Information

Sheet Number:

2021-21/195

Providing support for County and District Councillors

for County and District Councillors

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| From: | Brittney Strange, SCC 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:  | 21.09.21 |

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| To:  | All County and District Councillors  |

**Afghan refugee response update**

**Background –** Somerset’s Local Authorities are working to support the national effort to support those fleeing from the situation in Afghanistan.

SCC is the lead authority for co-ordinating the countywide response, with the district councils and voluntary sector working alongside to support. There are regular and ongoing discussions between the various partners to determine local capacity and ensure we can resettle people in a way that allows them to access the support that they need.

The key link is the refugee resettlement team at Somerset County Council – <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/refugee-resettlement/>

**Refugee resettlement schemes –** There are different resettlement schemes for different groupings of Afghan refugees.

**The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** was launched on 1 April 2021. Under the policy, any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served. Further information is available here: [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria and offer details - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance)

**The Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Housing Costs Fund** will provide a top up to help councils to meet the costs of renting properties for those who need it, including larger homes for families. This will help give councils the security to make a firm offer of support to take people into their communities and to help them build a new life.

**The Afghan Citizens’ Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** will provide protection for people at risk identified as in need. The eligibility criteria will include those who have contributed to civil society or who face a particular risk from the Taliban. For example, because of their role in standing up for democracy and human rights, or because of their gender, sexuality, or religion. The first cohort will include some refugees evacuated from Afghanistan this summer.

Those resettled through the ACRS and ARAP routes will be granted ‘indefinite leave to remain’.

The government has committed to welcome around 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years and will work with aid agencies to identify those we should help.

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 Local Authorities 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 have had a good offer of accommodation so far, and we are currently processing these housing offers. We have made our first property offers to the Home Office and now wait for family profiles to be matched to the respective properties. We will likely be working toward resettling our first arrivals in the next few weeks.

We continue to have conversations with the districts to determine local capacity and assess resettlement targets. Under previous schemes such as the Syrian resettlement scheme, we would typically resettle between 5-10 families per year.

We will be holding two virtual meetings for interested landlords to attend and find out more about the Resettlement service, how the scheme works, and give them the chance to ask questions about how the initiative works. Full details are still to be confirmed but the first meeting will be between 2pm and 3.30pm on 30 September, the second from 6pm to 7.30pm on 5 October. People can register their interest in attending by emailing resettlement@somerset.gov.uk.

**Help and donations**

The Government’s Help Refugee Campaign website – [www.helprefugees.campaign.gov.uk](http://www.helprefugees.campaign.gov.uk) – features a wide range of practical information and guidance on how to provide support. This includes how to donate goods, services, or your time, as well as how to offer work.

In Somerset there are specialist support groups such as RAFT (Refugee Aid from Taunton) [Refugee Aid From Taunton #raft | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/refugeeaidfromtaunton), Taunton Welcomes Refugees [Taunton Welcomes Refugees - homepage](http://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk/), RAISE (Refugee Action in Somerset East) [RAISE | Refugee Action In Somerset East](https://raise.today/) and others.

Elsewhere, Care 4 Calais has announced it is taking donations for Afghan refugees and its list of priority items is here: [www.care4calais.org/documents/Priority-Items.pdf](http://www.care4calais.org/documents/Priority-Items.pdf) with drop-off points and contacts – [www.care4calais.org/thedropoffmap](http://www.care4calais.org/thedropoffmap)

Nationally several UK refugee organisations are currently fundraising to help Afghans, including:

[www.act.refugeecouncil.org.uk/donation/refugee-crisis-appeal](http://www.act.refugeecouncil.org.uk/donation/refugee-crisis-appeal)

[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

[www.refugee-action.org.uk](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk)

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