

Agenda Item No:**Report To:** Cabinet**Date of Meeting:** 30th September 2021**Report Title:** The Resettlement of Afghan Nationals through the Government ARAP Scheme**Report Author &
Job Title:** Anne Forbes
Resettlement Coordinator**Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder for:** Cllr. Andrew Buchanan
Housing

Summary: The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched on 1 April 2021. Under the policy, any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served. The situation in Afghanistan escalated very quickly indeed and as a result, the scheme is evolving at pace with new information, guidance and policy changes from Government being produced daily. The Government are now formulating further assistance schemes for other groups at risk and displaced by the fall of the Afghan Government.

The situation in Afghanistan has escalated quickly and as a result, the schemes to assist Afghan Locally Employed Staff (ALES) and other groups evacuated as a result of the fall of the Afghan Government are evolving at pace with new information and guidance from Government being produced daily.

Over the last six years, Ashford Borough Council has successfully worked alongside Government in respect of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), recently winning a major national award for its work in welcoming refugee families to the county, therefore Ashford are well placed and have sufficient expertise to resettle Afghans into the borough.

This report gives an overview of Ashford Borough Council's response to the Government's appeal to Local Authorities to assist in the ARAP and to the subsequent emergency evacuation of Afghan Locally Employed Staff (ALES) and their families and other qualifying Afghan nationals to continue to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).

Key Decision: YES**Significantly
Affected Wards:** All**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed by the UK to the Afghan Locally Employed Staff.
- II. Support the offer to settle between 5 and 10 families in Ashford under the ARAP scheme.
- III. To support continuing development of projects and infrastructure to promote and enable successful integration and promote community cohesion to benefit the wider Ashford community.
- IV. A future report will come to Members in due course to approve funding for the programme.

Policy Overview: Living Ashford: quality housing and homes for all

Financial Implications:	None to the Authority. The scheme is fully funded by guaranteed grant funding claimed through the Home Office Resettlement Team.
Legal Implications	None
Equalities Impact Assessment	YES see appendix A to this report
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	None
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Report Title: Continuation of Planned Refugee Resettlement beyond End of Current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

Introduction and Background

1. Over the last six years, Ashford Borough Council has successfully worked alongside Government in respect of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), welcoming refugee families to the county and borough of Ashford. Following the success of this scheme, now the UKRS, and working in partnership with the Home Office Ashford Borough Council has committed to resettle between five and ten households from Afghanistan to Ashford from July 2021.
2. As with the UKRS, participation in the ARAP scheme on the part of local authorities is voluntary and the funding levels available to local authorities to run the scheme was to be for one year only however is currently being reviewed to look at options for additional support for participating Local Authorities.
3. The existing and dedicated Resettlement team within the Housing Service has taken responsibility for the management of the involvement of this new scheme on behalf of Ashford Borough Council. The first three families from Afghanistan arrived into the borough in July 2021 and these are each now settled into their accommodation, supported by the Resettlement Team and appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies.
4. Since committing to resettle between five and ten households the situation in Afghanistan has escalated at pace and is continuing to evolve, with a hotel in Ashford being procured by the Home Office to use as Bridging Accommodation for Afghans who have been evacuated from their home country. The Resettlement team and other members of the Housing Service and wider corporate colleagues have been working to support these families as they have arrived. Currently there are 25 families in the hotel and this equates to 130 people. One family of 4 has left to go to settled accommodation.
5. The council's excellent rapport with its public and private sector partners has ensured that mechanisms have been swiftly put in place to ensure timely engagement with statutory services including provision of access to primary care health assessment and care, and liaison to provide access to other healthcare provision such as dentists and opticians.
6. Ashford Borough Council has made the decision not use any social housing for arriving families so that there would be no impact on applicants to the Housing Waiting List. Families who have arrived in July have been provided accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), the Resettlement Team will continue to work with landlords in the PRS to secure additional accommodation to enable the authority to accept and meet the commitment to resettle between five and ten families. There will also be liaison with the authority's own social lettings agency 'A Better Choice for Lettings' should accommodation in the PRS become unavailable.
7. Individuals identified by the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) via this scheme for third country resettlement in the UK often present signs of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety following family separation and other health needs following their time in exile living in extremely difficult circumstances. Fundamentally, the scheme supports the transitional needs of the resettled person and removes barriers to help them access national and local services in order to fully and permanently integrate into

UK society. We, along with partner agencies, work to empower individuals to achieve their full potential and meet their responsibilities as members of British society.

8. The most recent arrivals in October 2019 brought the total number of families resettled through Ashford to 34 (146 individuals with a further 13 children having been born since the families arrived).
9. On June 17th 2019, following the success of the scheme nationally, the Government announced the amalgamation of all current national planned refugee resettlement schemes into one scheme to continue beyond 2020. This will be called the Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS). [Immigration: Written Statement HCWS1627 (Commons) and HLWS1589(Lords)]
10. This report gives an overview of the ARAP Scheme nationally and locally and describes Ashford Borough Council's plans to continue to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under GRS.

Proposal/Current Position

11. Since December 2015, ABC has welcomed and resettled 34 refugee families under the UKRS equating to 8.5 families per year. We have also now resettled three families under ARAP and subject to access to accommodation expect to have housed a total of up to ten families before the end of 2021.
12. In September 2016, ABC identified the need for adults to be able to access additional language and integration training beyond the prescribed 8 hours per week of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. In partnership with an Ashford based training company, Concept Training, a programme to support refugees to gain skills needed to access employment opportunities and integrate fully into the community was launched. The programme, Language and Integration Skills Training (LIST) has been recognised nationally as good practice and has been adopted by other local authorities.
13. All children from nursery age to 16 years attend a variety of schools across the Borough. Adults access English classes through Adult Education, college courses or Concept Training according to their abilities and preference.
14. There remains a challenge in securing learning opportunities for refugees aged 16-19 across the whole of Kent. In Ashford, we have developed a programme to enable this age group to fast track progress in English, maths and IT skills allowing them to access college courses of their choice as soon as possible after arrival. The situation has improved vastly since September 2017 with the introduction of new courses for this age group at Ashford College. We continue to work with education partners to increase choice and opportunities still further.
15. Ashford has been extremely successful in supporting refugees into employment. More than half the families now have at least one family member in paid employment. Of those refugees currently available for work, more than 40% have secured paid employment with the rest undertaking volunteering and work experience. This is much higher than the figures quoted nationally (3%) or regionally (11%). See attached overview and case studies (Appendix B).
16. Ashford's success in providing support for refugees to resettle and rebuild new lives in the borough has been recognised regionally and nationally and good practice acknowledged with various awards.

17. Ashford is approached regularly by other authorities seeking advice on various aspects of resettlement. The project co-ordinator received a British Empire Medal in the 2018 New Year's Honours List. The programme was awarded "Outstanding Achievement in Housing" at the 2018 Kent Housing Group and Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing Excellence Awards in 2018. Community and arts projects continue to receive positive coverage in the media. Most recently, the programme has been shortlisted for a national LGC (Local Government Chronical) Award, results to be announced in March 2020.
18. Under GRS, the UK will accept approximately 5000 of the most vulnerable refugees each year. Refugees assessed by United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as those for whom third country resettlement is the only viable option can be referred by UNHCR to the UK GRS for consideration. Refugees accepted to the UK under GRS will then be allocated by the Home Office Resettlement Team via regional Migration Partnerships to participating local authorities who have accommodation available to meet their needs.
19. As with VPRS, participation in the GRS on the part of local authorities is voluntary. The funding available to local authorities to run GRS is the same as VPRS. Authorities will be able to state the language/origin of refugees they feel best placed to support.
20. Kent has already indicated commitment to continue with resettlement in the other districts and boroughs as has Canterbury City Council (the only other Kent area directly managing their scheme locally).
21. The proposal is for Ashford to continue to welcome vulnerable families under the Government's GRS Scheme from 2020. New homes and futures would be offered to up to 10 households per year subject to suitable properties being available in the private rented sector.

Implications and Risk Assessment

22. Financially, the funding from the Home Office (central government) in support of our work on ARAP means we have experienced no risk in this regard. Grant funding claimable is claimed in arrears and is only for one year, therefore it is important to continue to monitor proposals for any changes to funding or cessation of the ARAP due to any change in policy or central government commitment, and adapt the Borough response accordingly.
23. Refugees resettled under GRS can be referred to the scheme by UNHCR from anywhere in the world. However, indications are that the majority (95%+) of refugees referred to the UK in the foreseeable future will originate from Syria and be located somewhere in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It is important to note that participating LAs can request referral of refugees from cultural backgrounds they are best placed to support. Therefore, we are proposing to continue to support families with Syrian origin as we have existing infrastructure in place to best support successful resettlement.
24. Ashford has developed a strong infrastructure and network through the excellent work and support for refugees during delivery of the UKRS since 2015. The model is adaptable to provide support for any vulnerable group arriving or already resident in the Borough in the future.

Equalities Impact Assessment

25. Members are referred to the attached Assessment.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

26. ABC continues to work closely with the Home Office, South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM), Kent County Council (for education and social care), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the NHS to ensure timely provision of services for arriving Afghans.
27. In addition to statutory services, ABC continues to work closely with third sector, voluntary, faith and community groups to enable effective community involvement and promote integration of arriving Afghans into their new communities.

Other Options Considered

28. To cease accepting families through ARAP and the Resettlement Team to continue work on the UKRS on behalf of the Borough Council.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

29. Ashford has proven to be innovative and forward thinking in developing a programme to support effective resettlement and integration of refugees in the community. Running the existing UKRS programme has brought resources to the Borough, which it would not otherwise be able to access and the ARAP scheme offers the same opportunity.
30. Ashford has developed a strong infrastructure and network of support for refugees since the commitment to the UKRS in 2015, supporting broader community cohesion objectives and community involvement and participation. The model is adaptable to provide support for any vulnerable group arriving or already resident in the Borough in the future, as achieved for the first three Afghan arrivals in July 2021.

Conclusion

31. Ashford remains well placed to continue to provide an important role in the resettlement of some of the most vulnerable refugees into new communities. There is a desire to continue planned refugee resettlement in Ashford under the Government's extension of VPRS the UKRS from 2020 and offer new homes for up to 10 families per year subject to availability of suitable properties in the private rented sector. In addition to the commitment to the UKRS Ashford is also well placed to provide this same important role to the resettlement of Afghan families through ARAP, with a commitment to each family/household for the extent of the funding period (initially one year but now extended to three years – details to be confirmed).

Portfolio Holder's Views – Andrew Buchanan.

32. I am proud and pleased to support the existing and future planned resettlement schemes in the Borough, continuing to build on the vast experience and expertise developed within the Authority and especially the dedicated Resettlement Team within Housing since 2015.
33. I acknowledge and have witnessed whilst visiting the bridging hotel in Ashford the difference we are making to the lives of some of those most affected by the global refugee crisis and more recently those impacted by the events unfolding in Afghanistan. It is important that we continue this good work and I fully support our continuing efforts to provide the established and evolving level of assistance, welcoming vulnerable families into our communities.
34. I would like to thank all of the staff at Ashford Borough Council who have been involved in supporting the Afghan families at the bridging hotel, this support, along with the response

and partnership working with the Hotel management and staff has been a huge factor in how successful our response has been.

35. I wish to thank each of the private landlords who have already helped, and would like to encourage others to offer suitable properties they may have in support of this project.
36. The continuing support from the residents of Ashford, third sector and voluntary organisations and community and faith groups continues to be key to enabling successful integration. Over recent weeks the support has been beyond expectation. The response has been humbling and heart-warming and I am confident that these strong community bonds will continue to develop and that we can use this to create a long lasting legacy and continue to set an exemplary standard of integration into our existing and thriving communities of Ashford.

Contact and Email

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Impact Assessment

When is an assessment needed?

Councils must assess the impact of **proposed policies or practices** while they are being developed, with analysis available for members before a decision is made (i.e. at Cabinet).

Broadly, *policies and practices* can be understood to embrace a full range of different activities, such as Cabinet decisions which substantially change the way in which we do something, setting budgets, developing high-level strategies, and organisational practices such as internal restructuring. Assessments should especially be undertaken if the activity relates closely to an equalities group (see next page).

Importantly, this does not include reports that are 'for note' or do not propose substantial changes – assessments should only be considered when we propose to do something differently.

Assessments should also be carried out when conducting a large-scale review of **existing policies or practices** to check that they remain non-discriminatory. This does not mean filling out an assessment on every report on a subject – it is up to you to decide if the report's scope or scale warrants an assessment.

1. General Information

1.1 Name of project, policy, procedure, practice or issue being assessed	The Resettlement of Afghan Nationals through the Government ARAP Scheme
1.2 Service / Department	Housing
1.3 Head of Service	Sharon Williams
1.4 Assessment Lead Officer	Anne Forbes
1.5 Date of Assessment	
1.6 Is this assessment of an existing or a proposed project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Existing policy and practice

2. What is Being Assessed?

2.1 What are the aims of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	To support the Resettlement of Afghan Nationals through the Government ARAP Scheme
2.2 Who is intended to benefit from this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Afghan families coming to the Borough under the ARAP Scheme and supporting wider community cohesion.
2.3 Who else is involved in the provision of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue? i.e. other sections, public or private bodies	
- within Ashford BC	Resettlement Team - Housing
- from other agencies	Home Office – funding and national policy and practice development and dissemination. South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) – regional coordination, sharing of good practice locally, regionally and nationally, personnel education and training, refugee participation. Kent County Council (access to Education and Social Care) Education and training providers (Adult Ed, Colleges, Concept Training) CCG and Local Health Trusts (access to healthcare)

	Private sector landlords NGOs (AVC) Community and Faith Groups
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3. Possible Sources of Information

In order to assess the impact of proposed decision it is important to bring together all information you have on it to, analyse them and come to conclusions on how it affects those with protected characteristics.

Information on a policy, project or procedure can come in many forms:-

- Census and other demographic information
- User satisfaction and other surveys
- Previous consultation exercises
- Performance Indicators
- Eligibility Criteria
- Service uptake data
- Complaints
- Customer Profiling
- MOSAIC data

In order to come to conclusions on impacts in section 4 you **must** have taken in to account all appropriate information, and be able to provide this if necessary in support of the judgements you make.

Also, it is not enough to have broad information on service users – to meet equalities duties this information **must** be broken down – where applicable – into the relevant protected characteristics which may be affected by this decision. For example, when considering disabled access to a new community facility, overall usage figures are not enough – an understanding of how many disabled users within this total must be demonstrated.

The protected characteristics are :-

Age Disability Gender reassignment Marriage and
civil partnership Pregnancy and maternity

Race Religion and belief Sex Sexual orientation

More information on the definitions of these characteristics can be found here - <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/protected-characteristics-definitions/>

4. What judgements can we make?				
4.1 Does the evidence already available indicate that the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue may affect these groups differently? (please check the relevant box and provide evidence where possible)	Positive Impact?	Negative Impact?	No Differential Impact	If yes, can it be justified (and how)?

Impact Factors:				
Age (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Age range of those currently supported is from birth to 80
Disability (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gender (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Marriage / Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Race (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We have resettled 34 households originating from Syria between December 2015 and November 2019 under VPRS. From March 2021 to July 2021 we welcomed 3 more households through UKRS. In July and August 2021 we welcomed 3 Afghan families through the ARAP Scheme
Religion / Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Most households have identified themselves as Muslim (practicing or non-practicing) with the exception of one multi-faith family and one practicing Christian family.
Sexual Orientation (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5. Conclusions

5.1 Does the decision maximise opportunities to promote equality and good inter-group relations? If "yes" please state how?

Yes – a key part of the programme has been to help integrate these families into their new communities
 No

5.2 Based on the answers to the above can we confidently say that in its present form the decision treats different groups fairly (bearing in mind "fairly" may mean differently) and that no further amendment is required?

Yes – although getting more support than other non-resettlement scheme groups this reflects the desperate situations they are fleeing.
 No

If further action is identified to ensure fair impacts please complete the Action Plan available on the intranet and attach it to this form

6. Monitoring and Review

How will monitoring of this policy, procedure or practice be reported (where appropriate)?

Regular reports to Cabinet and on-going monitoring of central government policy and funding in support of the ARAP

When is it proposed to next review the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?

March 2022