

26th November 2021

UPDATE ON THE DELIVERY OF THE UK GOVERNMENT AFGHAN CITIZENS RELOCATION SCHEMES

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update for members on the schemes to provide support for Afghan refugees, in particular the Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizen's Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

Background

2. On 29 December 2020, the Defence Secretary and Home Secretary announced the **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy** (ARAP). This was a new scheme that offers relocation or other assistance to Locally Employed Staff in Afghanistan which reflects the changing situation in Afghanistan. The ARAP scheme launched on 1 April 2021 and will continue to remain open and operate indefinitely.
3. Under the ARAP scheme, any Staff who were directly employed by Her Majesty's Government assessed to be at serious risk of threat to life will be eligible to apply for ARAP regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.
4. In August 2021, *Operation Pitting* is estimated to have airlifted 15,000 people to safety on more than 100 flights in the largest British evacuation since the Second World War and the largest airlift since the *Berlin Blockade* of 1948–9. Of those evacuated, 5,000 were British nationals and 8,000 were Afghans who were vulnerable to persecution by the Taliban due to their role in assisting British forces. Around 2,200 evacuees were also children.

The Welsh response

5. All Councils across Wales have committed to participating in the ARAP Scheme.
6. To date, 70 people (16 families and 2 singles) have been resettled in accommodation across 11 Welsh councils. The first arrivals to Wales came on a flight from Kabul to UK on 22nd June, spending 10 days in quarantine before being transferred to the council.
7. Bridging accommodation, in the form of a hotel and a residential centre, have been stood up in Cardiff as a temporary accommodation solution for those families who were evacuated, and the two sites are currently accommodating 37 families (175 people) who have links to Wales via the 160th (Welsh) Brigade. It is intended to resettle these families across Wales once appropriate accommodation is available.

8. Led by the [Wales Strategic Migration Partnership](#), a positive and proactive 'Team Wales' approach has been utilised to accommodate, co-ordinate, plan and support this cohort of families whilst they are in bridging accommodation. Key partners in this ongoing work are Welsh councils, Welsh Government, Home Office, Churchill Lines Foundation, Department of Work and Pensions, Ministry of Defence, Cardiff Council, Urdd, Novotel, Education, Health, Taff Housing, Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue, Faith Communities and members of the Afghan Community, alongside various charitable and voluntary organisations.
9. The planning to begin to move families out of bridging accommodation and onto their new homes will begin imminently and see around 25 families start integration within local communities across Wales. A further 25 additional families, with links to Wales, have more recently been identified and plans are being made to accommodate these families in the bridging accommodation initially, until suitable properties are identified and families can be moved to long-term accommodation.
10. However, further property offers are still required, especially larger properties for family sizes from 6 to 11 family members and local authorities, working with partners such as Housing Associations and private landlords, are continuing efforts to identify appropriate accommodation to offer to the scheme.

Longer-term considerations

11. Once families who arrived under the ARAP scheme have been resettled, it is anticipated that case work will begin on those who were evacuated as part of Operation Pitting but are not eligible for ARAP (including British Nationals).
12. There are some challenges to this work, for example, there is a lack of capacity to gather necessary information on families due to the pace of the emergency evacuation, while councils need basic information on families to be able to make an informed decision on whether they can provide support (including English language ability, occupation, education, any mobility or medical issues, and any pregnancies). There is also a lack of information on prior TB screening of families who are arriving at the UK and/or in bridging accommodation in England.
13. There is also an urgent need for clarification on the onward movement of people who were evacuated but were not eligible for ARAP (e.g. returning British citizens) and their referral/support routes.
14. In August 2021, the Home Office announced a longer-term scheme, [the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme \(ACRS\)](#). The scheme will prioritise:
 - those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law
 - vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+).
15. The UK Government has committed to welcoming around 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years. The scheme is not yet open and further details will be announced in due course.

16. While the commitment to a three-year funding package for both ARAP and new **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme** is welcomed, local government has flagged significant concerns that the funding instructions for the ARAP scheme apply only to those who arrived at council-sourced accommodation on or after 1 September – meaning those councils which were first to ‘step up’ and support the first arrivals do not qualify for the three year funding package and, as things stand, will receive considerably less financial support from UK Government (1 years financial support). Local Government is requesting that the Home Office provide confirmation that the funding instructions will be applied to all local authorities who have supported ARAP cases, irrespective of when the households arrived.
17. Despite the pace of the work and the challenges associated with the evacuation, there have also been some real successes and positive experiences for those arriving in Wales. In addition to the excellent partnership working that is taking place, the model of how families in bridging accommodation have been supported is an example of best practice which will be captured and shared by the WSMP. Families across the two sites have benefited from tailored integration support, including bespoke classes for all genders and age ranges, education provision, English and Welsh language learning, cultural orientation, visits to local places of interest, and some refugees have even taken part in the Cardiff 10k run.
18. As highlighted earlier, all councils have agreed to participate in ARAP, and many have also formally agreed to participate in ACRS. WSMP, supported by WLGA, will continue to liaise between local authorities and the Home Office to support the resettlement of refugees to Wales.

Other Resettlement Schemes

19. In addition to ARAP and ACRS, the UK operates several other resettlement schemes:
 - The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS);
 - Community Sponsorship Scheme; and
 - A Mandate Resettlement Scheme.
20. Welsh councils are not participating in Mandate but do have 15 Community Sponsorship schemes (across 5 council areas). Further clarity is awaited from UK Government on the status of the UKRS scheme going forward, in light of more recent commitments under ACRS and details will be shared with councils when known.

Recommendations

21. **Members are asked to:**
 - 21.1 **Note and comment on the content of this update;**
 - 21.2 **Encourage their councils to continue to support the ARAP scheme and make efforts to identify suitable properties, and in particular larger properties to offer to the scheme; and**

21.3 For those councils who have not yet decided on participation in ACRS, seek to ensure that their councils consider participation, and if agreed/supported, outline pledges and inform WSMP of the number of families over each year of the five-year scheme that could be accommodated to help with planning on a Wales wide basis.

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