



North Devon Council

Report to: Strategy and Resources Committee

Report Date: 5th July, 2021

Topic: Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

Report by: J W Mann; Head of Environmental Health & Housing

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. UK Government is running an Afghan relocation scheme for locally employed staff (LES) who have worked for British Forces. The scheme honours their service and reflects their work and the risks involved. Commonly, these people will have acted as military interpreters. There is now a greater fear for their safety as international troops leave the country.
- 1.2. Gov. anticipates helping a further 3,000 Afghans settle in the UK, and local housing authorities have been asked to support this effort and advise the Home Office of their decision as soon as possible.
- 1.3. Those who qualify and choose to relocate to the UK with their families are not expected to return to Afghanistan. After completing five years' limited leave, they can apply for permanent residence in the UK, free of charge, ensuring that they can settle here permanently and continue to build their lives and future here.
- 1.4. People coming to the UK under this scheme, may arrive either as a whole family unit or with the lead person arriving first and their dependents joining them at a later point, depending on their individual circumstances.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is RECOMMENDED that Members:
 - 2.1.1 Advise the Home Office of the Council's willingness to participate in the relocation scheme.
 - 2.1.2 Give delegated authority to the Head of Environmental Health & Housing to relocate up to 2 households in north Devon, subject to:
 - (i) The Head of Resources' agreement on the acceptability of the level of financial risk; and

- (ii) There being robust arrangements in place to provide support for the families' wellbeing and integration over the short and medium term.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 (Paragraph 2.1.1.) To advise the Home Office of North Devon Council's support for the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme.
- 3.2 (Paragraph 2.1.2.) To manage the Council's financial risks, and ensure the wellbeing of any relocated families over the short and medium term.

4. REPORT

- 4.1 The Government has written to all local authorities asking for support to the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) relocation scheme. The Government has been running this scheme to relocate Afghan former LES to the UK since 2013, in recognition of the fact that they are at increased risk of intimidation, having worked side by side with UK armed forces and officials. For example, many of those who are eligible under the scheme have worked as military interpreters. Following the announcement that NATO military forces will withdraw from Afghanistan, the Government intends to accelerate the pace of relocations under the scheme and is looking to local authorities to provide housing and a short-term package of integration support.
- 4.2 The Afghan relocation scheme is substantially different from the refugee resettlement scheme already in place in Devon (now called UK Resettlement Scheme UKRS). Officers believe that the differences between the Afghan relocation and UK resettlement schemes are such that Devon's resettlement scheme infrastructure cannot simply be adapted to include the Afghan scheme. Additional capacity and some different expertise would be needed to respond to the Afghan scheme. Officers can look at use of other existing resources (e.g. CAB, Homemaker and community-based organisations), but these would need to be pulled into a co-ordinated support package/arrangement. This itself would need capacity to design and commission.
- 4.3 The accelerated schedule of arrivals over a few months means that recruiting private sector landlords over a period of months may not be a viable response. This is further complicated by the differences in the immigration and initial benefits' eligibility of people arriving under the Afghan scheme. It has been suggested that councils should only consider offering property for Afghan relocation if they can do so from their own stock or social housing. Even under these circumstances, there are likely to be greater demands on council housing teams to manage rents and support benefits' applications due to the different immigration and benefit eligibility of people arriving under the relocation scheme.

4.4 The funding available under the Afghan relocation scheme is short-term, but it is certain that relocated families will continue to need support after four months. Contact points for ongoing support will need to be established and funded. There needs to be clear separation between the contact points for relocation and resettlement because of the significant disparity between the schemes. Funding for longer term support to relocation could be drawn from the main resettlement programme, which is received as a non-ring-fenced grant. This would require consensus from DCC and the district councils participating in the resettlement programme; Government approval would not be needed. However, diverting funding from UK resettlement to Afghan relocation will create a two-tier support offer which reduces support to resettled families without raising relocated families to the same support level.

4.5 Key differences between the relocation and resettlement schemes are set out in the document attached: see Appendix A.

4.6 Notwithstanding, the challenges associated with this scheme, Members may understandably feel there is a moral obligation to support those who have served our country. For this initiative to be successful in north Devon, the Council would need to secure affordable accommodation, and have the assurance there would be ongoing support for the family after the Government funding ends.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The funding available to participating local authorities is set out in Appendix A. A delayed Habitual Residency Test could result in the Council having to meet the accommodation and living expenses of the family until this situation was resolved.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1 The Afghan LES Relocation Scheme seeks to protect individuals and their families who have worked side by side with UK armed forces. They are now at increased risk of intimidation as forces return to the UK.

7. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Part 3, Annexe 1(h) and Delegated.

8. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

8.1 This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:

Fact Sheet for Local Authorities
The Afghan Locally Employed Relocation Scheme, Home Office, May 2021.

10. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

10.1 The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers:

Jeremy W Mann
Head of Environmental Health and Housing

23rd June, 2021