



**Prosperous Communities
Committee**

Tuesday 14th September

Subject: Refugee Resettlement Schemes

Report by:	Assistant Director Homes and Communities
Contact Officer:	Diane Krochmal Assistant Director Homes and Communities diane.krochmal@west-lindsey.gov.uk
Purpose / Summary:	To update Members on the Home Office move from the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) to the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme(UKRS) To seek support to explore opportunities to assist with the Afghan Locally Employed Staff scheme (LES)

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. Approve officers to fully investigate the lessons learnt from the previously agreed Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and bring a report back to the Committee with a proposal regarding transferring our commitment from the VPRS to the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)**
- 2. Council pledges to assist with the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) scheme and delegate authority to officers to facilitate that assistance, subject to the ability to source appropriate accommodation through registered provider (RP) partners and having obtained assurance of ongoing support from Government**
- 3. Details of those assisted be shared with Members as appropriate**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None noted

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report **MUST** be seen by the MO

Financial : FIN/71/22/TJB

(N.B.) All committee reports **MUST** have a Fin Ref

Staffing: No direct staffing implications. Our membership of the Lincolnshire Refugee Resettlement Partnership is met within existing staff resource.

Engagement with local housing providers and private sector landlords will be required to assist in sourcing appropriate accommodation.

(N.B.) Where there are staffing implications the report **MUST** have a HR Ref

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

Services provided to support resettlement will meet the needs of the communities and will be culturally appropriate

Data Protection Implications : None noted

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: none noted

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: none noted

Health Implications:

Health and Wellbeing prospects will be much improved for families relocating to UK. Support for households will need to be in place to ensure pathways are in place into health services to reduce the potential for families to suffer further health inequalities

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

Wherever possible please provide a hyperlink to the background paper/s
If a document is confidential and not for public viewing it should not be listed.

Risk Assessment :

Property implications – as a non-stock owning authority sourcing suitable properties within the social or private rented sector will be a challenge and will also impact on the availability of properties for qualifying West Lindsey residents

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1. Background and update on Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

- 1.1 Refugee resettlement plays a key role in the global response to humanitarian crises – it saves lives and offers stability to refugees most in need of protection. Refugees do not leave their countries out of choice, they are displaced by conflict, violence and persecution. The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it and the government's resettlement schemes give the opportunity of a new start to those who have been forced to flee their homes.
- 1.2 Members of this Prosperous Communities Committee received a report on 4th June 2019 where it was resolved that West Lindsey District Council would participate in the Home Office Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and agreed to accommodate two households which was in line with David Cameron's pledge for the UK to accept 20,000 refugees fleeing from the conflict in Syria. Members had requested that officers advise once families had been located to the area.
- 1.3 In November 2019 discussions had begun with Acis regarding the availability of properties in preparation of accepting the first family into the district. Before arrangements were finalised the scheme was concluded as the Government's target was achieved with almost 700 individuals being resettled in the East Midlands region.
- 1.4 A pause in the programme ensued due to the Corona Virus Pandemic.
- 1.5 The government have now replaced the VPRS with the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) which almost mirrors the previous VPRS. The main difference is the wider defined area from which refugees will be accepted which is a global catchment with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa.
- 1.6 West Lindsey is a member of the Lincolnshire Refugee Resettlement Partnership. This partnership is in turn a member of the East Midland Migration Partnership which has been tasked with establishing the appetite to transfer the pledges from the VPRS to the new UKRS.
- 1.7 No time frame had been attached to determining commitment to the revised scheme. Other authorities in Lincolnshire have accepted families into their areas and therefore fully understand any cost and resource implication and any challenges that need overcoming in accommodating families. In light of this officers are seeking member approval to research more fully the learning from the previous scheme to ensure Members are fully briefed before making a decision whether to transfer their commitment with regard to the VPRS to the UKRS.
- 1.8 The Home Office have other immigration and refugee programmes in place at present, namely those relating to Hong Kong British National (overseas) status, unaccompanied Children seeking Asylum in the UK and the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme.

These schemes all offer additional opportunities to assist the Home Office with refugee resettlement and support. Additional information on these opportunities will be provided as it becomes available.

1.9 At this time the Afghan (LES) scheme is the priority for the Government. A number of authorities have already pledged their support but there is an increasing and urgent need for more authorities to come forward with offers.

2. Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

2.1 The UK has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013. The scheme honours their service and reflects the risks involved. Commonly these people will have acted as military interpreters.

2.2 Following the announcement that NATO military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan at the end of August, the pace of relocation under this scheme accelerated as any Afghani national who had supported the British Forces was deemed to be at an increased risk.

2.3 The precise number of people, and the timing of relocation to the UK, was expected to depend on a number of factors, including the wishes of the families themselves. The government had anticipated helping 3700 Afghans settle in the UK.

2.4 This expectation had not accounted for the speed at which the situation in Afghanistan would unfold and by the end of August 15,000 people from Afghanistan had been evacuated into the United Kingdom. Of these it is thought that 8000 are thought to be eligible claimants under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

2.5 Those arriving in the UK and eligible for the ARAP scheme will have been assessed as being 'under serious threat to life'. Having qualified and consequently chosen to locate to the UK they will not be 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 futures

2.6 Of the 15,000 evacuees in excess of 10,000 are currently in quarantine hotels. In Lincolnshire there are circa 100 people residing in a hotel in Grantham and are being supported by a range of services including Wellbeing Lincs, NHS, education and public health colleagues. This number changes regularly as new families move out into other forms of accommodation to be replaced by families who are being moved from the quarantine hotels.

2.7 Local Authorities are being asked for their support and assistance in the effort as the government seeks to fulfil their obligation to support those who have served this country. Consequently Local Authorities

are required to advise the Home Office of decisions to support this programme as soon as possible. The MOD is taking the lead, with MHCLG and the Home Office involved as key departments

2.8 The Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme is a further scheme that has been announced by the government which will allow a total of 20,000 to settle in the UK. The aim is to offer protection to those identified as most at risk such as women and girls. There is a commitment to take around 5000 people in the first year. This scheme is not open yet but demonstrates that there will be an ongoing ask to Local Authorities to support resettlement.

3. Support

3.1 Lincolnshire is part of the East Midland Migration partnership and North Kesteven District Council are the lead authority for the Lincolnshire Resettlement Partnership. People relocated under the scheme will be supported by the lead Authority via a twelve month integration package which includes:

- Accommodation
- A package of advice and assistance
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) assessment
- Registration with GP's and local Job Centre Plus
- Assistance in securing school places for school aged children
- Cash support

3.2 This is funded via a personal grant of £10,500 for every household member payable to the lead Local Authority. It is anticipated that this will adequately cover the cost of securing and preparing accommodation plus on going housing costs including rent and household bills for the first four months. No financial burden therefore will fall on West Lindsey District Council.

3.3 To further support those resettling under the ARAP scheme the government has announced an additional £5m of funding through the Afghan LES Housing Costs Fund to support councils who may have concerns around housing costs should families relocated to their areas have been unable to secure employment within 4 months and would be affected by benefit caps. This fund will be able Local Authorities to be awarded a top up grant should there be a shortfall in rent..

3.4 LES are not eligible for benefits until they can satisfy the Habitual Residency Test set by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which can take up to three months. Households will be supported in applying for this by a project officer who will be employed by NKDC and will be in post early September. This person will coordinate the requirements of furnishing accommodation and will welcome families upon arrival.

3.5 If members pledge their support to the scheme officers will liaise with Acis or one of our other Registered Provider partners to identify and allocate a suitable property. Sourcing accommodation in the private rented sector may also be an option but a social housing provider would be preferred.

3.6 The suitability of accommodation identified would be determined by NKDC as lead organisation who would put forward our proposal to the Home Office. It is worth noting that the Home Office has stressed the need for larger properties although properties of all sizes are acceptable. As a non-stock owning authority identifying suitable accommodation at an appropriate time could present challenges.

3.7 NKDC would also liaise with the education authority to establish availability of school places.

3.8 All information re properties would be passed to the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership along with a 'ready to let date' and arrangements would be made to facilitate transporting a 'matched' family to the district on that date.

3.9 In April 2020 through Procurement Lincolnshire the partnership awarded a contract to Upbeat Communities for the provision of bespoke support for families resettled in Lincolnshire. It is anticipated that whilst support needs vary between families at different times of their resettlement ongoing support will be provided by Upbeat Communities. In addition to this Wellbeing Lincs are providing support in relation to the emergency response

4 Conclusion

4.1 This scheme is entirely voluntary and the council can decide not to take part. This would reduce any risk to the council but would also mean that the council were not assisting potentially vulnerable families. Supporting the scheme would demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the priorities within the Corporate Plan.

4.2 Notwithstanding the challenges associated with this scheme, Members may understandably feel there is a moral obligation to support those who have served our country. However for this initiative to be successful having the ability to secure affordable accommodation and having the assurance there would be ongoing support for the family after the Government funding ends are assurances which officers cannot give at this time.

5 Recommendations

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