

AFGHAN LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF (LES) RELOCATION SCHEME

Executive Summary

The Government has requested the Council's support to welcome those who need our urgent help and assistance through the acceleration of the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme. This report outlines the Scheme and the Council's commitment to assist those families who need our urgent help.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) Woking Borough Council agrees to participate in the Scheme and offer help to five Afghan families;
- (ii) the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, shall be delegated authority to agree suitable arrangements for the provision of housing, support and any other services necessary for successful implementation of the resettlement scheme, in line with the government's requirements; and
- (iii) the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, shall be delegated authority to agree with Government that Woking Borough Council welcomes additional Afghan families should more properties and resources become available.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: The Council should support those people who have risked their own lives to work with the British armed forces in Afghanistan and as a result now have to leave their home under threat of their lives.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

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Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A Ministerial Letter was sent to all Council Leaders and Chief Executives in England, Scotland and Wales regarding the Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) to urgently request support to welcome Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) to the UK, following NATO's decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan.
- 1.2 The UK Government is asking for urgent local authority support and assistance to fulfil a moral obligation to support those who have served the UK in circumstances where they have risked their own lives and where their lives are now at even greater risk of being lost because of reprisal attacks by armed insurgents in Afghanistan.

2.0 Afghan LES Relocation Scheme Acceleration

- 2.1 The UK Government has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan (mainly interpreters) working in often dangerous and challenging situations, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK military forces since 2013.
- 2.2 The LES scheme provided a range of in-country packages of assistance in Afghanistan and, for those who meet the criteria, relocation to the UK with their dependants. The ARAP which launched in April 2021, reflects the changing situation in Afghanistan and consequent risk to locally employed staff. Through the scheme the Home Office are hoping to relocate approx. 600 households (3000 people) to the UK. Those arriving in the UK under the scheme will have been assessed as being 'under serious threat to life'.
- 2.3 Following the announcement that NATO military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan, the UK government has accelerated the pace of relocations under the scheme. The UK Government is asking for urgent local authority support and assistance to fulfil a moral obligation to support those who have served the UK in circumstances where they have risked their own lives to assist the UK.
- 2.4 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.

3.0 Woking Borough Council's Commitment

- 3.1 The Council pledges to assist with the relocation of 5 Afghan families through the Scheme.
- 3.2 Our intention is that households will be accommodated by securing properties in the private rented sector within the Borough, including Thamesway properties. An appeal has already been issued for landlords to come forward with properties and has received a promising response. However, it should be noted that some flexibility may be required on the property sizes offered, depending on the pace at which properties will need to be made available and the family make-up of those households requiring our help. The number of properties proposed is manageable and unlikely to have a detrimental impact on homelessness or waiting times faced by applicants on the Housing Register within the Borough.
- 3.3 The Council can draw on its extensive previous experience of the delivery of a similar scheme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme whereby 50 Syrian refugee households were successfully resettled in our area (far in excess of most local authorities). We will utilise the existing partnerships and support networks that are well established within the Borough through the UKRS and employment support through our partnership with the DWP and Surrey

Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

Care Trust's Steps to Work Project. The Government sees this scheme as additional to UKRS and, at this time, of greater priority and urgency.

- 3.4 Given current constraints (particularly a shortage of suitable homes), the Council can only commit to assisting 5 Afghan families at the current time. However, in the event that more properties are identified and sufficient funding and resources are available, the Director of Housing (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing) will be given delegated authority to negotiate with Government to welcome further Afghan families into the Borough under the scheme.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 This decision is consistent with our corporate values and objectives as a council that takes local and global responsibility seriously, and an inclusive council that promotes social and health equality.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 5.1 The Afghan LES Relocation Scheme is grant funded by the UK government for a period of 12 months. These grant payments are anticipated to cover the costs of the arrangements for the first 12 months.

- 5.2 The funding package is outlined in the below table:

Accommodation				
Rent (up to 4 months or when in receipt of benefit)	£15 per person, per day			
Integration				
To provide integration support (includes element for void and set up costs for accommodation)	Per person rate			
	£10,500			
Cash support				
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months or when in receipt of benefit)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (under 18)
	£59.20	£74.70	£117.40	37.75
ESOL provision				
£850 per adult (who requires it)				

- 5.3 This funding package was reached with the expectation that families in this cohort will integrate more quickly than families who arrive under UKRS and that the most intensive support is provided in the first few months and not for the full 12 months.

Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.4 The scheme protects the human rights of Afghan Locally Employed Staff who have supported the British Forces deployed in Afghanistan. They now risk persecution and death as British Forces withdraw from the Country.

Legal

- 5.5 The relocation scheme will be governed by regulations and guidance from the Home Office.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 This is a humanitarian issue which requires swift and urgent action and as such precludes an engagement or consultation exercise being undertaken. The Leader of the Council has been consulted.

REPORT ENDS