
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

29 June 2021

Cabinet

Title:	Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme
Purpose:	To advise Cabinet on the scheme to relocate locally engaged staff who worked for the UK Government in Afghanistan.
Recommendation(s):	That Cabinet (i) notes the request from the UK Government to Scottish local authorities to provide accommodation for Afghan locally engaged staff and their families; and (ii) agrees to relocate two Afghan families within North Ayrshire as a matter of urgency.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the acceleration of a scheme to relocate locally engaged staff (LES) who worked for the UK Government in Afghanistan. The UK Government is seeking support from Scottish local authorities to provide accommodation for LES and their families who are seeking to move to the UK. The scheme is based on local authorities volunteering to host agreed numbers of LES and their families in return for funding designed to cover any costs incurred.
- 1.2. The political situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly volatile in recent months and the United States has indicated that its armed forces will fully withdraw by September 2021. This means that LES are increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the Taliban. The UK Government has therefore taken the decision to accelerate their plans so that as many LES as possible can be evacuated by summer 2021. Early indications are that up to 6,000 Afghan nationals will be looking to relocate to the UK.
- 1.3. It is recommended that the Council participates in this voluntary scheme and offers to relocate two Afghan LES and their families before the end of September 2021, providing that suitable accommodation can be made available.

2. Background

- 2.1 The political situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly volatile in recent months and the US has indicated that its armed forces will fully withdraw by September 2021. This means that LES are increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the Taliban. The UK Government has therefore taken the decision to accelerate their plans so that as many LES as possible can be evacuated by this summer. Early indications are that up to 6,000 Afghan nationals will be looking to relocate to the UK.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 North Ayrshire Council took part in the original scheme to relocate Afghan Nationals in 2014/15. Six families were successfully resettled within the Irvine area in 3 bedroom accommodation to ensure that the Council's commitment to the relocation programme could be balanced with the needs of local residents and would not impact on the Council's ability to meet our statutory obligations to homeless households. Four other Scottish local authorities (South Ayrshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde and Fife) also volunteered to welcome Afghan families at that time.
- 2.4 The families were allocated temporary accommodation with an occupancy agreement that was later transferred to a Scottish Secure Tenancy when they passed the Habitual Residency Test set by the Department of Work and Pensions.
- 2.5 Those who qualified for the scheme had worked with UK forces on the frontline. Those families who have resettled in North Ayrshire integrated successfully, playing active roles and securing employment within North Ayrshire's communities. Four of the six families who relocated to North Ayrshire are still living here. The other two families moved away for work and family reasons.

Local Authority Support and Funding

- 2.6 People who are relocated under the scheme are supported for a four-month period by a local authority. All LES and their families are expected to arrive into the UK at Birmingham Airport, which has been prepared to receive visitors from 'red list' countries. Onward transfer arrangements to other areas throughout the UK have still to be confirmed.
- 2.7 The local authority is responsible for providing a four-month integration package which includes:
- Reception arrangements upon arrival at the airport including handover from flight escorts and welcome briefing;
 - Accommodation;
 - A package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply;
 - Registration with GPs and local Job Centre Plus, including receipt of a National Insurance Number;
 - Assistance in securing school places for school-aged children.
- 2.8 It should be noted that Afghan families relocated under the scheme 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, so the local authority provides financial support to those who arrive under the relocation schemes for up to four months.

- 2.9 The local authority is provided with funding to support families through a grant funding arrangement. The local authority claims an initial payment on arrival and a further payment after the four month period has ended.
- 2.10 The Council received approximately £218,000 of funding for the six Afghan families who arrived in 2015 (approx. £36,300 per family, to cover the required four months of support, as per the Home Office funding agreement at that time).
- 2.11 In practical terms, the casework requirements for both the Syrian and Afghan programmes are very similar, for example: sourcing accommodation and preparing for occupation; airport arrangements / pickup; providing initial cash support; linking in with initial services (GP, schools, dentists, DWP etc).
- 2.12 When the Council participated in the Afghan Scheme in 2015, the four months' funding was adequate to cover associated costs, with the exception of staff costs. Existing Housing Support staff were utilised to support the families.
- 2.13 Comparing the Syrian / Afghan programmes, the Afghan families settled quicker, possibly due to it being their choice to accept the relocation option and agreeing to settle in the UK and their English language skills.
- 2.14 There were less trauma and health issues to support and manage within this group, with less reliance on Council services.
- 2.15 In terms of the Afghan families themselves, the main applicants (husbands) were English speakers, which supported communication and integration. The wives and children were not generally English speakers and would either converse in Pashto or Farsi, which we don't have resources to support.
- 2.16 Based on our previous experience, support may be required beyond the four-month funding period, particularly for colleagues who offer ESOL support.
- 2.17 The four Afghan families still living in North Ayrshire are all working, and officers have very little contact with them. These families may be willing to provide some peer support to any new families coming into the area.

Covid-19 Testing and Isolation

- 2.18 The Home Office is still considering how they are going to manage the quarantine restrictions. Currently Afghanistan is on the amber list for travel; if Afghanistan was to move to red list, then quarantine would take place in the hotels set aside for this purpose in England.
- 2.19 The HSCP Coordinator working within the Refugee Taskforce team has been trained to swab test individuals and will liaise with testing centres for results if necessary.
- 2.20 It is presumed that families will be required to isolate at home for 10 days following their arrival in North Ayrshire. Officers will be required to make sure that properties are equipped with IT devices and Wi-Fi is installed in the houses for the families arriving, to help with contact, advice and assistance. The Refugee Support Team staff will monitor any new arrivals closely and provide appropriate practical support.

Indicative Timeline

- 2.21 The Home Office are looking for assistance immediately. There may be a short lead in time, however 1,500 Afghan nationals are expected to have arrived into the UK by the end of June and all 6,000 by the end of September 2021. Subject to Cabinet approval, officers will liaise with the Home Office and identify suitable accommodation.
- 2.22 Officers attended a COSLA briefing session on 2 June. Most Scottish Local Authorities were present, and several representatives indicated that their Council would be taking part in the scheme.

2. Proposals

- 3.1 That Cabinet:
- i. notes the request from the UK Government to Scottish Local Authorities to provide accommodation for Afghan locally engaged staff and their families; and
 - ii. agrees to relocate two Afghan families within North Ayrshire before the end of September 2021, providing that suitable accommodation becomes available.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 Local authorities are provided with funding to support families as outlined below through a grant funding arrangement. The local authority claims an initial payment on arrival and a further payment after the four month period has ended. The current rates of support are outlined below:

Accommodation			
Set-up costs	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples	Per person rate for singles
	£1,250	£1,425	£2,850
Rent (up to 4 months)	£15 per person, per day		
1 night hotel accommodation (if needed, dependant on time of arrival)	£50 per person		
Baby pack comprising cot, highchair etc	£225 per any child under two years of age		

Integration				
To provide integration support (lump sum)	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples		Per person rate for singles
	£4500	£6000		£7500
Cash Support				
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (Under 18)
	£58.90	£74.35	£117.10	£37.75
Transport				
Transfer from airport to accommodation	£40 per person			

Human Resources

4.2 Support for the families will be provided by the Services who make up the existing Refugee Task Force.

Legal

4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 If approved, this will have a positive impact on the lives of the Afghan nationals and their families by providing a safe haven in North Ayrshire and on the ethnic minority group of refugees already resettled.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 None

Key Priorities

- 4.6 Resettling refugees will contribute to achieving the Council Plan priorities of 'Active and strong communities' and 'People and communities are safe'.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 The Afghan nationals who came to North Ayrshire in 2015 were very keen to work and quickly found employment locally.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The members of the Syrian Refugee task Force have been consulted regarding the contents of this report. Members represent a wide number of internal and external services including Physical Environment, Finance and Corporate Support, Education, Health & Social Care Partnership, Connected Communities, Economic Development & Regeneration, Police Scotland, Department for Work & Pensions, Primary Care NHS Ayrshire & Arran, The Ayrshire Community Trust, Ayrshire College.

RUSSELL MCCUTCHEON
Executive Director (Place)

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Background Papers

Home Office Fact Sheet "The Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme"



Home Office

FACT SHEET FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

May 2021



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Background

The UK has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan, often in dangerous and challenging situations, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013.

The scheme currently consists of two elements:

- The ex-gratia scheme which will close in November 2022 and;
- The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy which launched in April 2021, reflecting the changing situation in Afghanistan and consequent risk to LES.

Both schemes are intended to support current and former LES who have worked for British Forces and to provide appropriate support that honours their service and properly reflects their work and the risks involved. The schemes provide a range of in-country packages of assistance in Afghanistan and, for those who meet the criteria, relocation to the UK with their dependants.

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.

People coming to the UK under this scheme may arrive either as a whole family unit or with the lead person arriving first and their dependents joining them at a later point, depending on their individual circumstances.

Local authority support

People who are relocated under the scheme are supported for a four month period by a local authority who will meet the family/individual at the arrival airport and take responsibility for them from arrival.

The local authority is responsible for providing a four month integration package which includes:

- Reception arrangements upon arrival at the airport including handover from flight escorts and welcome briefing
- Accommodation
- A package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply
- Registration with GPs and local Job Centre Plus including receipt of a National Insurance Number
- Assistance in securing school places for school aged children
- Cash support.

It should be noted that LES 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, so the local authority provides financial support to those who arrive under the relocation schemes for up to 4 months.

Local authority funding

The local authority is provided with funding to support families as outlined below through a Grant funding arrangement. The local authority claims an initial payment on arrival and a further payment after the 4 month period has ended.

The current rates of support are outlined below:

1. 4 month funding package for Beneficiaires arriving either as a single person or with their family members:

Accommodation			
Set-up and void costs (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples	Per person rate for singles
	£1250	£1425	£2850
Rent (up to 4 months)	£15 per person, per day		
1 night hotel accommodation (if	£50 per person		

needed, dependant on time of arrival)				
Baby pack comprising cot, highchair etc	£225 per any child under two years of age			
Integration				
To provide integration support (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families	Per person rate for couples	Per person rate for singles	
	£4500	£6000	£7500	
Cash support				
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (under 18)
	£58.90	£74.35	£117.10	37.75
Transport				
Transfer from airport to accommodation	£40 per person			

2. 8 week funding for dependents joining a family member already settled under the scheme:

Accommodation		
Set-up and void costs	Spouse	Per child
	£1,500	£1,500
Rent	Only for large families	
Baby Pack	£225 per child under two years of age	
INTEGRATION		
To provide integration support (lump sum)	Spouse	Per child
	£4,500	£4,500
CASH SUPPORT		
Weekly cash support rates (8 weeks)	Spouse	Per child
	£43.00	£37.75
TRANSPORT		
Transfer from airport to accommodation	£40 per person	