

Lancaster City Council | Report Cover Sheet

Meeting	Individual Cabinet Member Decision	Date	24/06/21
Title	Participation in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme		
Report of	Director for Communities and the Environment		
Purpose of Report			
All local authorities have been invited to be part of the response to the Government's Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. This report describes the scheme and requests approval for Lancaster City Council to be involved.			
Key Decision		n/a	
		Exempt	No

Report Summary
Due to changes in the international presence in Afghanistan, the Government plans to immediately accelerate the relocation of locally employed staff and their families who worked for the British Forces from Afghanistan to the UK. Families will be arriving in the UK between July and September 2021. Local authorities have been asked to assist, and will be provided with funding to house and support the families when they first arrive and for a 12 month period.

Recommendations of Councillors
<p>(1) That Lancaster City Council agrees to participate in the Government's Afghan Locally Employed Relocation Scheme.</p> <p>(2) That Lancaster aims to offer relocation to up to five families totalling approximately 25 people.</p>

Relationship to Policy Framework	
Participation in the scheme is consistent with a co-operative kind, and responsible Council.	
Conclusion of Impact Assessment(s) where applicable	
Climate	Wellbeing & Social Value
Digital	Health & Safety
Equality	Community Safety
Participation will result in a positive impact in terms of equality, wellbeing and social value.	
Details of Consultation	
In view of the urgent nature of the scheme, there has not been widespread consultation, but the following have been consulted;	

Lancashire County Council, The Director of Public Health for Lancashire, Morecambe Bay CCG, Global Link

Legal Implications

Legal will be able to advise the Council upon the contents of any grant funding agreement and approve the same. If the Council wishes to use its own housing stock to accommodate the families, it will need to have regard to its housing allocation policy. Legal can assist, if required, in respect of the appropriate form of agreement for the occupation of housing by the families.

Financial Implications

The local authority is provided with funding to support families as outlined in the attached Home Office Fact Sheet for Local Authorities and supplementary email. Payment will be claimed in 3 instalments. It is considered that the rates included within the grant funding arrangement are acceptable to local conditions and therefore no further financial burden on the local authority. The additional staff time required to undertake this scheme can be managed from within existing budgets.

Other Resource or Risk Implications

There are no major resource or risk implications for the Council.

Some Officer time will be required to set up and monitor the integration support over the 12 month period.

Section 151 Officer's Comments

The s151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add

Monitoring Officer's Comments

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

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Links to Background Papers

Appended to report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Following the drawdown of UK military operations in Afghanistan, the Government introduced schemes to support current and former locally employed staff (LES) who worked for British Forces, often in dangerous and challenging situations. This is in recognition of their service and reflects the work and the risks involved. Due to changes in the international presence in Afghanistan, the Government plans to immediately accelerate the relocation of staff and their families from Afghanistan to the UK.

- 1.2 All Local Authorities have been asked to be part of the scheme and Lancaster would like to participate. It would see four to five families relocate to the Lancaster district. The families will arrive between July and September 2021.
- 1.3 People relocated under the scheme are supported for a 12 month period by the local authority. This will involve an integration package, and financial support until they satisfy the Habitual Residency Test set by the DWP (which can take up to 3 months). Funding is provided to the local authority from the Government to support families for the 12 months through a Grant funding arrangement, including rent, furnishings, living expenses and integration support. There is no financial burden on the local authority.
- 1.4 The Council previously took part in both the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) so has experience in welcoming and supporting refugee families. 15 families in total were resettled between July 2017 and September 2019. Approval has already been given to be part of the Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS) and to accommodate a further 5 families. The GRS was delayed due to Covid and the first families are expected to arrive from September 2021.
- 1.5 Families arriving as part of the SRP and VCRS programmes were accommodated in a combination of Council Housing and Housing Association properties as well as in the private rented sector. It is anticipated that this mix of tenures, subject to availability, will continue.
- 1.6 There are established networks in Lancaster with experience of providing integration support to new arrivals. It is anticipated that these networks will provide integration support to any arrivals for the 12 month period.
- 1.7 The Director of Public Health for Lancashire has been consulted and supports Lancashire's involvement in the scheme. He comments that arrivals will go through all the necessary quarantine processes and family members would need to be engaged with vaccination as soon as they arrive here in the UK/Lancashire.
- 1.8 Those individuals who qualify and chose to relocate to the UK with their families can apply for permanent residence in the UK after 5 years.

2.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

Option 1:

Participate in Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme.

Advantages:

- Lancaster City Council has a history of welcoming people who have been forced to flee their home.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lancaster is designated as a City of Sanctuary with an aim to provide a welcoming place of safety for people fleeing violence and persecution, building a culture of hospitality and inclusiveness within the city • Support services set up as part of this scheme will benefit other members of the community.
<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up and monitoring the scheme will require some management time from Council staff
<p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further pressure on the housing stock.
<p>Option 2:</p> <p>Do not participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Relocation Scheme</p>
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional demands on staff time
<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient accommodation will be found nationally for individuals and families at risk • Lancaster misses out on additional integration resources being brought into the city as part of the scheme.
<p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputational damage with regard to non-participation. • National government may place families without the planning and support available in this scheme.

3.0. Officer Preferred Option

3.1 The officer preferred option is Option 1 – to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme and to support its acceleration.