

Record of officer decision

Decision title:	Making commitments with regard to the accommodation and support for resettled Afghan refugees to enable an offer to be made to the Home Office
Date of decision:	22 September 2021
Decision maker:	Acting Director for Adults and Communities
Authority for delegated decision:	The chief executive's scheme of delegation SA09; Commissioning, quality assurance and contract management relating to all ages
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	<p>All four of Herefordshire's largest stockholding housing providers have been consulted with and have offered to help in arranging social housing for refugees. These providers are Connexus, Stonewater, Platform and Citizen.</p> <p>Representatives of the local armed forces community have been consulted and have shown very positive support for resettlement of Afghan people.</p> <p>There has been engagement with the local command of West Mercia Police who have supported refugee resettlement in Herefordshire enthusiastically and comprehensively in the past. They have committed to doing so again in partnership with the council.</p> <p>Ongoing engagement is also taking place with Herefordshire and Worcestershire CCG and other NHS partners and voluntary and community organisations. Cross-sector engagement will continue through a multi-agency working group on refugee resettlement.</p>
Decision made:	<p>In consultation with cabinet members;</p> <p>To use social and affordable accommodation provided by registered providers to accommodate Afghan refugee families and to pay void rent costs to landlords in order to reserve properties.</p> <p>To advertise in local media to appeal directly to independent landlords to come forward with offers of housing for Afghan refugees.</p> <p>To submit one or more offers to resettle Afghan refugees during 2021 to the Home Office and the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) by 23rd September 2021.</p> <p>To provide periodical statements, as appropriate and consistent with an agreed communications approach, from the council to residents, the media and local stakeholders regarding plans for resettling Afghan refugees.</p>
Reasons for decision:	Herefordshire is an inclusive county and has welcomed 95 refugees through resettlement programmes since late 2016. From 2020, the council has had to defer implementing its commitment to resettle more refugees, owing largely to Covid19. However the final withdrawal of UK forces from Afghanistan and the unfolding situation amid humanitarian concerns has

	<p>led to the council rapidly reviewing the options for resettling refugees.</p> <p>The government has announced two resettlement schemes; the afghan citizen's resettlement scheme (ACRS) and the ARAP scheme, which is for Afghan people who have been employed supporting UK forces and agencies. The two schemes are now closely aligned and are supported by the same comprehensive financial package. People on both schemes will be awarded refugee status and five years leave to remain, giving them all the rights of UK citizens.</p> <p>The council has received significant offers of support from key partners including but not limited to: the CCG, NHS Trusts, police, housing, voluntary and community sector agencies.</p> <p>Herefordshire's larger stockholding housing providers are offering properties suitable for refugee families, when they become available from their existing social and affordable stock or new development schemes. Suitable properties will generally be able to accommodate a family of four or larger. Properties will be reserved by the council to ensure they are available at the time of arrivals.</p> <p>The council must submit an offer of accommodation and support to the Home Office by Thursday 23 September. It is likely that an offer made to the Home Office from Herefordshire will focus on one or more of Ledbury, Hereford City or Leominster areas. A support and orientation service will be commissioned from a specialist provider and mobilised rapidly, subject to a separate record of officer decision.</p> <p>A communications approach for Afghan refugee resettlement is being prepared in conjunction with the Communications Team, to guide all external and internal communications as resettlement develops.</p>
<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p>All the direct costs to the council of resettling afghan refugees will be met by funding from central government. Under either the ARAP scheme or the ACRS scheme, that funding includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £20,500 per person over three years - £850 per adult for ESOL for one year - £4,500 to schools for one year for each child of school age - Additional funding for individuals with complex needs arising from health, disability or special educational needs. - Funding for void costs of reserving housing for refugee families to ensure it is available for their arrival. - Cash subsistence payments for a period before refugees are receiving benefits to which they are entitled <p>In due course, the costs of rent will be met for refugees by housing benefit. If rent exceeds the local housing allowance rate, the council will pay the top up costs from the £20,500 received for each person.</p> <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A public appeal for landlords will draw attention, including potential negative reactions from some local residents. However, such appeals have been undertaken before without any particular reputational damage to the council. • Use of social and affordable housing from registered housing providers is likely to attract significant public and media attention in due course, with potential harm to the council's reputation. The council will be able to clarify that properties used for refugees would come from the providers' reserved quota, which they are not obliged to advertise on Home Point. In addition, any properties used from

	<p>new development schemes would not be subject to s106 local connection criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be delay in the Home Office matching refugee families to the offer/s made by Herefordshire. The information provided about families may also be insufficiently detailed or reliable to enable coherent planning and provision of services. Any direct costs arising from a delay are likely to be covered in full by the government's funding package. The council will work with its commissioned provider to interpret and challenge information provided on families and to identify needs and risks on arrival. A full health check will be carried out for each refugee by their GP as soon as possible, to ascertain needs. • Covid19 places additional pressures on local NHS services in being asked to provide services to refugee arrivals. Funding is provided under the ARSP and ACRS schemes to the NHS to support its local responsibilities. The council will work closely and collaboratively with the CCG, WVT, Taurus and HWHCT to plan for and manage health needs. • There is considerable local interest in the possibility of Afghan refugees coming to Herefordshire, evident in enquiries from the public and from local members. Much of that interest and social media commentary is positive, but there may be negative and hostile views also expressed. • Offers to resettle refugees need to be made by 23rd September 2021. This is a very short deadline and there is some uncertainty about the availability of sufficient amount of accommodation of the size needed. Any offer made to the Home Office would be subject to some caution and liaison with officials is seeking assurance around the handling of offers by councils..
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<p>To not participate in the Afghan resettlement programmes. This option is not recommended as it would not appear to reflect the interest of many local residents or members of the council. It would also have potential to cause reputational damage for the council with local residents, the Home Office, neighbouring and regional councils and local strategic partners, including Police and the NHS.</p>
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>None</p>

Signed..... Date: 22.09.2021