

Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

Date: 14th June 2021

Report of: Resettlement Manager

Report to: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment, Leeds City Council

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- The Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Re-location Scheme comes in response to an urgent call from the UK Government for local authorities to respond and accept Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) due to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.
- To approve Leeds City Council's participation in the Afghan LES Re-location Scheme.
- The work set out in this report contributes to the Best Council Plan Priorities of Safe, Stronger Communities. Leeds is a growing and richly diverse city, with people of different ages, backgrounds, cultures and beliefs living and working alongside each other. As a city of Sanctuary, we celebrate this diversity and want Leeds to be a welcoming city for all, where people get on with each other and feel part of their local neighbourhood.

Recommendations:

That the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment approves:

- a) Leeds City Council's participation in the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme by taking up to 60 people, initially we would like to take 40 people (8 properties) with a view to sourcing 4 more if we are able to.
- b) The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment is responsible for the implementation of decisions in respect of this report.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

1. The UK Government has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan (mainly interpreters) working in often dangerous and challenging situations, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK military forces since 2013. A Ministerial Letter was sent to Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives on 3 June 2021 seeking support and effective integration of all those LES who choose to come to the UK. However, the clear intention from government is that all those qualifying for the scheme are to be relocated to the UK by September 2021. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan could mean that it is no longer feasible to retain a British Embassy

there after September. Consequently, there will be no local means to process visas for those Afghan LES and their families who want to come to the UK.

2. Following the announcement that NATO military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan, the UK government saw the need to accelerate the pace of relocations under the scheme. A more recent factor for the accelerated relocation has been prompted by the US military withdrawal being extended to 11th September 2021, amid escalating violence from a number of armed insurgent groups.
3. Those arriving in the UK under the scheme will have been assessed as being 'under serious threat to life'. Those who qualify and choose to relocate to the UK with their families are not expected to return to Afghanistan. After completing five years limited leave they can apply for permanent residence in the UK, free of charge, ensuring that they can settle here permanently and continue to build their lives and future here.
4. People coming to the UK under this scheme may arrive either as a family unit or with the lead person arriving first and their dependents joining them at a later point, depending on their individual circumstances.
5. A ministerial letter was sent to Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives which states that the precise number of people, and the timing of their relocation to the UK, will depend on a number of factors, including the wishes of the families themselves. For planning purposes, the UK government is preparing to relocate at least 600 families over the summer (a minimum of 3,000 people and possibly up to 5,000).
6. Leeds has taken part in many refugee resettlement schemes where there are always similarities, but in many ways due to the pace and immediate risks. The Afghan LES Relocation Scheme is more similar to a humanitarian evacuation programme, such as was carried out for Kosovans in 1999 which again Leeds has experience of.
7. The Afghan LES Relocation Scheme is wholly grant funded by the UK government.
8. The first flight to the UK will be in late June 2021. Those arriving will go into quarantine for 10 days at government approved hotels, in view of the fact that Afghanistan is on 'the red list' of countries in respect of the COVID-19 virus. The first arrivals will come out of quarantine in early July to go to locations across the UK. Charter flights will be at frequent intervals throughout July, August and September.
9. The Home Office requires an urgent response from local authorities. Migration Yorkshire will have a co-ordinating roll with the Afghan LES relocation Scheme with the local authorities.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

10. Migrant communities are valuable contributors to the city's economy, culture and diversity and Leeds aspires to ensure people are welcomed and supported. Leeds has a long held commitment to support asylum seekers and refugees and is dedicated to being a city of sanctuary.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

11. Consultation has taken place with the executive members of communities, Director of Communities, Housing and Environment and the Chief Officer of Safer, Stronger Communities.

What are the resource implications?

12. There are no resource implications for the council in supporting the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme as it is fully funded by the Home Office.

What are the legal implications?

13. Local authorities participating in the scheme will be required to meet the obligations set out in the Grant Agreement.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

14. The main risk is not identifying suitable accommodation in time, work will take place with Housing Leeds to manage and mitigate the risks. If we are unable to find suitable housing, due to the shortness of time, this could be a key risk. However as there are already two properties ready we are in a good position, we are speaking to landlords and Housing Associations ready to take properties on as soon as they are offered to us.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

15. This decision will have a positive impact of the Health and Wellbeing of individuals arriving on this scheme.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

16. Leeds doesn't participate in the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme.

b) How will success be measured?

17. The grant funding will include specific monitoring requirements.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

18. Work will commence immediately on the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme.