Information

Sheet Number:

2021-21/190

Providing support for County Councillors

for County Councillors

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| From: | Brittney Strange, Health Promotion Manager - Resettlement |

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| Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:  | Simon Clifford, Director/Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health |

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| Date:  | 02.09.21 |

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| To:  | All County Councillors  |

**Afghan refugee response**

**Background -** Somerset County Council, alongside the other councils in Somerset, is ready to help with the national effort to support those fleeing from the situation in Afghanistan. We are ready to work with the Government on any co-ordinated resettlement scheme to bring safety and security to those in need of our help.

In such situations, central government have co-ordinated well-organised and properly funded schemes to make sure that families are given not only housing, but other support which they so desperately need.

SCC is the lead authority for co-ordinating the countywide response, with the district councils and voluntary sectors working alongside to support. We have a resettlement webpage with up-to-date information about the current plans, what the accommodation needs are, and what people can do to volunteer or donate: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/refugee-resettlement/>

**Refugee resettlement schemes –** There are different types of resettlement schemes for different groupings of Afghan refugees. Somerset County Council’s current work is focused on the Afghan Locally Employed Scheme (LES) which will help to resettle military interpreters and their families.

The Government has also announced the Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, which aims to welcome up to 20,000 Afghans to the UK. We are waiting to hear more details from Government about this initiative but it is clear this will lead to permanent resettlement and potentially to citizenship.

The Government has said people already relocated to the UK under the Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) will be able to apply free of charge to convert their temporary leave into indefinite leave enabling certainty and stability to rebuild their lives with unrestricted rights to work and the option to apply for British citizenship in the future.

Government national spending commitments include:

£12m to schools

£3m to GP surgeries

£5m housing for rental agreements

Further funding to local authorities to support families

**Housing/accommodation –** There are strict rules about the types and locations of suitable accommodation for resettlement. As a Council we are unable to place refugees in temporary accommodation such as lodgings or spare rooms. The accommodation needs to be sole occupancy such as self-contained flats and houses.

We are mindful of local housing challenges and are considering this when determining how many cases we can resettle. We are working with district partners to understand what is possible. Most resettled Afghans will be housed in town centres where they can access specific foods, medicines, and transport to link with other communities. Any private landlords with suitable self-contained accommodation available in Somerset are encouraged to contact us at resettlement@somerset.gov.uk

SCC has already started work on securing private self-contained housing, working with schools to arrange potential places, with GPs to ensure capacity, and with our own teams such as transport etc. We are also looking to involve the Vulnerable People Cell (initially set up during the pandemic) and other multi agency support as required to ensure we can respond to this crisis in a timely and effective way.

The Home Office is placing Afghans in ‘bridging accommodation’ around the country until more suitable permanent homes become available.

In the case of Afghan LES, once we identify a property, we will get in touch with the Home Office and regional partners to match a family to the home. We then make plans for their arrival to the area, which will include support from a dedicated team who assist resettled people to register with statutory services, look for employment, and link with their local community.

We are grateful for statutory, charity, and community partners who we work alongside of throughout this process and who all help to make this possible.

**Donations-**

We have already received a number of very generous offers – from money through to school places at county boarding schools.

We would ask that people donate to charities that help refugees in the UK and abroad through organisations such as British Red Cross, Oxfam, Save the Children, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNICEF, World Food Programme, Refugee Action.

Experience from other emergency situations shows that people are very generous in offering of clothing, furniture etc, but this does lead to a logistical, storage and distribution challenge. We will keep our website up to date with the latest news and highlight what is needed and how people can donate to support our volunteers and communities.

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| For more information please contact:  | Name: Brittney StrangeEmail: BStrange@somerset.gov.uk |