
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

31 August 2021

Cabinet

Title:	Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme
Purpose:	To update Cabinet on the scheme to relocate locally engaged staff who worked for the UK Government in Afghanistan and increase the Council's pledge to resettle more families.
Recommendation(s):	That Cabinet (i) notes that the situation in Afghanistan has escalated quickly; (ii) agrees to increase the pledge to relocate Afghan families within North Ayrshire from two to an initial five families; (iii) gives delegated authority to the Executive Director (Place) and the Cabinet Member for Place to increase the pledge to resettle additional Afghan Locally Employed staff and their families; and (iv) accepts the need to prioritise the Afghan scheme ahead of the UK Resettlement Scheme

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. In June, Cabinet agreed to take part in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme and made a commitment to relocate two Afghan LES staff and their families within North Ayrshire before the end of September 2021. Two properties in Irvine have been identified and are currently being made ready to welcome the families at the beginning of September.
- 1.2. Over recent days the severity of the situation in Afghanistan has escalated very quickly and the Home Office and Ministry of Defence are now working to get those entitled to a safe home in the UK out of the country as soon as possible.
- 1.3. In addition, the UK Government has now announced a new refugee resettlement scheme that will see 20,000 Afghan refugees being relocated to the UK over the coming years. Local authorities in Scotland will be required to consider the role that they are able to play in supporting this new scheme.
- 1.4. It is recommended that the Council increases their pledge to resettle more Afghan LES staff and their families as a matter of urgency, providing that suitable accommodation can be made available.
- 1.5. It is proposed that delegated authority is assigned to the Executive Director (Place), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place, to liaise with COSLA and the Home Office and agree any further increases in the pledge to resettle Afghan LES staff and their families, if required.

2. Background

- 2.1 The situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly volatile in recent days. Afghan LES staff and their families are increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the Taliban and the need to find alternative accommodation has intensified.
- 2.2 Given the scale of the scheme and the rapid escalation of the situation in Afghanistan, the Home Office are having to procure hotels as contingency accommodation. Afghan families arriving through the scheme will stay in those while more permanent accommodation is found across the UK. The Home Office estimate that there is likely to be the need for approximately 4000+ hotel bedspaces across the UK.
- 2.3 Given previous concerns expressed by COSLA and local authorities in Scotland, particularly in relation to the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers, it is recognised that the use of hotels for the housing of migrant communities is far from ideal. However, due to the nature of the situation in Afghanistan, the Home Office has indicated that there is no alternative to their use.

UK Resettlement Scheme

- 2.4 The Council made a pledge to resettle six Syrian families (30 people) within the current financial year. Cabinet agreed to re-settle two Syrian families with existing links to North Ayrshire before the end of September 21. One family was re-settled in July, and the Refugee Support Team are currently in the process of identifying accommodation for the second family with existing links. Officers made a commitment to review the situation at the end of September 21 before arranging to bring in the other four families in the second half of 2021.
- 2.5 Given the escalation of the situation in Afghanistan it is necessary prioritise this scheme ahead of the UK Resettlement Scheme.
- 2.6 When accommodation for the second Syrian family with existing links to North Ayrshire is identified, the focus will turn to finding a further three properties for Afghan families.
- 2.7 The limited availability of larger three and four-bedroom properties restricts our ability to maintain our commitment to both schemes, particularly in the short term. It is possible that our commitment to rehouse six Syrian families within the current financial year will not be achieved.

Indicative Timeline

- 2.8 The Home Office are looking for further assistance immediately.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 That Cabinet:
 - (i) notes that the situation in Afghanistan has escalated quickly;

(ii) agrees to increase the pledge to relocate Afghan families within North Ayrshire from two to an initial five families; and

(iii) gives delegated authority to the Executive Director (Place), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place, to liaise with COSLA and the Home Office to agree any further increases in the pledge to resettle additional Afghan Locally Employed staff and their families, if required ; and

(iv) accepts the need to prioritise the Afghan scheme ahead of the UK Resettlement Scheme

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 Local authorities are provided with funding to support families resettled.

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 will be 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)

For further information please contact **Robert McGilvery, Senior Manager (Housing Operations)** on **01294 310175**.

Background Papers

None