

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

30 August 2021

PARTICIPATION IN THE AFGHAN LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF (LES) RELOCATION SCHEME ACCELERATION

**Report by Depute Director (Communities)
(Report No. 21/143)**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks Council's approval to homologate the decision to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme Acceleration.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 The UK Government has been operating a scheme to relocate Afghan former locally employed staff (LES) to the UK since 2013. The basis of the scheme is to provide support to LES to relocate back to the UK. Relocation is required due to an increased risk of intimidation arising from the fact that LES have worked side by side with armed forces and officials. For example, many of those who are eligible under the scheme have worked as military interpreters.
- 1.2 On 3 June 2021, a letter was issued by the UK Government to the Chief Executives of all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, seeking support with the relocation scheme. This request was due to the UK Government's intention to accelerate the pace of the relocation scheme following the announcement that NATO Military forces are withdrawing from Afghanistan.
- 1.3 On 30 July 2021, a further letter was issued by the UK Government with an urgent request for offers of support from local authorities. The increasing urgency follows the escalating conflict in Afghanistan and the associated increased risk to LES and their families.
- 1.4 This letter noted the UK Government's intention to work at pace to relocate around 3,000 people (approximately 600 families) to the UK by the end of August 2021.

2. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

- 2.1 Perth and Kinross Council has provided assistance with relocation schemes in recent years. Seven families from Syria were supported to resettle in Perth and Kinross through the Home Office Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS). These families arrived in 2015 and 2016 and are now well integrated in the communities where they live.
- 2.2 In addition, 17 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs) have been supported by the Council to resettle in the area.

- 2.3 From experience, relocation schemes have enabled people to rebuild their lives within Perth & Kinross but have also provided, through their skills, talents and abilities, various opportunities and benefits to the local community.

3 THE AFGHAN RELOCATION SCHEME

- 3.1 The Afghan relocation scheme closely resembles the Syrian VPRS scheme in terms of the relocation arrangements and the package of funding provided by the Home Office. The people to be relocated could be single individuals or families. Family groups may all arrive together, or the lead person may arrive first with other family members joining them at a later date.
- 3.2 Based on current discussions with COSLA, who are working with the Home Office on this scheme, local authorities can match eligible individuals and families based on the size of accommodation they have available.
- 3.3 People, who are part of the scheme, 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. Participating local authorities are required to provide weekly cash support during this time and reclaim the cost of this from the Home Office.
- 3.4 The funding offer from the Home Office, paid to the local authority, includes three main elements:
- accommodation and integration support funding - a flat rate of £10,500 per person, which applies to all people within the household, including children.
 - a weekly cash allowance, for single people or families for up to 4 months or until they receive their outcome of their Habitual Residency Test and become entitled to DWP benefits.
 - additional funding to assist with excessive accommodation and travel costs and for ESOL training (English for Speakers of Other Languages) from the first 12 months from the person's arrival.
- 3.5 Based on the grant funding available the only cost to the Council from participating in the scheme will be officers time in terms of set up, administration and monitoring.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 There is high demand for social-rented housing in Perth and Kinross with currently around 3,300 applicants on the Common Housing Register.
- 4.2 It is our intention, therefore, to source suitable accommodation within the private-rented sector using well established arrangements and networks. Based on our assessment of current housing demand and the potential impact on education and support services, Perth and Kinross Council are in a position to offer to relocate five individuals or three families as part of the relocation scheme.

- 4.3 Through the Syrian VPR scheme, the Council has valuable experience of the work that is required to effectively support individuals and families and promote their community integration. This experience will ensure that any Afghan households relocated to Perth and Kinross will be welcomed and supported to settle here by officers, partners and our communities.
- 4.4 The support role for the Syrian families was initially delivered by Housing Support Officers employed by the council. However, more recently, the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) were commissioned to support the Syrian families and this approach was found to be more effective. Initial discussions have been held with SRC and they are keen to support the council with this scheme.
- 4.5 As there is the potential to match identified properties with individuals and families who are part of the relocation scheme, work is underway with Education and Children's Services to identify accommodation in the most suitable locations in terms of current capacity and support needs within the early years, primary and secondary settings.
- 4.6 A multi-agency group has been established to co-ordinate and oversee the relocation and integration of individuals and families.
- 4.7 Following the escalation of the situation in Afghanistan approval was sought and given from all political groups to write to Cosla outlining Perth and Kinross Council's offer as outlined in paragraph 4.2. This letter was sent on 17 September and also indicated that further work was being undertaken to extend that offer of support, potentially up to 10 individuals or 6 families or a mix dependant on need.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 5.1 Perth and Kinross Council is in good position, based on experience and current arrangements, to welcome and support LES as part of the Afghan Relocation Scheme. The Council's participation in the scheme will confirm our commitment to providing humanitarian support to individuals and families who have worked side by side with our armed forces and officials.
- 5.2 It is recommended that Council homologates the decisions to:
- (i) approve the Council's participation in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme.
 - (ii) approve the proposal to offer support and assistance to 5 individuals or 3 families as part of the relocation scheme.
 - (iii) Agree that further work is undertaken to increase the offer of support and assistance for up to 10 individuals or 6 families or a mix dependant on need.

Author(s)

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Approved

Name	Designation	Date
Barbara Renton	Interim Chief Executive	13 August 2021

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	Yes
Workforce	Yes
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	No
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	No
Strategic Environmental Assessment	No
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	No
Legal and Governance	No
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	No
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 This report and proposals support the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This report and proposals support the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 The Head of Finance has been consulted on this report. An initial payment is made by the Home Office upon the arrival of the person / family and the local authority then makes a claim for the remainder of the costs at the end of the 10-month period.

Workforce

- 2.2 Officers' time will be required over various services within the council to help with the set-up, administration and monitoring of the scheme.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 There are no land or property implications arising from this report

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.
- 3.2 The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.3 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

Sustainability

- 3.4 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council must discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.

Legal and Governance

- 3.5 The Head of Legal and Governance has been consulted and is supportive of the council's participation in this scheme.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 Heads of Service and senior managers from Communities and Education and Children's Services have been consulted on the content of this report.

5. Communication

- 5.1 None.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were relied upon during the preparation of this report.

7. APPENDICES

None.