had to be shared between all of the men living there. These washing machines would often break. One washing machine gave some of the guys an electric shock. In many occasions, none of them were working. Many of the men were forced to wash their clothes

by hand in the washbasins in the toilet blocks or in rubbish bins. There are three communal electric driers on the site but these are broken most of the time and they don't dry clothes very well. We were told to pay for the machines ourselves initially but after a member of our Union raised a complaint with Migrant Help, he was allowed to request coins for the washing and drying machines once a week from the staff office (Room 206). The coins are 2 Pounds and 40 pence for washing machines and driers respectively. Consequently, when the dryer cycle finishes after 10-15 minutes the clothes are still damp. This is a problem because Penally is a very cold, wet and windy place most of the day and creates an increased risk of people getting chilled and unwell and makes people less able to go outside to exercise, which is important for health.

Medical Centre

It is not effective for a barracks like Penally which contains more than 150 residents from different lands around the globe to have a Nurse that is available at the site 2-3 days per week. Ready Homes declared that a doctor is available at the site 24/7 according to their contract with the HO and said the British Red Cross knew about it but nothing is implemented properly and residents have no way to contact a doctor. It is not appropriate for residents to have to speak to non-clinical staff from Ready Homes about private medical information, in order to access a doctor. Non-clinical staff from Ready Homes are also not qualified to treat or assess health issues. We have experienced residents being blocked from accessing medical treatment.

One of the residents asked for a doctor after a fight broke out at the barracks at night because he got hit with a pool ball in his head beside his ear, but the admin told him to wash and put some plasters on his head to stop the bleeding. In other cases residents were inspected by the Manager, Mr. Jem, rather than a clinician when they were unwell. Concerns about this were raised with Migrant Help and they received complains but we have received zero feedback.

In another incident, a man in a shared dormitory had COVID-19 symptoms; he was really scared and his roommates as well. His roommates asked the admin office to take him to a self-isolated room but at the beginning they refused. The roommates did not want to return to the room and after a while a member of staff called the NHS in front of the residents; the NHS advised that he should self-isolate for 8 days. He was taken at night to the only self-isolation room but in the morning, he was allowed to go back to his room. We are concerned there is no proper self-isolation room or procedure. One of the Union organisers was one of the man's roommates who went directly to the manager and asked him for an explanation but no answer was provided. The fear of residents of COVID-19 therefore remains high.

Safety

We are concerned that Camp residents continue to feel unsafe. There are aggressive racist protests at the site, which is a target for hate crimes and threats. This makes people feel unsafe outside of the site. Due to lack of privacy, lockable rooms and storage and isolation people feel unsafe on the site too. There is no confidence that complaints from residents are heard and they are often not answered or treated respectfully. The site security and police presence make the residents feel even less safe at times. The way people are moved to the site at night (which feels like a kidnapping or abduction) harms people's health and the way people have been left in the Camps for the long-term (with no time limit) makes residents feel very desperate.

25 November 2020