

ITEM No ...5.....

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
REPORT ON: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE - AFGHAN CITIZENS
REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 264-2021

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To note the Council's response to the urgent request for assistance from the UK Home Office to accommodate Afghan former Locally Employed Staff (LES).
- 1.2 To note that the UK Home Office are devising a second relocation scheme for Afghan citizens displaced by the fall of the Afghan government and withdrawal of US and UK Forces and that Dundee City Council and its partners will actively engage with this scheme once further details have been provided on its operation.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Approve the proposed involvement in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Scheme, as outlined below.
- 2.2 Agree that officers should engage with the proposed Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, once details are available and have been reviewed.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There is no net additional cost to the Council of participating in these schemes as both schemes will be fully funded by the UK Government. Administration costs can be met from existing resources.

4 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The UK Government has been operating a scheme to relocate Afghan former Locally Employed Staff (LES), as part of a wider Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP), to the UK since 2013. The basis of the scheme is to provide support to LES to relocate back to the UK. Relocation is required due to an increased risk of intimidation arising from the fact that LES have worked side by side with UK armed forces and officials. We are advised that many of those who are eligible under the Scheme have worked as military interpreters.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-locally-employed-staff-ex-gratia-scheme/afghanistan-locally-employed-staff-ex-gratia-scheme-further-information-on-eligibility-criteria-and-offer-details>

- 4.2 On 3 June 2021, a letter was issued by the UK Government to the Chief Executives of all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, seeking support with the LES scheme. This request was due to the UK Government's intention to accelerate the pace of the relocation scheme following the announcement that US and UK forces were to withdraw from Afghanistan at the end of August 2021.
- 4.3 On 30 July 2021, a further letter was issued by the UK Government with an urgent request for offers of support from local authorities, reflecting concerns of increased risk to LES and their families.

- 4.4 Up until the most recent events in Kabul our assessment, based on information received via COSLA on estimated family size, has been that we would have difficulty sourcing suitably sized properties for LES families.
- 4.5 We have, however, now received further guidance from COSLA on family sizes which means that we should be able to secure suitably sized accommodation which would allow us to resettle some families.
- 4.6 To date approximately 2000 people have arrived in the UK and a further 2000 due to arrive by the 24th August through the LES scheme.
- 4.7 In addition to the LES Scheme, the UK Government plans to introduce a further resettlement scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, which would see 20,000 Afghans resettled in the UK (5000 of which would be in year 1). As with previous potentially similar schemes, such as that for Syrian refugees, the Scottish Government has committed to support this humanitarian process given the escalation of recent events in Afghanistan.

5 PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

- 5.1 Dundee City Council and our partners have resettled 59 families since 2015 via the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Resettlement of Vulnerable Children Scheme (RVCS). These families arrived over the period 2015-2021 and are now well integrated in the communities where they live.
- 5.2 From experience gained during this time, relocation schemes have enabled people to rebuild their lives in Dundee and, in addition, a number of family reunion and family reunification applications has also meant that some people have been reunited with family members.

6 THE AFGHAN LES SCHEME

- 6.1 The Afghan LES scheme has some similar elements to the Syrian VPRS scheme in terms of the relocation arrangements however the package of funding to support integration is for one year only. In contrast, the Syrian scheme provides funding for 5 years, reducing each year till year 5 and also provides refugee status which the LES scheme does not.
- 6.2 Based on current discussions with COSLA, who are working with the Home Office on this scheme, local authorities can match eligible individuals and families based on the size of accommodation they have available.
- 6.3 Unlike the scheme for Syrian refugees, those accepted for the LES scheme by UK Government 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 3 months. Participating local authorities are required to provide weekly cash support during this time and reclaim the cost of this from the Home Office.
- 6.4 The funding offer from the Home Office, to be paid to the local authority, includes the following main elements:
- accommodation and integration support funding - a flat rate of £10,500 per person, which applies to all people within the household, including children, for one year only.
 - a weekly cash allowance, for single people or families, for up to 4 months or until they receive their outcome of their Habitual Residency Test and become entitled to DWP benefits.
 - £15 per person per day for accommodation costs for up to 4 months or until Universal Credit is in payment.
 - additional funding to assist with excessive accommodation and travel costs.

- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) training for the first 12 months from the person's arrival. This is at a rate of £850 per person attending ESOL.

6.5 Based on the grant funding which will be available, the cost to the Council from participating in the LES scheme will be officers time in terms of set up, administration and monitoring.

7 PROPOSAL

7.1 The LES scheme has already identified those deemed eligible and those individuals are currently either in UK or are likely to arrive very shortly. They are being placed in hotel accommodation by UK Home Office until suitable accommodation can be identified across the UK.

7.2 The Covid-19 pandemic has placed significant and continuing pressure on social rented housing in Dundee with a significant number of individuals having to be placed in temporary accommodation and increased levels of lets to Homeless applicants to ensure that local authority statutory duties are met.

It is, therefore, proposed that suitably sized properties are sourced from the local private rented sector for LES arrivals, utilising the skills, contacts and knowledge of our existing Homefinders team to ensure that accommodation is suitable and to the standard required.

7.3 Based on our assessment of the supply of suitably sized accommodation and the requirements for wrap around support we are confident that we will be able to successfully resettle a number of families based on an ongoing assessment of our ability to provide the required accommodation and support services.

7.4 In terms of the proposed Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, subject to the details which are awaited, we are confident that we have the skills, experience and commitment to allow us to deliver a positive partnership response once this scheme comes into operation. We are unable to quantify the number of individuals who could be resettled in Dundee at this time as we require some key information from the Home Office to allow us to start preparations.

7.5 Our multi-agency Humanitarian Protection Partnership was established in 2015 to co-ordinate and oversee the relocation and integration of individuals and families arriving in Dundee through the VPRS and VCRS.

7.6 The Humanitarian Protection Partnership includes representatives from Health, Social Work, Housing and Communities including ESOL provision, Employability, Police Scotland, Education, DWP and the third sector (Scottish Refugee Council and Project Scotland).

7.7 Dundee City Council has gained valuable experience in the work that is required to effectively support individuals and families and promote their community integration. As noted above we already have a tried and tested and well established partnership and a robust planning model which can be used to support and resettle people from Afghanistan. The experience gained over the past 6 years will ensure that any Afghan households relocated to Dundee will be welcomed and supported to settle here by officers, our partners and our communities.

7.8 As there is the potential to match identified properties with individuals and families who are part of the relocation scheme we would discuss with partners before resettling anyone to ensure there are adequate resources available in local areas where people may be housed.

7.9 Dundee already has a robust partnership and knowledge gained over the past 6 years. This can be utilised to support those resettled here as part of the LES scheme. The Council's participation in the scheme will confirm our commitment to providing humanitarian support to individuals and families who have worked side by side with our armed forces and officials.

8 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This report has been subject to an assessment of any impacts on Equality and Diversity, Fairness and Poverty, Environment and Corporate Risk. There are no major issues.

9 CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The Council Management team were consulted in the preparation of this report.

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.

Gregory Colgan
Chief Executive

1.9.21

In view of the timescales involved this report was approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Convener of the Policy and Resources Committee, Labour Group Spokesperson, Conservative Group Spokesperson, Liberal Democrat Group Spokesperson, the Lord Provost and the Independent Members.

Gregory Colgan

Chief Executive

1st September 2021

Date

John Alexander

Convener of Policy and Resources Committee

1st September 2021

Date

Kevin Keenan

Labour Group Spokesperson

3rd September 2021

Date

Derek Scott

Conservative Group Spokesperson

3rd September 2021

Date

Fraser Macpherson

Liberal Democrat Group Spokesperson

1st September 2021

Date

Ian Borthwick

Lord Provost

2nd September 2021

Date

Gregor Murray

Independent Member (Councillor Murray)

3rd September 2021

Date

Alan Ross

Independent Member (Councillor Ross)

3rd September 2021

Date

