

# **SUBMISSION TO APPG ON IMMIGRATION DETENTION**

## **MY BACKGROUND**

I am a Quaker living in Pembrokeshire. A number of us were very concerned about the placing of up to 234 male asylum seekers in Penally Army Training Camp at the end of September 2020. With winter not far off it was clearly unsuitable accommodation, even without the additional challenge of the Covid pandemic. I know a lot more now about just how bad the facilities were: blocked, dirty and overflowing toilets and drains, likewise very communal washing facilities with no privacy and not properly cleaned, showers with no privacy, often cold or at best luke warm, no functioning washing machines, really bad food with very long queues, unpleasant treatment by some of the staff, no access to interpreting for example re confidential medical needs, the list goes on and is well documented elsewhere, with video clips available (contact me if you have not accessed these).

I have got to know a number of the men placed in Penally and 2 from Napier Barracks. I have also worked with a nationwide consortium of doctors and legal people who wanted to do assessments for vulnerability in the camp and needed local support, and I have attended many other on line events organised by a range of groups, with speakers who have “lived experience” of this sort of accommodation.

I have encouraged the men I know to make a submission to this inquiry, or can put you in touch with them if they feel unable to make written representation. In the meanwhile those of us supporting these men are morally tasked with amplifying their voices, or speaking on their behalf.

## **GENERAL POINTS**

### **USING LARGE SCALE HOLDING FACILITIES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

These are not suitable for accommodating vulnerable people, many of whom have been severely traumatised in their country of origin or en route. They are away from normality or ordinary life in the community, isolated, and unable to access refugee and asylum seeker support available in centres of population, or GP surgeries, let alone mental health support. Simply sharing a room for such a person can be extremely disturbing, let alone living in quasi detention.

### **USING SUCH FACILITIES IN TERMS OF INFECTION CONTROL**

Asylum seekers may have brought all manner of infections from their country of origin or acquired en route. Many of the men were previously housed in hotels and hostels, which seem to be the source of such conditions as scabies which is currently rife in Napier and not being adequately controlled. Likewise there are bed bugs. Infections such as TB and other serious infectious conditions may be in this population.

Covid was everywhere at the time both camps were first used. The men were housed with up to 16 to a shared air space overnight in Penally, and it was up to 28 in Napier. Masks had to be asked for in Penally, hand sanitiser frequently ran out for days on end. Hot clothes washing by machine was largely not available (60 degree wash a recommended infection control for scabies) nor is this happening in Napier where there is currently a significant outbreak which is not being properly dealt with and the men being given, and actually sharing very old fashioned treatment creams.

Showers are/were often cold or luke warm in both facilities. There was no privacy for showering in Penally. I believe curtains have now been provided in Napier but they were not there when men were first placed there.

There is no basic physical health screening before the men arrive in the camp, let alone screening for psychological vulnerability. Some physical screening was provided by the local health board several months into Penally being opened but no psychological screening. I am not aware of this happening at all at Napier and certainly not prior to placement there. There may now be some attempt at this, using information supplied by the Home Office, but this is a very inadequate approach and reports written in this way could in the future impact negatively on any asylum claim. It is simply not scientific or thorough. Nor should such assessments, especially those directly involving the individual concerned, be conducted by anyone who is not highly trained and experienced with working with potential victims of torture and other trauma.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF USING BARRACKS/ARMY CAMPS AND SIMILAR

To place men who may well have been imprisoned, tortured or survived in a war zone, in an army camp surrounded by barbed wire, with targets of cut out men (Penally), with firing ranges within hearing, and entirely open, visible and vulnerable to the demonstrations from the Far Right observing their every move and shouting at them, photographing them, is clearly cruel and likely to be retriggering of past trauma. The presence of the Far Right also increases the de facto imprisonment even more than the curfews, and in the case of Napier, multiple gates. It is pointless to claim that the men are free to come and go under these conditions.

The screening prior to arrival **which was claimed by the Home Office**, clearly did not happen. The vulnerability assessments done at Penally by the medico legal team mentioned above, found each person assessed had significant vulnerability (eg evidence of torture, PTSD, mental health problems etc) which could then be used to get them moved (around 20 men were moved this way I believe over a relatively short period. They should never have been there in the first place). Similar assessments are being planned for Napier. In both facilities it was/is extremely challenging to find a suitable private space to conduct such assessments, and internet provision needed for online assessments and access to interpretation is extremely poor; appropriate equipment is being supplied by the men, including having to use mobile phones etc. Unbelievably it is/was not possible for doctors willing to do these assessments to enter either of the camps and have access to an appropriate private room and relevant equipment. In Penally referrals and all these necessary provisions were provided by the men from the residents unions, CROP (Camp Residents of Penally) who incidentally were also doing their best to look out for and support those camp residents who were particularly vulnerable. It was not Clearspring or their sub contracted staff who provided any such service.

It is clear to all those who have got to know the men that mental health declines the longer they are in these de facto prisons. I refer to research presented at the Quarterly Meeting of Detention Forum, by Ryan Essex and Erika Kalocsanyiova. Much of this is included in an article awaiting publication: *Essex, R., Kalocsanyiova, E., Young, P., & McCrone, P. (Manuscript submitted for publication). Psychosocial distress in Australian onshore and offshore detention centres from 2014-2018*, which shows that detention of anyone of more than 3 months, in any setting, has very clear, significant and measurable negative mental health outcomes. (I can supply their contact details for you to access them for example as expert witnesses.) In addition, as asylum seekers, the men have committed no crime, have not been tried in a court of law, or been sentenced and they have no idea how long they are to be detained. This is psychologically extremely distressing.

All agency is removed by putting them into an institutional setting where they have no control over when or what they eat, who they share a room with, indeed any of the freedoms most of us take for granted. All this would impact on the mental health even of a normal population sample. In addition many of the men arrive with existing and significant mental health issues. The number of suicide attempts in Napier is witness to this situation, without counting depression, insomnia, nightmares, self harm which were almost universal in Penally and no doubt likewise in Napier. Those who had

no mental health problems before they came soon show signs of significant and noticeable deterioration. I have this information from the men themselves and from someone who has worked closely and in person with a large number of the men. Expressions such as: “he is fading away, has lost all hope, really worried about x or y” and so on.

#### MEDICAL AND OTHER SUPPORT

There is/was **no** mental health support or counselling available in either of the camps, other than that provided by volunteer agencies, and that is necessarily very limited.

They do not have access to basic medical provision. Even if they are registered with a doctor which it is claimed the men in Napier are, though the men at Penally were not on the whole unless they managed in a very few cases to do that themselves at the nearby totally overloaded Tenby Clinic (now as a failing practice taken under direct control of the local health board). At Napier they have to go through the gatekeeper of the single nurse on site, not specifically trained for the sort of physical and mental problems the men are likely to have, but who will make a decision about whether they need to see a doctor. There is one nurse to up to 400 men. The so called doctor’s registration at Napier is not done by the men, but by staff at the camp, using the information provided in the initial interview by the Home Office on their arrival in Britain. At Penally the situation was even worse, as there was hardly ever a nurse available so it was untrained Clearspring staff who were playing the role of untrained medical receptionist and making those decisions. Largely the answer was “you don’t have a problem” and leaving some painkillers on the table. No interpretation was provided so the men mainly didn’t understand the system, nor could they communicate about their problems. Some of the men who spoke better English offered to help with the initial questions re health but Clearspring staff took this over with the basic assumption that “everyone was fit and healthy” (quote from one of the asylum seekers themselves.)

The Covid outbreak at Napier is well documented, around 200 men were infected, **and not offered any medical support at all during their illness.** For a few days fences were put round the block where the first infections were, to isolate them. Then the fences were removed and the men were told that they were in effect one bubble. Men coughing all night in shared dormitory style accommodation, sharing toilets and showers and washing facilities (apologies I cannot locate exact ratios of men to toilets and showers, but it is way too large). Limited partitioning now exists but open at the top so they are still breathing the same air. Men were choosing to sleep outside in the depths of winter rather than risk being infected. In both camps meals were communal with very long queues, outside in all weathers in the case of Penally and for up to an hour and half.

None of the men to my knowledge have been vaccinated against Covid, despite the fact that they now fall within the age range being offered vaccines, and despite the additional risk they have, given the ethnicity of many of the men, not to mention other health factors and their living conditions where they are unable to self isolate. Supposed GP registration at Napier is not leading to vaccination.

One is led to believe that what happened in Napier was a deliberate decision to allow the infection to spread and not to support those who were ill. Since the Home Office have repeatedly contradicted themselves and indeed lied it is hard to get at the truth. People make an assumption that politicians do not lie. I have read one of Chris Philps replies to an MP’s enquiry and it simply bears no resemblance to what is happening on the ground, which I know directly from people who are living in the camps.

Asylum seekers who are repeatedly moved from one end of the country to another, do not have a chance to register with a doctor, or with every move, repeatedly re register, if they even know how to do this. No one explains any of this, either the need to register, or the way to do so. Any general

advice supplied in the camp is often presented in English (this was the case for the Penally Orientation document which was entirely in English, though Covid advice was given in a few other languages as well). No one seems to understand that up to about 90 % of this population speak little, very limited, or no English at all. This affects absolutely everything.

Interpreting was not provided at Penally, and I believe it is rarely provided at Napier. Those few men who have some command of the language are being asked to interpret for medical and confidential matters, including some very traumatic issues. One man at Napier who happened to speak good English, though not trained or supported as an interpreter, was even being approached by Clearspring staff after he left Napier to interpret for men housed in hotels. This gave him significant stress and disturbance, given the nature of the interpreting needed and his own history.

#### ASYLUM CLAIMS AND LEGAL ACCESS

The situation at Penally was chaotic. Many men did not have legal representation, or did not know who their solicitor was. Most either at Penally or Napier do not know the difference between the different sorts of lawyers they need. The NGOs working to support the men in Napier do their best to signpost residents, but because of the reduction in legal aid it is increasingly hard to find good or even any legal representation.

Since the so called refurbishment in Napier (a very limited affair, men are still sleeping in rooms shared by up to 24 people) “substantive interviews” are now happening. These often happen at very short notice, such as one hour, so the men cannot possibly adequately prepare for them. I believe the Home Office recommendation is 5 days notice, but this short notice is not reliably happening.

It might seem a good thing to expedite these interviews, and the men themselves want to be out of the limbo they find themselves in, however, given that they are housed in a place that is likely to be retraumatising and stressful, given little or no notice, not being able to access adequate preparation and support, the outcome of the interviews is likely to be unfair.

It is well documented that the experience of trauma affects memory and the ability to recall events. It may take significant time in a **safe place** for memories to become accessible to the individual. Napier and Penally are/ were not safe places, as outlined above. In addition we are now faced with the possibility of “one stop shop” asylum claims, meaning that memories which emerge later cannot be brought into subsequent appeals if they do not get presented at these rushed, poorly represented interviews where they are not being supported emotionally, or if they do have legal representation the lawyers will not have had sufficient time to prepare the case and communicate with their clients.

#### COMMUNICATION

Wifi and internet provision was very limited at Penally as was the mobile signal, and I believe internet provision is very poor at Napier. Many of the men arrive without any sort of phone or other internet device, how can they possibly properly prepare their case and be supported to do so?

#### THE RULE OF LAW

The Home Office behaves as a law unto themselves. Guidance by Public Health has been clearly flouted throughout the history of both Penally and Napier being used as asylum accommodation. Planning, building regulations, environmental health, employment law are all being flouted or treated in a completely cavalier manner. I believe that asbestos was found in the building at Penally after the fire. Accommodation and conditions for the employees of Clearspring and those who are subcontracted is clearly in contravention of accepted or legal norms. I have even heard the word slave labour used of how some of the staff used in Napier are being treated, at least as a way of expressing the unacceptability of their living and employment conditions. The Inspector’s report by HMI of Borders and Immigration together with HMI Inspector of Prisons has clearly been

completely ignored, as has the recent ruling in the Judicial Review case brought by 6 residents of Napier. The very rule of law has been ignored.

#### HASSOCKFIELD

This ill considered proposal to house women immigration detainees in this former and notorious setting, would mean that a development of much needed affordable housing which was agreed for the site cannot go ahead and yet the Home Office seem to be able to march right in. Women are even more inappropriately detained in this way, and yet, against the flow of all the improvements achieved in this area, the Home Office wishes to go ahead with this project. Most of my general comments about the effect of detention, will apply to this situation