

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

5 OCTOBER 2021

Title:

AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT IN WAVERELY

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety

Head of Service: Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery and Communities and Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations

Key decision: Yes

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

For the Executive to agree Waverley Borough Council's plans and commitment to support Afghan refugees through the Home Office Resettlement Programmes.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive:

- supports the commitment to secure five to ten homes, in the Borough, to assist Afghan refugees, through the Home Office resettlement programmes over a two-year period, subject to the availability of suitable homes,
- agrees to recruit a designated support worker, for up to three years, costs expected to be met by central government funding, and
- approves the addendum to the Housing Allocation Scheme to allocate homes directly to eligible Afghan refugees for a two-year period as set out at Annexe One.

3. Reason for the recommendation

3.1 The Government has two initiatives to assist Afghan refugees the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) launched April 2021 for former locally employed staff and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), launched August 2021 to assist vulnerable refugees who assisted the UK efforts and stood up for values eg democracy, women's rights, rule of law, freedom of speech.

3.2 The Government has committed to welcoming around 5,000 people from Afghanistan in the first year of the resettlement programme and up to 20,000 over the coming years. Local Authorities have been requested to assist the programme by providing homes and support services for integration.

3.3 Waverley Council Members and residents have recognised the plight of and risk to Afghan refugees and have pledged to support the humanitarian initiative.

4. Background

4.1 The Government announced 'Operation Warm Welcome' on 31 August to ensure that those relocated to the UK can access healthcare, housing, education and support into employment, in order to be fully integrated.

4.2 Local Authorities will receive £20,520 per person for resettlement and integration costs.

4.3 The Housing Service worked with other statutory agencies and charities to resettle five Syrian refugee families during the last four years. This experience has informed and will assist with the resettlement of Afghan Refugees.

4.4 To implement a resettlement programme Waverley needs to appoint a support worker and seek an addendum to the Council's Allocation Scheme for social housing. The proposed addendum is at Annex One.

4.5 A support worker is required to implement Waverley's pledge, to coordinate and liaise with the Home Office, refugee families themselves, council services, statutory and charitable agencies to support families and facilitate integration.

4.6 The support worker will liaise and work with Surrey County Council, the NHS and the Guildford and Waverley Family Support Team. They will advocate for families, seek suitable accommodation, apply best practice, and secure access to resources and support across Surrey.

4.7 The Housing Team will seek suitable accommodation from the private sector, housing associations, and charities/churches as well as considering using council homes. The aim is to secure homes in the private sector where possible. The support worker will liaise with the Waverley's benefits team and the Department for Work and Pension to ensure financial support is secured.

4.8 To launch the resettlement programme Waverley will provide one council home, to pilot the scheme and set up processes and partnership working to support full resettlement and integration. If the support worker is unable to secure private accommodation for refugee families in two months, a further social housing home will be provided to keep momentum within the programme.

4.9 It should be recognised that due to the high demand for affordable homes in the borough it will be challenging to secure affordable, secure homes for larger

families. The team must take proportionate action to reflect the needs of Afghan refugees and the existing housing need and priorities in the borough.

4.10 The addendum to the Housing Allocation Scheme (Annexe One) permits the direct allocation of homes to five to ten Afghan Refugee families, if alternative private accommodation is not available. Only families referred by the Home Office through the Afghan Resettlement Schemes will be considered, and the direct allocation will need to be approved by Head of Housing Operations.

4.11 Any Afghan refugees making a direct approach for support will be directed to the Home Office programmes. The Council have received comprehensive advice, from the Homelessness Advice and Support Team at MHCLG on eligibility and recourse to public funds and services.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

5.1 The pledge to support Afghan Resettlement programmes aligns with Waverley's vision to ensure housing is available for *all who need it*.

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

6.1.1 Indications of Government funding at this stage are £20,520 per person over a three-year period. In addition, allocations will be provided for children's education, health care and English language training. It is intended that this initiative will be met entirely from external funding and no HRA (Housing Revenue Account) or General Fund budget provision is suggested at this stage.

6.1.2 Integration package for Afghan citizens and other refugees resettled under ARAP and ACRS:

ACRS/ARAP	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
LA Tariff [per person]	£10,500	£6,000	£4,020	£20,520
Education [per child]	Up to £4,500			Up to £4,500
English Language [per adult]	£850			£850
Health [per person]	£2,600			£2,600

6.1.3 It is proposed that a proportion of each person's allocation is to be used for the support worker detailed above. This will total £39,898 per annum.

6.1.4 Other costs expected to be covered by this funding include; furniture, clothing, initial groceries, transport and other initial set up costs.

6.1.5 By allocating HRA properties for families, costs will be minimised. This will support the families as Universal Credit limits may make private housing unaffordable.

6.1.6 There is government provision for property adaptations, property void costs, support for children with identified education needs, social care provision and other exceptional costs which can be requested in addition, to the mainstream funding if required.

6.2 Risk management

A comprehensive risk assessment will be completed when the first families and homes are identified and will include:

- Reputational –risk of not assisting refugee programme and risk that others feel addendum to allocation policy is unfair
- Financial – ongoing budget monitoring to prevent escalation of costs, unrecoverable funds and to seek central government and charitable funds
- Legal – addendum to Housing Allocation Scheme
- Service Delivery – recruit specialist support worker to engage and support families with integration
- Safety – complete Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) review on potential private sector homes.

6.3 Legal

Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 governs the allocation of the Council's housing stock. The Council is not under a duty to maintain a housing register but must have an allocation scheme for determining priorities between applicants for housing which sets out the procedure to be followed when allocating housing accommodation. That procedure must be clear from the scheme, and any allocation made under a procedure that is not clear from the scheme may be unlawful.

The Council publishes and maintains its Housing Allocation Scheme as required by s.166A of the 1996 Act. It identifies the priorities that the Council will follow in the letting of its Council stock and those Registered Provider (housing association) properties, to which it has nomination rights. The Scheme can be modified either under delegated authority to the Head of Housing Delivery and Communities or by a decision of the Executive.

The Council can determine how it wishes to allocate its housing stock provided, as said above, the criteria and procedure are set out clearly within the Scheme.

The statutory guidance issued under section 169 of the 1996 Act ("Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England") was amended on 16 September 2021 in order to adapt to expand scope to cover certain persons subject to immigration control who are eligible for an allocation of social housing, namely "a person with leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom who left Afghanistan in connection with the collapse of the Afghan government that took place on 15th August 2021 and who is not subject to a condition of no recourse to public funds and has not been given leave to enter or remain as a result of an

undertaking that a sponsor would be responsible for the applicant's maintenance and accommodation.”

It is therefore for the Council to consider how it wishes to allocate housing stock to such persons within its Scheme, and to ensure that the procedure for such allocations is clear.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

Pledge to assist resettlement demonstrates Waverley's inclusive approach. Equality Impact Assessment in place for Allocation Policy – to be updated accordingly.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

To consider energy efficiency and location of homes to minimise heating and travel costs, where possible.

7. Consultation and engagement

n/a.

8. Other options considered

To do nothing is not an option during humanitarian crisis

9. Governance journey

Executive

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – Addendum to Housing Allocation Scheme

Background Papers

There no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Hugh Wagstaff
Position: Head of Housing Operations
Telephone: 01483 52363
Email: hugh.wagstaff@waverley.gov.uk

Agreed and signed off by:

Legal Services: DB 22 September 2021

Head of Finance: GC 22 September 2021

Strategic Director: AR 22 September 2021

Portfolio Holder: AMR 22 September 2021