

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Policies, Procedures and Services

Proposal name	Acceleration of the UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation scheme		
Directorate	Childrens Services		
Service	Money Home Job (MHJ)		
Responsible Officer	Rashida Hussain		
Proposal planning start	09/06/2021	Proposal start date (due or actual date)	01/07/2021 <i>Update</i> 31/08/21

1	What is the purpose of the proposal?	Yes / No	New / revision
	Show which category the proposal is and whether it is new or a revision.		
	Policy	Yes	New
	Procedure		
	Guidance		
	Is this a service to customers/staff/public?	Yes	
	If yes, is it contracted or commissioned?	Yes	
	Other - give details		
2	What is the business case for this proposal? Please provide the main purpose of the service, intended outcomes and reasons for change?		
	<p>The UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation 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 by September 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 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.</p> <p>There are four areas in the UK that have participated in the Scheme including Coventry in the West Midlands. Recently, a commitment in principle had been given by Wolverhampton, and Dudley have pledged to take 20 families. The 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. Subsequently, due to the urgent nature of the situation, all of the WMCA Metropolitan councils have confirmed their pledges and arrivals have started with Walsall close to taking all of their initial 80:</p>		

Birmingham – 80 individuals
Coventry – previously committed to 150 individuals
Dudley – 20 families
Sandwell – 20 to 25 families
Solihull – 0 families
Walsall – 80 individuals
Wolverhampton – 80 individuals/20 families

Walsall has already supported 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. It should be noted that further procurement of properties is currently suspended across the West Midlands.

The Scheme is quite 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 4 months on arrival, with the tariffs detailed in Figure 1 in 3.7. The tariffs are set at different rates for persons who are single, or within couples or families. This briefing note has used the rates for persons who are within families. Primarily this provides a lump sum for integration, and housing (rent, void loss, and setup costs) to be claimed as necessary. There are no education or health tariffs. The tariff elements appear to be up to 4 months, other than the lump sum for integration. Confirmation has now been received from the Home Office that it's acceptable to spend the integration funding over a longer period of time.

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 over 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 requirements above, albeit it should be noted that it is very difficult to access 4 bed homes in Walsall, either in the social or private rented sector. The tariffs as part of the scheme 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. However, as, if they are in private rented accommodation there may be a rent shortfall, which may be covered if the adult individuals access employment, or may be considered through an application to the Council for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

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.		
3	Who is the proposal likely to affect?		
	People in Walsall	Yes / No	Detail
	All	No	
	Specific group/s	Yes	
	Council employees		
	Other (identify)		The policy will affect various community organisations who may support the Afghan nationals.
4	Please provide service data relating to this proposal on your customer's protected characteristics.		
	<p>A refugee is a person who has been accepted by the UK government as a refugee under the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951. There are no restrictions on a refugee being employed in any type of job, having full access to public services, receiving housing support, and generally enjoying the same entitlements, and subject to the same conditions, for access to services or to higher education as UK citizens.</p> <p>Iqbal et al (2011) state individuals from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds confront a variety of unique problems when adjusting and resettling to life in a new country. For individuals from refugee backgrounds, difficulties associated with language and cultural differences are frequently compromised by prior experiences of discrimination, stigma, human right violation, and trauma which potentially exacerbate mental health problems. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of maintaining and building connections with members of their own community and with the broader community. Many of the cultural impacts identified in this study are related to being female, as this potentially influences the clothing that many of them wear, the activities they can participate in, and the amount of educational support they receive from their family.</p> <p>Women and children have been particularly affected. Antenatal care entitlement checks and charging put women at increased risk of pregnancy-associated complications; care was frequently received late and women received fewer antenatal appointments than the minimum standards for England (Shortall et al 2015). Among migrants, Black African women had a mortality rate four times that of White women in the UK (Cantwell et al., 2011). Charging undocumented migrant children for secondary healthcare potentially prevents health professionals from identifying child protection and safeguarding concerns (The Children's Society, 2015).</p> <p>The Migration Observatory (University of Oxford) found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who originally came to the UK to seek asylum made up an estimated 0.6% of the UK population in 2019. 		

- COVID-19 has had a major impact on asylum seeking and refugee resettlement in the UK.
- On 30 June 2020, around 56,000 people were awaiting an outcome on their asylum claim.
- The distribution of asylum seekers and resettled refugees is highly uneven across the UK.
- In 2019, the top five most common countries of nationality of people seeking asylum in the UK were Iran, Albania, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
- Of all refugees resettled in the UK from January 2010 to May 2020, around 70% were Syrian nationals.
- Of the roughly 29,500 refugees resettled in the UK from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2020 under the country's four resettlement schemes, 75% were nationals of Middle Eastern countries, and 18% were nationals of sub-Saharan African countries.
- In 2019, the UK ranked 6th among the EU-28 in the absolute number of people to whom it granted asylum-related protection (excluding resettled refugees).
- In 2019, around 7,500 people were issued with a refugee family reunion visa, and around 2,500 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were granted asylum or other leave.

The West Midlands Strategic Migration partnership (WMSMP) data for September 2020:

- There were 29,456 asylum applications (main applicants only) in the UK in 2020, an 18% decrease from the previous year. This latest figure will have been impacted by the measures taken in response to COVID-19 which have impacted migrants' movements globally.
- The biggest percentage increase in applications was seen from Yemen (286 to 518, +81%), other increases were seen from Syria (+43.5%), Sudan (+33.9%) and "stateless" (+31.87%). For all other nationalities there were fewer asylum applications than the previous year.
- In the West Midlands there were 5,875 asylum seekers in receipt of Section 95 support. The nationalities with the highest numbers receiving this support are Iraq (1,154), Iran (691), Albania (540), Pakistan (411) and Eritrea (288).

As at February 2021 this borough has:

- 469 Asylum Seeker Placements
- 20 Under VPRS (Syrian) – Refugees
- 1 – child under VCRS
- 12 – UASCs
- 17,580 EU resettlement applications

The majority of those being placed through the scheme will be from the Helmand province which:

- Population Estimate: 940,200
- Capital: Lashkar Gah

- Ethnic Groups: Pashtun majority, Baluch minority in the south, Nalaquin (in Pashtun, "*migrant*" and usually eastern Pashtun tribes).
- Tribal Groups: 32% Barakzai, 16% Noorzai, 9% Alokzai, 5.2% Eshaqzai.
- Religious Groups: Sunni, Shi'a.
- Literacy Rate: 4%

Source: <https://nps.edu/web/ccs/helmand> , Accessed (10/06/21)

5 Please provide details of all engagement and consultation undertaken for this proposal. (Please use a separate box for each engagement/consultation).

Consultation Activity

Type of engagement/consultation	Internal Consultation on the proposal for Afghan LES Scheme	Date	01/21
Who attended/participated?	Informal consultation with 2 community organisations (Afghan Community Association, Refugee and Migrant Centre) and WMSMP alongside a third participant who works with housing refugee. Feedback demonstrated a support for the scheme and a drive to ensure communities are placed in suitable areas in Walsall.		
Protected characteristics of participants	Limited to staff including those from different ethnic, age, gender groups		
Feedback Added into report as part of consultation process.			

Type of engagement/consultation	Internal Consultation on the proposal for Afghan LES Scheme	Date	08/21
Who attended/participated?	Informal consultation with 1 community organisations (, Refugee and Migrant Centre) and WMSMP along with feedback from key services. Feedback demonstrated a support for the further extension of the scheme and a drive to ensure communities are placed in suitable areas in Walsall.		
Protected characteristics of participants	Limited to staff including those from different ethnic, age, gender groups		
Feedback Added into report as part of consultation process.			

6 Concise overview of all evidence, engagement and consultation

The Afghan 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, there is a pressing need to accelerate the pace of relocations to the UK for families currently in Afghanistan who are eligible to participate. They are seeking to relocate **1500 individuals by the end of June 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, preferably between June and September 2021.

There are four areas in the UK that have participated in the scheme including Coventry in the West Midlands. Recently, a commitment has been given by Wolverhampton, and Dudley have pledged to take 20 families. On the basis of an average family size of 5, this will be up to 100 individuals housed in Dudley. The WMSMP are seeking pledges from LAs as a matter of urgency, and on this basis Walsall council recently gave a commitment to support families in principle subject to further clarity and scheme details.

Walsall has already supported a number of resettlement schemes:

- since 2017 aided 20 individuals through the Syrian resettlement schemes (SVPRS) and further committed to 20 helping 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. It should be noted that further procurement of properties is currently suspended across the West Midlands.

The Acceleration of the UK Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation scheme is fundamentally different to resettlement schemes above, including, shorter mobilisation times, lower levels of financial support and therefore potentially more reliance on mainstream funded services.

The scheme includes:

- For the first 4 months on arrival support funding, with the tariffs detailed in 3.7. Primarily this provides a lump sum for integration, and housing (rent, void loss, and setup costs) to be claimed as necessary. There are no education or health tariffs.
- 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 over together. Based on the flow of arrivals the average family size is 5 individuals, ranging from 1 to 7 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 requirements above, albeit it should be noted that it is very difficult to access 4 bed homes in Walsall, either in the social or private rented sector
- 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 support could be offered through variations to existing contract, consideration of any in

house options, or a (quick) competitive procurement exercise. It should be noted that already two organisations have expressed an interest to work with these families

- 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.

The local authority will need to carry out its own community safety checks as part of due diligence in property sourcing.

Updated Cabinet report 8th September 2021:

Walsall has so far housed 15 families consisting of 69 individuals through this ARAP scheme, all during August 2021. This report recommends increasing the number of individuals helped through the ARAP to a total of 120, from the previous pledge of 80. The integration support requirements for these additional numbers means that the existing contract variation with the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) will exceed £500,000.

This Council has a history of warmly welcoming a range of people from many different countries. This increased pledge will not only build on our existing work with Afghan families, but also our contribution to the Syrian and UK resettlement schemes, our support to community sponsorship, and our help to unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC).

That extended scheme pledges to assist with the relocation of an additional up to 40 Afghan individuals (which includes immediate family), taking Walsall's total pledge to up to 120 individuals, through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy.

The recent urgency of the situation in Afghanistan has been well documented in the national news. At the time of writing this report, it is anticipated that several thousand Afghan individuals will have been flown into the UK. When individuals land, they are taken to quarantine hotels for 10 days (or longer if test positive). They are then subsequently moved to their identified properties, or to 'holding' hotels if the properties are not ready. There are currently no holding hotels in Walsall, and we are not aware of any immediate plans to procure one, but it is a rapidly changing situation.

In addition to the ARAP scheme, which as above is aimed at individuals who worked with the armed forces, the government announced a new Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 18 August 2021. This scheme will help up to 5,000 vulnerable Afghans to the UK, who have been forced to flee the country, in its first year, with up to a total of 20,000 in the long-term. The scheme is not yet open. Further details will be announced in due course.

7	How may the proposal affect each protected characteristic or group? The effect may be positive, negative, neutral or not known. Give reasons and if action is needed.			
	Characteristic	Affect	Reason	Action needed Yes / No
	Age	Positive	<p>United Nation's data suggests At least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18.</p> <p>Those accessing the scheme internationally will likely be subject to rigorous checks and will be family units.</p>	N

	Disability	Positive	<p>When assessing families the UN look at health and the need for healthcare as part of their criteria.</p> <p>Migrant groups in general are more likely to be affected by health inequalities. National research demonstrates refugees are at an increased risk of mental health problems and low subjective well-being.</p>	N
	Gender reassignment	neutral	<p>Those fleeing political and persecution due to their identities are amongst the groups considered under the scheme. There is no reason to consider that the proposed actions would have a negative impact upon individuals with these protected characteristics. Data to be collected where possible.</p>	Y
	Marriage and civil partnership	neutral	<p>Many of those seeking help through the United Nations will include family units and it is likely these households are in a married/civil partnership.</p>	Y
	Pregnancy and maternity	Positive	<p>We do not have sufficiently robust data at this stage to do any meaningful analysis as social housing is allocated on the basis of overall housing need rather than this specific characteristic.</p> <p>Families with children who will be deemed to be at risk of harm forms part of the UN's criteria for assistance.</p>	Y
	Race	Positive	<p>Those accessing the scheme will be from a Black and Minority Ethnic group. In particular of Afghani descent and will be from the Helmand province, national data suggests Helmand's population is mainly made up of Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group.</p>	Y

			Source: https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSSP506492 , Accessed 10/06/21		
	Religion or belief	Positive	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known. However, the Helmand province is home to a majority Muslim population along with small Sikh and Hindu population who have previously marginalised.	Y	
	Sex	Positive	Women and girls fleeing harassment are amongst the groups fleeing persecution. The current political landscape of Afghanistan demonstrates a need to support particularly females and girls.	Y	
	Sexual orientation	neutral	No information specific data is available and so the impact is not currently known.	Y	
8	Does your proposal link with other proposals to have a cumulative effect on particular equality groups? If yes, give details.				(Delete one) No
	None that we are aware of.				
9	Which justifiable action does the evidence, engagement and consultation feedback suggest you take?				
	A	No major change required			
	B	Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality			
	C	Continue despite possible adverse impact			
	D	Stop and rethink your proposal			

Action and monitoring plan				
Action Date	Action	Responsibility	Outcome Date	Outcome
<p><i>Monitor from</i></p> <p><i>Project start date</i></p> <p><i>Then qtrly</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data around protected characteristics of incoming households as defined by the Equality Act 2010 Total number of individuals placed in Walsall 	MHJ	Qtrly	What outcomes have been achieved and service usage
Procurement of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure outcome stars form part of any commission and reviewed weekly over 4 month period and ensure service user feedback Ensure procurement ensures effective move on and support planning once a household is placed. Also ensure specification meets the needs of all protected characteristics. 	MHJ		

Update to EqlA

Date	Detail
31/08/21	- Update to report in line with increase in number of individuals by 40, now totalling 120 individuals.

Contact us

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Inside Walsall: [http://int.walsall.gov.uk/Service information/Equality and diversity](http://int.walsall.gov.uk/Service%20information/Equality%20and%20diversity)