

28 September 2021

Title	Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
Purpose of the report	To seek approval for Council participating of Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
Report Author	Marta Imig, Strategic Lead, Housing
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	<i>n/a</i>
Corporate Priority	Housing
Recommendations	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the participation in Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) in Spelthorne; and 2. To support a policy approach of being open to support in general future refugee schemes in Spelthorne as requested by Central Government, on which detailed report will be provided
Reason for Recommendation	To support Government by participating in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and to help with the current refugee crisis in Afghanistan

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The Afghan Ex Gratia Scheme originated in 2014 to provide funding to local authorities to support resettled Afghan locally employed staff engaged by the British armed Forces and the UK Government in Afghanistan.
- 1.2 The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) provides similar support but to a wider range of ARAP. Local authorities will provide a package of support and assistance to those arriving under the scheme to help them to adjust to life in the UK.
- 1.3 The level of funding and support has been agreed to allow local authorities 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.
- 1.4 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.

- 1.5 ARAP generally have good command of the English language, however their families often require language support. The Local authority is required to undertake an assessment of each adult's English language capability to determine their training needs. Funding is prioritised for provision of and participation in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- 1.6 SBC Family Support Team has the capacity to support up to 5 families arriving under this Scheme, by employing an additional 0.5 FTE of resource to be financed from the scheme funding.
- 1.7 To cope with the significant inflows arriving over the next few weeks, the Government is creating an additional holding stage. After the Afghans families have spent the required period in COVID-19 quarantine hotels, the Government is looking to place them in holding hotels across the country until suitable short-term accommodation with assistance of councils is found for them.
- 1.8 In Spelthorne the Government is currently looking to place 100 Afghans in a hotel in Staines. The Government is requesting for the local councils to provide some wrap around support to the families whilst they are in the holding hotel ahead of moving into temporary accommodation, such as helping the families to register with GPs, signing up with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), placing children in local schools.
- 1.9 Our Family Support team provided support to the Syrian families in Elmbridge and Epsom and Ewell and have good level of experience with providing this type of support. However, our Family Support team are already fully stretched. Given the funding for the Afghan families we would need to resource up quickly with some additional support, which, can be achieved on a short-term basis using agency staff.
- 1.10 Sadly, in the future there will be further requests from Government to help those in need from other parts of the world. In addition to the Afghan ARAP the Government is indicating that there will be a broader Afghan refugee scheme whereby the UK will commit to resettle 20,000 refugees in the coming years. We seek directions on the support of future refugee schemes as requested by Central Government. Further detailed research, including understanding the associated financing and resource implication, can be gathered as schemes are introduced and presented to the Committee for consideration. The Committee is requested to provide a general policy steer confirming that they wish the Council to be open to exploring participation in future such schemes.

2. Options analysis and proposal

Option 1: To opt in (recommended)

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.

The Family Support Team has the capacity to support up to 5 families with 0.5 FTE person employed, however it could potentially support more with additional staff employed.

Option 2: To opt out

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

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 The Local Authorities are provided with funding to support families as outlined in the report enclosed in Appendix A, through a Grant funding arrangement. To be paid 40% on arrival of ARAP, the remainder will be paid in two equal 30% instalments at the end of the fourth and eighth months following the arrival in the UK.
- 3.2 The Family Support Team has prepared calculations of the cost of service required to support ARAP (Appendix B) and our finance team has considered the cost of the support provision as well as the grant funding offered by the government (Appendix C) and confirmed that the grant funding will cover the cost of the management of the scheme and support required.
- 3.3 Further, letter detailing additional government funding of the scheme is enclosed in Appendix E.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1 Spelthorne does not have a large Afghan community, but Hounslow, our neighbouring Borough, does. We propose to source accommodations within Spelthorne Borough near Hounslow, to enable access to the wider Afghan community and places of worship.
- 4.2 Knowle Green Estates (KGE) do not currently have properties in this location. However, KGE can potentially support future schemes for other refugees' accommodations to support future Government requests.

5. Equality and Diversity

- 5.1 An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out and is provided in Appendix D.

6. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The proposed Strategy itself does not have any impact on the Council's sustainability / climate change position.

7. Timetable for implementation

- 7.1 If the scheme is approved, we would liaise with the Home Office to support the scheme as early as practical to do so.

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix A ARAP– position statement

Appendix B ARAP Cost of support

Appendix C Afghan ARAP Support Budget

Appendix D Equality Impact Assessment for Afghan Relocation Scheme

Appendix E HO-MHCLG Letter on Afghan Resettlement and Relocation 130921