

AFGHAN REFUGEES

Head of Service:	Rod Brown, Head of Housing & Community
Report Author	Rod Brown, Rachel Epton, Arjan de Jong
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	N/A
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 Impact Assessment Appendix 2 Transitional Accommodation specification Appendix 3 HMG letter 19 th March 2025 Appendix 4 ARP Funding summary Appendix 5 ARP FAQ

Summary

The report sets out the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) and proposes the Council's offer of accommodating eligible Afghan households and the provision of Transitional Accommodation.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Nominate and Authorise the Head of Housing and Community, in consultation with the Committee Chair, to produce and submit a response to the Government on behalf of the Council, as outlined in section 5 of this report**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 By agreeing to accommodate two families under the ARP, the Council is contributing to the national resettlement of eligible Afghan households settled in the UK

2 Background

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- 2.1 The Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) brings together existing Afghan resettlement schemes into a single, efficient scheme. The Government intends that a single resettlement scheme will improve efficiency, value for money and outcomes across Afghan Resettlement. The Government intends to reach an eventual ending of UK Afghan resettlement schemes.
- 2.2 Existing schemes brought under the ARP include:
 - The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). This is for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles and may include an offer of relocation to the UK for those deemed eligible by the Ministry of Defence and who are deemed suitable for relocation by the Home Office.
 - The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). This is a referral-based resettlement scheme which prioritises vulnerable people and those who assisted UK efforts in Afghanistan.

3 Previous Council support for Afghan resettlement

- 3.1 At the 30th September 2021 Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting the decision was to support up to 5 Afghan families referred from the ARAP programme.
- 3.2 At the 17th March 2022 Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting the decision was to extend the original offer under ARAP to include those also eligible under ACRS.
- 3.3 Since these decisions were made the Council has, with support from Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network (EERN), fulfilled its commitment in full under both the ARAP and ACRS.
- 3.4 The Council has developed good working relationship with EERN and has benefited significantly from the resources and expertise they are able to offer. EERN is a specialist refugee charity operating as part of the locally based charity The Good Company.
- 3.5 Properties being used for Afghan resettlement have been acquired through the EERN, avoiding conflict with the substantial number of residents seeking affordable accommodation.
- 3.6 The Council is also committed to resettling one Afghan family through participating in the Local Authority Housing Fund 3 programme (LAHF3). This programme also includes government part funding the purchase of an additional 5 properties for the Council's use as additional temporary accommodation for local Epsom borough residents.
- 3.7 In addition to support for Afghan refugees, the Council has previously supported refugees from Syria and continues to support those fleeing conflict in Ukraine.

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4 Request from central Government

- 4.1 The current Government has indicated it wishes to engage with local authorities and to move away from a centre led approach to asylum dispersion and refugee resettlement.
- 4.2 Following the recent conflict in Afghanistan the UK Government, working with local councils, has resettled over 30,000 Afghans. Many eligible Afghan refugees are still not yet resettled, instead continue to live in either Afghanistan or in other displaced areas. It is anticipated an additional 1000 new arrivals will be admitted to the UK this spring.
- 4.3 From 1 March 2025, transitional accommodation will be provided for all Afghans on the ARP for a maximum of 9 months. Following this period ARP families will be expected to move to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) directly or via council provided accommodation, with councils funded to facilitate case working support.
- 4.4 The UK Government works with local councils through Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMP) which serves to co-ordinate regional responses to migration issues. Surrey and Sussex are included in the South East SMP, which co-ordinates and gathers data from councils in the South East of England.
- 4.5 UK Government have identified the allocation of ARP families across the UK regions, based on population share up to March 2026. The UK total is 6,720 Afghan people. Of these 5509 are allocated unmatched Afghans for England, the South East as a whole has been allocated 496 unmatched Afghans with London allocated 1095. (See Appendix 2)
- 4.6 On 19th March 2025, the UK Government wrote to all councils asking for Councils to:
 - Consider capacity to stand up transitional accommodation for Afghan refugees, and
 - Consider provision of housing and integration support to households leaving transitional hotels.
- 4.7 A copy of this UK Government correspondence is attached as Appendix 3.
- 4.8 So as to facilitate a general high level indication, the South East SMP asked councils to provide initial high-level responses to the questions raised in the 19th March 2025 letter by 3rd April 2025. This tight timetable meant that without Committee approval, only an indicative officer response was possible.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 This report provides an opportunity to confirm the Council's response to the questions raised.

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Transitional Accommodation

- 5.2 The UK Government have specified the minimum requirements for Transitional Accommodation (See Appendix 2). This specified Transitional Accommodation offered must be larger hotels with bed space capacity of at least 100 with on-site catering facilities, or serviced accommodation in hubs of at least 5.
- 5.3 There are no large hotels with on-site catering facilities within the borough. With the high demand for accommodation of all sizes for use as homeless accommodation, we are not aware of 5 properties which can operate as a hub of 5 units.
- 5.4 Consequently the proposed response from the Council is that we are not able to assist with the provision of Transitional Accommodation, as specified.

Provision of housing

- 5.5 The South East SMP have indicated that if the allocation of 496 Afghans for the South East region was simplistically split across all the councils in the region, then this would equate to each council taking 8 people.
- 5.6 Clearly some councils are better placed to take more than 8 Afghans and other areas, particularly those experiencing the highest homelessness pressures, would be unable to accommodate 8 people.
- 5.7 Given that this Council continues to experience some of the highest levels of homelessness in the region and has an extreme shortage of affordable housing, it is proposed that the commitment to accommodating Afghan households, through the ARP is limited to two households with a maximum of four people.

6 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

- 6.1 Impact Assessment
- 6.2 An Impact assessment was presented in the report taken to Full Council on 30th September 2022. These considerations are upheld for the purposes of this report as families under ARP are subject to same eligibility in respect of housing, securing indefinite leave to remain, the Government funding instruction and tariff, and subsequent support package.
- 6.3 Consideration would need to be given to families under ARP and any impact in respect of having more complex needs and more support in integration. This issue may be mitigated by EERN who, having supported the Council in hosting refugee families, are experienced in addressing the complex needs of refugee families.

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6.4 Crime & Disorder

- 6.4.1 The emphasis on the funded resettlement of Afghan refugees through an identified Government scheme ensures the best opportunities for successful integration and a positive future contribution to the UK.
- 6.4.2 The Council will work closely with the police in identifying suitable property and would ensure risks to the refugee family were identified and minimised and any community concerns addressed promptly

6.5 Safeguarding

- 6.5.1 Any refugee household accommodated through the ARP scheme would benefit from close integration support. This would include safeguarding considerations with a duty to report safeguarding concerns in line with statutory requirements

6.6 Dependencies

- 6.6.1 The availability of suitable properties for ARP families is likely to be a significant dependency of fulfilling the commitment to accommodate families.
- 6.6.2 Working closely with the EERN, including in identifying suitable properties, is reliant on maintaining good working relationships and their ability to identify properties.

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Funding instructions with further detailed information are yet to be made available. However, in the 19th March 2025 letter (see Appendix 3), the UK Government have specified the following and summarised the funding provision (See Appendix 4)
- 7.2 Under the ARP the funding arrangements are moving towards a single integration tariff of £24,110 per person, spread out over three years.
- 7.3 In the first year a lump sum of £5,400 per person can be claimed following the individual's arrival into transitional accommodation. Two further payments of £3,600 and £3,410 will be available in months 4 and 10 respectively to help cover costs associated with housing and integration support during the first year.
- 7.4 Further tariff payments of £6,550 and £5,150 will be available in years two and three respectively.

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- 7.5 In addition to this integration tariff, councils can claim up to £5,130 per child aged 5-18 and £2,965 per child aged 3-4 to help meet costs of education in year one. A further payment of £2,600 per person will be made to Integrated Care Boards in year one to support healthcare upon arrival.
- 7.6 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The financial implications are included within the body of the report.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 There is no legal obligation on the Council to participate in the Government's ARP. Should the Council agree to participate in the ARP to be eligible for the funding the Council will be required to abide by the Government's requirements for the scheme.
- 8.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report

9 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 9.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:
- Safe and well
- 9.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 9.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None
- 9.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** Successful integration of refugee families is identified as being a significant factor in ensuring community safety issues are minimised. The ARP scheme is funded over three years offering reasonable assurance that accommodated families will integrate successfully.
- 9.5 **Partnerships:** The Council is working effectively with Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, NHS organisations, neighbouring Councils, and various voluntary groups, in particular Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network in providing support to Afghan refugees.
- 9.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** There are no significant implications to the recommendation of this report from Local Government Reorganisation.

10 Background papers

- 10.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

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- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme Community and Wellbeing Committee 17th March 2022
- Afghan Locally Employed Staff Council 30th September 2021

Other papers:

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