

Information and position statement in relation to proposed Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

1. Background

In May 2021, the Government wrote to all Local Authorities (LAs) asking for councils to offer support and accommodation for Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) under a Relocation Scheme.

The UK has been running a scheme to support relocation from Afghanistan, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013.

There is no end date for the scheme, but the vast majority of arrivals of Afghan ARAP and their families is taking place in July and August 2021.

ARAP 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.

Families who relocate receive a visa which grants 5 years limited leave to enter the UK, with an opportunity to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain at the end of that 5-year period, free of charge. This leave is granted under the Immigration Rules and gives them the right to work and recourse to public funds.

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. Families consist of immediate family only – husband, wife and children, extended to grandparents only.

Families would sign a tenancy agreement and are free to move on at any time should they wish. Equally, they may wish to continue to stay in the house once the 5-year period is up. South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) advised that assured shorthold tenancies are what most landlords use for resettled families. We consulted with Rentstart, who would be happy to assist with finding appropriate accommodation, equally accommodations could be sourced through Rent Assured Team or provided by KGE, should the Council choose to participate in the scheme. However, current KGE properties may not be in an ideal location for this scheme to enable easy access to the Afghan Community. There is a larger Afghan Community based in our neighbouring borough, Hounslow. Thus, properties within Spelthorne and in close proximity to Hounslow are considered to be better suited.

Accommodations must be fully furnished, including white goods. Funding received should be used for food storage, cooking and washing facilities but should not include the provision of other white goods or brown goods, i.e. TVs, DVD players or any other electrical entertainment appliances. Those items can be provided through other sources of funding at the LA's discretion.

There is currently no deposits or up-front rent payment available from the Treasury.

In addition, the LA's are to provide a welcome pack of groceries on arrival – the content of this pack should take into account the culture and nationality.

With flights of around 150 people arriving several times a week, in July and August 2021. There will be some information available about the families and the LA will always be able to decide whether they accept a family or not. For example, the information provided will include the ages of children, to help for example the LA with planning for school places.

Families arriving in the UK will be temporarily accommodated in hotels after their Managed Quarantine Service (MQS), until such time that an LA are able to source accommodation and confirm that they can provide the necessary integration support. Wraparound support will be arranged by the Home Office for the duration of their stay in a hotel. The Home Office invites property offers without a particular family in mind. The Home Office team coordinating the scheme will send out the requirements of the families who need accommodation to participating LA's, via SESPM, to confirm which properties are available. The Allocation Team at SESPM will then match families to properties and will make a referral to the LA with details of the family seeking their acceptance. The LA can choose how many families they are able to support.

If additional time is needed to prepare the properties, the Home Office will arrange and pay for bridging accommodation in the local authority area, and the local authority will start integration support while the families are in temporary accommodation.

2. The Support

SESPM reports that ARAP generally have good command of the English language, however their families often require language support. The LA are required to undertake an assessment of each adult's English language capability to determine their training needs. This assessment should take place at the earliest opportunity. The assessment should determine whether formal language training is appropriate, and where informal language training should be used to complement, or as a foundation for, formal language training. As a minimum, adults should be able to access conversational practice to consolidate/complement their formal language training.

Funding is prioritised for participation in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.

The level of the support and funding has been agreed to allow LA's to provide a high level of intensive interventions and support in the 12 months following arrival into a local authority area and the commencement of the provision of housing and support to enable self-sufficiency for those relocated under these

Schemes. Given this intensive provision no funding is being made available for later years.

The LA is responsible for providing an integration package which includes:

- Reception arrangements upon arrival and welcome briefing (currently reception arrangements after period of quarantine)
- 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.

ARAP 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.

3. LA Funding

The Local Authorities are provided with funding to support families as outlined below through a Grant funding arrangement. To be paid 40% on arrival of ARAP, the remainder will be paid in two equal instalments at the end of the fourth (4th) and eighth (8th) months following the arrival in the UK.

The current rates of support are outlined below:

Accommodation				
Rent (up to 4 months or when in receipt of benefit)	£15 per person, per day			
Integration				
To provide integration support (includes element for void and set up costs for accommodation)	Per person rate £10,500			
Cash support				
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months or when in receipt of benefit)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (under 18)
	£59.20	£74.70	£117.40	37.75

ESOL provision

£850 per adult (who requires it)

In addition, the Home Office confirmed that:

- Where families do not travel and another family cannot be matched to the property, void costs can be claimed
- Exceptional costs can be claimed, i.e., adaptations
- An education tariff is not included. The expectation from Treasury is that other government departments will pick up additional costs from existing budgets.
- There will not be separate payments for health provisions to clinical commissioning groups. The expectation from Treasury is that other government departments will pick up additional costs from existing budgets.
- There is one tariff rate per person regardless of family size which includes provision for void and set up costs.
- Payment will be claimed in 3 instalments

4. Experience of other LAs

At a networking event organised by the Home Office, participating LAs were invited to share their experience with authorities considering taking part, it was reported that the ARAP arriving in the UK generally have good command of the English language, however it was also noted that children and often women require language support. Their native language is Pashto and Dari.

The Home Office reports that 90% of women in Afghanistan experienced at least one form of domestic violence, 17% have experienced sexual violence and 52% physical violence. 92% of 15–49-year-old women believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife. Many women will need support with domestic violence.

Many children of ARAP will need support to cope with parental separation, parental death, household members suffering with mental health issues, household members abusing alcohol, among other concerns for their safety.

It is reported that children who join local schools make quick progress in their language development.

ARAP are often well educated, and determined to gain employment in the UK, however their qualification often require conversion. In addition, it was reported that the National Insurance application process is taking up to 16 weeks, with participating LA's urged to make NI applications as soon as possible after ARAP arrive in the country.

Participating LA's reported that their experience working with ARAP is positive. ARAP generally have strong work ethics, keen to start employment

as soon as possible, and do not wish to remain on security benefits, and are eager to give back to the communities that welcomed them. However, due to their qualifications often requiring conversion, they often take up jobs below their qualification level.

MHCLG provides online Welcome Packs for new arrivals, which also includes information about the Covid vaccination programme. A link to the Welcome Pack is being sent to ARAP before their arrival in the UK. The pack is downloadable and possible to read offline.

The Pack provides general guidance and help on living in the UK, however it is not interactive and users cannot for example enter a postcode and sign into local services. It does however in most cases provide national links to where local services can be found in postcodes of interest.

Participating LA's shared good practices and lessons learned, such as establishing Key Stakeholders Groups prior to the arrival of ARAP, including on subjects such as education, medical, religious and police services.

The majority of ARAP are Sunni Muslims, but participating LA's report that in their experience many ARAP are not practicing Muslims.

ARAP require assistance on arrival with NI application, opening of a bank account, setting up utility bills and rent, school and GP registration. The support is focused on preparation for independence. It is advisable to run cultural integration sessions focussing on prevention, safeguarding to raise awareness, and internet safety.

Participating LA's have also been advised to prepare a strategy for dealing with media attention.

To learn more about a recent and similar programme, we discussed the experience of management of the Syrian Refugee Programme for Elmbridge Borough Council's (EBC) with our Family Support Team. The Family Support Team reported that there are significant differences between the two schemes. The biggest challenge with the management of the Syrian Refugee Programme is the lack of command of the English language amongst the Syrian Refugees. EBC employed a dedicated Family Support Coordinator who is a native speaker in Arabic to communicate with the Refugees families.

EBC welcomed 9 Syrian families 4 years ago across Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, all families remain dependant on security benefits. The support of the 9 families required a dedicated time of 1 full time Family Support Coordinator and 1 part time Family Support Coordinator initially, it has now been reduced to 1 full time Support Worker.

Other barriers and challenges reported by EBC included racism within the community, a lack of specific regional food shops within the Borough, a lack of places of worship, and benefit cap challenges for larger families.

EBC have initially decided to not participate in the ARAP due to funding concerns but are now reconsidering this decision due to additional funds being made available to support the scheme.

5. Position summary

The proposed resettlement scheme was discussed at the June Strategic Housing Group meeting, and initial concerns have been raised around the resource required for the ARAP scheme, including staffing and finding houses of adequate size.

Although, there are significant differences between the Syrian Refugee Programme and the Afghan Resettlement Scheme, intense resources will be required to provide both the initial and the ongoing required to support ARAP and their families.

6. Options

Option A – To opt in

SBC would need to deploy extensive resources to support the scheme, that would involve making arrangements for accommodation, including furniture provision, deploying support staff and running the financial administration of the scheme.

Option B – To opt out

SBC would choose not to participate in the scheme and inform the Home Office of the reasons for the decision.