

Cabinet – 7 July 2021

Assistance with the Acceleration of the UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation scheme

Portfolio: Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader, Regeneration

Related portfolios: Councillor Craddock – Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Martin – Adult Social Care
Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader, Resilient Communities
Councillor Wilson – Children’s

Service: Money Home Job (MHJ)

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Aim

To assist the national Acceleration of the UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation scheme (“the Scheme”) to safely relocate Afghan nationals who have supported the armed forces.

2. Summary

2.1 Assistance is being sought from local authorities by central government to support the Scheme as a matter of urgency. The Scheme has been in place since 2013 and its aim is to safely relocate Afghan nationals (and their families) who have assisted our armed forces to the United Kingdom. This has now become an urgent situation due to the withdrawal of our armed forces from Afghanistan.

2.2 Involvement in the Scheme is on a voluntary basis. A number of local authorities have recently pledged support to the Scheme, including local authorities in the Black Country. The requirement of the scheme is for the local authority to source properties, make them ready, and support the Afghan families on arrival. Government offer a financial package of support for the first 12 months following arrival of the families, to include locating and furnishing properties, rental payments, and integration support. Following this time, any further financial requirements will need to be met from mainstream funding.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet pledges to assist with the relocation of 80 Afghan individuals (which includes immediate family) through the Acceleration of the UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation scheme
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates to the Executive Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Regeneration, authority to agree additional tranches of individuals to be relocated in Walsall.

4. Report detail - know

Context

- 4.1 The Scheme has been in place since 2013. It enables all interpreters who served for a year or more continuously on the frontline in Helmand from 1 May 2006, and were made redundant, the option to apply for relocation to the UK (those who were dismissed or resigned are not eligible). The Scheme is run in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces in dangerous and challenging situations. Whilst the Scheme will continue to remain open, in line with the plans for the withdrawal of UK troops from Afghanistan later in 2021, there is a pressing need to accelerate the pace of relocations to the UK for families currently in Afghanistan who are eligible to participate. The Home Office are seeking to relocate 1500 individuals by the end of June 2021 with a total of approximately 5000 before the final withdrawal of the troops later this year. The Home Office are therefore seeking to relocate all those eligible as soon as possible, between June and September 2021. The latest advice is that there will be flights at least weekly from Afghanistan from July 2021, with an urgent need for accommodation for these families.
- 4.2 There are four areas in the UK that have been participating in the Scheme including Coventry in the West Midlands who are assisting 150 individuals through the Scheme. Recently, a commitment in principle had been given by Wolverhampton, and Dudley have pledged to take 20 families. The West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) are seeking pledges from LAs as a matter of urgency, and on this basis Walsall council gave a commitment to support families in principle subject to further clarity and scheme details.
- 4.3 Walsall is already supporting a number of resettlement schemes:
 - since 2017, aided 20 individuals through the Syrian resettlement schemes (SVPRS) and committed to helping a further 20 individuals through this route (now called UKRS) in 2021/22,
 - in 2021, introduced a Cabinet approved process for Community Sponsorship, where the community provide a property and support to help resettle refugees,

- has been a voluntary asylum seeker dispersal area for many years, which currently houses approximately 500 individuals.

4.4 The Scheme is different to the resettlement schemes above, including shorter mobilisation times, shorter funding periods, and therefore potentially more reliance on mainstream funded services. The Scheme includes:

- Support funding for the first 12 months on arrival. This financial support was set at only four months until recently. The detailed tariffs for the 12 month offer have therefore not yet been published, and as such the four month tariffs detailed in Figure 1 in 4.7 are still used as an indicative guide. The tariffs are set at different rates for persons who are single, or within couples or families. This report has used the rates for persons who are within families. Primarily this provides a lump sum for integration, a lump sum for setup costs (e.g. void costs, purchase furnishings etc), and rent which has to be claimed as necessary. The previous four month tariff scheme did not provide any education or health tariffs, it is unclear whether this will change with the new 12 month tariff offer.
- The need to house families rather than individuals. Previously, the scheme, as has been run for some time in Coventry for example, has required that the interpreter is housed, and at a later date his/her family may join them. However, due to the urgency of the situation, families will be travelling together. Based on the flow of arrivals the average family size is 5 individuals, ranging from 1 to 8 individuals.
- A requirement that the local authority sources properties in advance, notifies the Homes Office of the properties, and holds them whilst a match is sought – as mentioned above, void loss (and set up costs) is covered up to £1,250 per person (families) threshold. The requirement will generally be 2 to 4 bed properties to meet the family sizes above, albeit it should be noted that it is very difficult to access affordable 4 bed homes in Walsall, and so it is likely we will only be able to assist families with two and three bed homes. There will be active engagement with both local private rented sector landlords, and housing associations, to source properties, noting that due to the urgency and tight timescales, we will need to work with whichever responsible landlords have properties available. The tariffs in 4.7 also show that a rent contribution of £15 per person per day is provided for up to 4 months to cover any period whilst benefits are put in place, after which it is assumed that the families will be in receipt of the housing element of universal credit to cover their housing costs. As noted, there will now be a 12 month tariff offer, but there are no further details on what this will include.
- Most of the interpreters are likely to be able to speak English, however this may not be the case for their families and we would potentially need to provide English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) support.
- Families are likely to be matched to properties by the Home Office with very short notice. This means the local authority will need to be prepared in advance, and have support in place, within a very tight timeframe.
- The information provided by the Home Office about these families (e.g. health needs etc) is likely to be more basic than with the other resettlement schemes. This means most of the additional needs can only be scoped upon arrival of the individuals.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

- 4.5 The Scheme will contribute to the Council’s priorities as follows:
- Economic growth for all people, communities and businesses – the support provider will work with incoming service users in particular working to increase employment prospects and to provide access to education opportunities.
 - People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities – the support provider will be required to ensure prevention of homelessness, support in maintaining a tenancy, promoting independence and can improve mental and physical health and wellbeing.
 - Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion – the support provider will be responsible for ensuring the families are integrated into communities and therefore will enhance community cohesion.

Risk Management

- 4.6 There is a financial burden risk to the Council and partners, as the package of financial assistance from the government is limited to 12 months only, after which any further additional costs will need to be met through existing funded services. However it should be noted that this risk has recently been reduced by central government increasing the tariffs from a four month to 12 month period. There is a potential that there will be only a basic level of information regarding the families health and education needs, prior to arrival in the UK.

Financial Implications

- 4.7 The Council will claim a number of tariffs, which will be used to help support the resettlement of the household in line with the Home Office Funding Grant. These tariffs were in place for four months only as shown in Figure 1, and didn’t include any health or education tariffs. However, it has recently been confirmed that the tariff offer will be increased to cover a 12 month period following arrival, albeit no further details on the breakdown are available at the time of writing this report, and it is unclear whether this will now include any assistance for health and education services. After the 12 month tariff period, any further additional costs will need to be met through mainstream funded services. The previous four month tariff funding rates are as follows:

Figure 1: Tariffs	Accommodation		
Set-up and void costs (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples	Per person rate for singles
	£1250	£1425	£2850
Rent (up to 4 months)	£15 per person, per day		
1 night hotel accommodation (if	£50 per person		

needed, dependant on time of arrival)				
Baby pack comprising cot, high chair etc	£225 per any child under two years of age			
Integration				
To provide integration support (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples	Per person rate for singles	
	£4500	£6000	£7500	
Cash support				
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (under 18)
	£58.90	£74.35	£117.10	37.75
Transport				
Transfer from airport to accommodation	£40 per person			

Legal Implications

- 4.8 Participation in the Scheme is on a voluntary basis, and is not a statutory requirement.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.9 Support for this Scheme will require support from external suppliers. Any contracting activity will be undertaken in compliance with Public Contract Regulations 2015 (the Regulations) and the Council's Contract Rules. Where appropriate Local Sourcing will be used to support this Scheme.

Property Implications

- 4.10 There will be no direct implications for council owned property. However the Scheme will require the sourcing of suitable properties from the social or private rented sector, based on property availability and standard. On arrival, the families will enter into a tenancy directly with the landlord, in that the council would not be involved in any long term leasing arrangement. However there may be a requirement for the council, or contracted property sourcing agent, to sign short term suitable legal agreements with housing providers, to secure empty properties in advance, to be held pending families being matched to properties by the home office and arriving in Walsall. At that point the landlord would offer the tenancy direct to the family.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 4.11 The health and wellbeing prospects for these families and their children will potentially be much improved by relocation to Walsall. National research has demonstrated many refugees have been faced with health inequalities and can often be subjected to mental health issues. Therefore the support for these households will need to ensure pathways are in place into health services and appropriate outcomes are achieved.

Staffing Implications

4.12 MHJ officers will project manage the Walsall response to the Scheme.

Reducing Inequalities

4.13 An Equality impact Assessment (EQIA) is attached at Appendix A and shows the need to ensure the support element of the service meets the needs of the community and is culturally appropriate. The support element will encompass the support provider forging close links with local community groups who will help support the family and provide cultural intelligence and will also work with relevant faith groups to support integration. The EQIA will ensure regular support plan monitoring by the council to ensure all service user requirements relevant protected characteristics are met suitably.

Consultation

4.14 The Council has consulted with, and been consulted by WMSMP. The Council has also consulted with the Refugee and Migrant Centre, who deliver the existing Syrian Refugee Support contract, as a potential support provider for this project.

5. Decide

5.1 The following options below need consideration:

- There is a 'do nothing' option. The scheme is voluntary, and the Council can decide not to take part. This would reduce any financial risk, however this course of action would mean the Council were not assisting potentially vulnerable families.
- The Council could support the Scheme. Possible options could include to support:
 - 20 individuals (approximately 4 to 5 families), the same as the previous commitment made for the Syrian refugee scheme
 - 80 individuals, potentially equating to between 15 to 20 families, to match the similar pledge from Dudley
 - Any other number

5.2 It is recommended that 80 individuals are supported. The greater the number of families helped, the bigger contribution that the Council would make to this national scheme, but could also mean potentially greater pressure on mainstream services in the future.

6. Respond

6.1 Subject to approval, officers would proceed to notify the Home Office of our pledge, carry out relevant procurement processes, engage with the support provider, and ensure properties are sourced

7. Review

- 7.1 The project will be monitored by a dedicated MHJ project lead, and reported back on a weekly basis through the connected working platform. The support will be reviewed weekly throughout the contract period ensuring robust outcomes are achieved and the family units are able to integrate.

Background papers

None

Author

Neil Hollyhead
Senior Housing Strategy Officer
☎ 07943 500394
✉ neil.hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk

Sally Rowe
Executive Director Children's Services

29 June 2021

Councillor Andrew
Portfolio holder Regeneration

29 June 2021