

Corporate Policy Committee

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| Date of Meeting: | 3 rd March 2022 |
| Report Title: | ARAP/ACRS Bridging Hotel and Resettlement Scheme Report |
| Report of: | Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director – Adults, Health and Integration |
| Report Reference No: | N/A |
| Ward(s) Affected: | All Wards |

Please note: Documents referred to as appendices are background papers which are available for inspection on request.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** To provide an update to members on the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). To provide further detail on the wrap around support provided by Cheshire East Council and partner agencies for 263 individuals from 12th August 2021 to 22nd December 2021 (at the time of writing this report). The report also provides information on the 5 families that have now been resettled into permanent accommodation in Cheshire East. Finally, the report seeks to inform members that the expected support offered by the Council within the bridging hotel is until at least 30th June 2022.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** To acknowledge the high-quality wrap around support provided to date for the ARAP/ACRS cohort within the bridging hotel and to acknowledge this will be expected of the Council until at least 30th June 2022.
- 2.2.** To acknowledge the integration support for the 5 families from the ARAP scheme to date, that have been already permanently settled in Cheshire East.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. To provide members with an update highlighting the good work and the resource required for the ARAP/ACRS scheme. The wrap around support within the bridging hotels is resource intensive requiring various public and third sector services providing daily onsite and off site support. Alongside this there are high housing pressures on registered social landlord for appropriately sized properties. It is felt necessary to acknowledge Cheshire East Councils offer of support to this scheme remains to continue to provide the high-quality work within the bridging hotel and to focus on fully integrating the 5 families as they to continue to settle in the borough.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not to provide members with an update around the work done to date.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Connected Communities Operating model presented to Environments and Communities Committee November 2021 on page 14 it describes how we can support diverse cohesive communities across services with Cheshire East. Supporting resettlement schemes and creating a welcoming, safe and cohesive place for our residents to live.
- 5.2. Following NATO's decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan, a high risk to the local staff who have worked for the UK Government and associated Afghan nationals has been identified. As a result, the Government has placed approximately 15,000 locally employed staff (numbers including family members) under the ARAP (Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy) scheme into temporary accommodation which is referred to as "bridging hotels" across the UK.
- 5.3. The ARAP scheme is aimed at LES (Locally Employed Staff) Afghanistan nationals who were made redundant following the UKs military withdrawal from the country. Typically, these LES acted as interpreters for the British army and now are viewed as traitors and are being persecuted. This is not a refugee resettlement program. The families coming through the scheme are not refugees and do not arrive with refugee status. They are granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. The majority of this cohort has now been permanently housed across the country.
- 5.4. The successful evacuation of over 15,000 people under the ARAP scheme to safety is the largest and fastest emergency evacuation in recent history.

Bridging Hotel wrap around support

- 5.5. Cheshire East Council agreed (Appendix 2) to provided wrap around and use upfront costs to support on behalf of the Home Office the individuals

that have been brought to the UK under the ARAP and now the ACRS schemes that have been residing at the one bridging hotel within the borough since 12th of August 2021. The length of time of this support offer is expected to be in place is still to be confirmed as families are still being evacuated via various Countries. Alongside this due to the high-quality support offered in Cheshire East the bridging hotel is expected to be one of the last (from the 80 across the Country) to be stood down. The only indication we have to date is the Home Office have signed a contract with the bridging hotel until 31st of June 2022.

- 5.6.** To date (time this report was written) 263 individuals of which 147 are children and 116 adults have been supported with the below wrap around offer:

Healthcare

- Ensured health support is provided in the hotel or through local healthcare provided to meet immediate needs including Covid Vaccination and regular testing.
- Ensured all residents are given access to NHS services including providing access to GPs and are provided with NHS numbers.
- Updated families with latest Covid advice and supporting compliance.
- Identified and escalated potential life threatening conditions

Welcome and ongoing support

- Provided meet and greet services as a new hotel is engaged and provide ongoing support within hotels through regular surgeries and advice sessions
- Identified essential and longer-term needs from the families in the hotels
- Engaged with voluntary sector to meet needs, arrange activities, provide local Integration support, and make connections with local groups
- Managed donations and offers of support from the local community and ensure fair and equitable distribution of goods
- Worked alongside other actors in the hotels (e.g. DWP) to act as a liaison point between local and central government to escalate issues Ensure the specific needs of women and girls are factored into the design and delivery of services to ensure participation/access.
- Considered the needs of other disadvantaged or marginalised groups (e.g., LGBTQI)
- Supported families to access local transport provisions e.g., understanding options for local transport and providing advice and guidance on travel around the region

- Issued documents and paperwork as required
- Provided clear, translated information to residents

Policing and Security

- Identified local policing or security requirements (including community cohesion) and work with local policing and community support officers to mitigate risk
- Provided information and support for families to report any incidents of Hate Crime

Education

- Continued support from Local Authority Officers to undertake pre-work with Afghan children ahead of moving into a school environment. This work is essential to ensure that basic literacy skills in particular are supported early to ensure a positive first experience in school.
- Supporting families with school admission arrangements where permanent placements are secured and in transition arrangements to ensure funding follows.
- Very regular liaison by Local Authority staff with schools to ensure placements are progressing to the benefit of the children.
- Increasing the reach of schools in the Crewe area to ensure that we are not overloading certain schools with large numbers.
- Daily monitoring of transport arrangements to ensure that children are safely and successfully getting to schools.
- Liaising with DfE officials to ensure appropriate levels of funding are secured to meet our local need.

Safeguarding

- Offered a full safeguarding support service, in line with statutory responsibilities, channelled via the adult and child LA safeguarding processes
- Provided Safeguarding Awareness Training

Financial and employment

- Supported the families to access appropriate financial support (through own services or engagement with DWP) including accessing Universal Credit and Child Benefit
- Supported individuals to gain a National Insurance Number

Other

- Supported access to dental care
- Worked with the CCG to identify pathways for further trauma informed healthcare provision (including mental health support)

- Worked alongside Prevent Police and Channel Panel Partners where potential issues were identified
- Considered and facilitate access to local education services for children (and adults)
- Ensured access to specialist youth services (including mentoring)
- Supported the families to access employment, working with DWP and with the Refugee Employment Network (REN) who will identify local refugee employment support expertise
- Signposted to and provided support to access bank accounts
- Organised daily trips, sporting and cultural activities on and off the site.
- Worked closely with CE Highways to improve road safety measures to improve access for pedestrians from the hotel to the local village.

5.7. The support provided by Cheshire East Council was nationally recognised. As such, the Council was asked by the Home Office to extend the support provision until 30th of June 2022. The below quote was provided by Colin Parker, Asylum Lead, NW RSMP:

“Cheshire East was one of the first local authorities to agree to provide wrap-around support, the standard and quality of which is second to none. Of particular note I would include the following:

Your work in identifying and going above and beyond to respond to the individual needs of your clients

Identifying health needs, and making appropriate and timely referrals

Counselling clients when they have faced difficulties, or when the system has failed them

Advocating for your clients, and trying to get the best possible outcome for them

Providing wrap-around support to people in bridging hotels has been an up-hill struggle, and the lack of a formal framework, and properly set-out funding arrangements has been particularly challenging. However, Cheshire East has always risen to the occasion, and provided an unparalleled service, (until the publication of the Funding Instruction on Friday 12th November) at a financial risk. I often point to Cheshire East's work at the Bridging Hotel as a beacon of good practice, of which you deserve to be extremely proud.”

Permanently resettling 5 families into Cheshire East

5.8. Cheshire East Council have agreed to provide long-term integration support for five families under the ARAP scheme through an urgent

decision (Appendix 2) which was retrospectively supported by Policy Committee on the 7th September 2021.

- Between 30th of September and 29th of November 2021, in partnership with Local Registered Housing Providers and Refugees Welcome we have managed to permanently accommodate all the 5 families (10 Adults and 14 children) in various parts of the borough as follows: 3 families in Crewe, 1 family in Macclesfield, 1 family in Alsager.
- The families secured social rented housing via local Registered Housing Providers in order to ensure long term sustainability and affordability.
- A package of support in accordance with the guidance is in place with all the families with the aim to fully integrate them by the end of their 3rd year in UK. Please note that all the children are in schools and some of the adults have already started employment or are actively seeking employment.
- Places in schools for the 5 families has been effectively brokered and pupils have now commenced their learning with their new peers. Feedback has been very positive and school leaders have openly embraced this scheme in wanting to offer the best support both educationally and in relation to their personal development and wellbeing.
- All the families are grateful to be homed into Cheshire East and very eager to repay this by becoming contributing members of their communities. Feedback from one of the families was receive through the council's customer service centre:

"I would like to give some feedback on the outstanding help and support provided by the Cheshire East Council and their team members who are actively involved in working for tremendous hours at the hotel to look after the Afghan nationals relocated to the UK under the ARAP scheme.

I was brought to the hotel along with my wife and three children at the end of August 2021 and resided there for more than a month where I found these hard working and committed officers tirelessly serving the relocated Afghans and making sure that we are taken good care of in order to settle with ease in the UK. From the creation of bank accounts, ARAP fund support cards, BRP's, registrations with NHS and home office to other paperworks they have left no gap in our documentations to settle as the proper legal residence of the UK. I was totally new in the country far away from my home, family and so were the rest of the Afghans at the hotel where we all lost our beloved country to insurgents and became demoralised but Cheshire East Council

members stationed in the hotel made our life comfortable and wonderful once all over and again. Their dedication and commitments to their jobs are outstanding and highly appreciated by my own family including many other Afghans.

Our children were provided all the clothing, toys, and education with activities that a normal child in the UK would have access to and even gave them equal parental love and joy to forget about the hardship and struggles they went through during our relocation from traveling along the dangerous Kabul airport routes and flying in the back of frightening military airplane at night.

They formed a great diverse team to communicate, liaise, help and support us living a normal life in an environment which is totally different from where we have all come, regardless of the difference in our culture, religion and the way of life's these individuals integrated with us just like our own family members and even managed to find a place in our hearts to remember them forever.

After settling at my home in mid October, my children are still remembering the kindness and friendliness of these people during their stay in the hotel. They even ask me to take them for a visit back to the hotel due to the wonderful time they had there and making friends with the council representatives of Cheshire East.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Cheshire East Council representatives in the hotel from the deep sea of our hearts and will always keep them in our hearts for being the most wonderful people we ever met in our life's.

Sincerely," Family XXX

- One of the family members that have resettled into the borough has been successful in obtaining Cheshire East Council employment.

Current Position

- 5.9. On the 6th January the Minister for Afghan Resettlement formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)¹. The ACRS scheme will provide up to 20,000 women, children and others most at risk with a safe and legal route to settle in the UK over the next 3 years. It will prioritise those who have assisted UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for UK values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech and rule of law; and vulnerable people such as women and girls at risk,

▪ ¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oral-statement-on-the-afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>

and members of minority groups (including ethnic / religious minorities and LGBT+).

5.10. Over 6,500 Afghan Nationals this year have already being place under the ACRS (Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme) into the temporary accommodation which is referred to as “bridging hotels” across the UK which further permanent accommodation will be also be required.

5.11. Whilst we are still understanding the needs around this population, the measured approach taken to delay and decision on permanently settling more families into the borough immediately is one that is taken based on the following rational:

Housing considerations: The Home Office are preferring four or five bedroom properties for larger families. An email received on 1st December 2021 from the Home Office stating, “We can also safely say that at the moment, we don’t need many more 2-bed or 3-bed properties (suitable for families of 4/5)”. The current Cheshire East Housing situation (Appendix 1) for the larger families is extremely competitive with high waiting lists.

Intensive but high-quality wrap around support: Staffing capacity around resettlement is fully allocated to the support provided at the bridging hotel and ensuring priority remains on sustainable integration for those that are currently being resettled into permanent accommodation in Cheshire East.

Education: capacity within the local schools to the hotel around available school places especially for primary is extremely challenging in managing those families in transition or moving to permanent homes. Careful consideration would be needed for any new permanent placements in terms of aligning housing availability with school places in the local area.

6. Consultation and Engagement

6.1. External consultation would not be appropriate for this decision.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

7.1.1. Legal considerations (dated 23.06.21) were set out the previous report to Policy Committee dated 7th September 2021. There are no further immediate Legal implications for consideration.

7.1.2. Following approval of WARNs, Legal Services have supported the preparation and entering into of three separate Contracts for Services for the Support of the Afghanistan Families Provision, for various contract periods, as set out below:

- WARN 100027: Inspire Motivate Overcome (27.09.21 to 16.01.22);

- WARN 100028: LOL Foundation (08.10.21 to 08.02.21);
- WARN 100029: Refugees Welcome (08.10.21 to 07.10.22).

7.1.3 The Contracts place obligations on the Providers that reflect and assist with the monitoring and reporting mechanisms which are required under the Home Office Funding Agreement (including Annex B Data Sharing Protocol). This supports the Council's ability to meet the conditions attached to those funding requirements.

7.1.4 In the event of the ARAP/ACRS Scheme and/or the Home Office Funding Agreement being extended/expanded, the contractual arrangements will need to be reviewed and any proposed consequent contract extensions/renewals need to be made in accordance with, and in consideration of, the Contract Procedure Rules and Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

7.2. Finance

These schemes are fully funded from specific ring-fenced home office grants.

Claims have been made in accordance with the funding instructions (included in the appendices) and we're currently anticipating the first instalment payments from the home office. Supplementary Revenue Estimates will be completed for the grant income to ensure that the appropriate governance is in place.

Wrap Around Support

The tariff for wrap around support is £28 per day, per individual supported. CEC's responsibility and therefore funding eligibility ends once the individual leaves the bridging accommodation.

The grant claim submitted in November was for approximately £220k. Further grant claims will be submitted up until the wrap around support ceases.

Relocation Support

There is a separate funding tariff to cover the costs of permanently resettled families:

| Funding Year | Tariff per individual (£) |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Year1 | 10,500 |
| Year2 | 6,000 |
| Year3 | 4,020 |

In addition to the tariff, for each adult resettled we receive a one-off £850 for English language learning support. The school aged children attract an educational tariff, in lieu of the AWPU which their school would have missed out on due them enrolling mid-academic year. This educational tariff will be transferred to the relevant school once received (and after enrolment).

Both grant funds and their associated expenditure are being monitored. We have separate cost codes set up in the accounts to capture the relevant expenditure and income. Current forecasts anticipate that the funding tariffs will be sufficient to meet our current commitments, so there are no financial implications or changes required to the MTFs as a result of the recommendations in this report.

Specific funding to support education has been made available which will come into the Local Authority on a quarterly basis. Our initial allocation was £63,700. A detailed breakdown of incurred costs has been returned to the DfE as required to the value of £80,000 and an exceptional case has been made for funding to cover the difference in these two amounts. The key reason for the higher costs is the need for dedicated transport to schools.

7.3. Policy

No policy implications have been identified at this stage

7.4. Equality

Equality impact assessment is not required.

7.5. Human Resources

Two additional Community Liaison Officers have been recruited to support is additional demand on the Communities service. A number of staff have also had to be re-assigned from traditional duties to support the bridging hotel demands

7.6. Risk Management

Financial risks – no funds received from the Home Office to date, although initial claim has been committed and we are funded per person per day at the bridging hotel, if capacity reduces as will the funding

Housing risks – The need for larger family accommodation is growing in Cheshire East and availability is limited, as outlined in Appendix one, to prioritise housing for this scheme will mean that current Cheshire East residents will have to wait longer for available properties, including those families who are threatened with homelessness.

Affordability is an issue within the private rented sector, especially for larger families who are reliant on benefits and are restricted on the level of rent they can pay under the Local Housing Allowance. Whilst the Government will pay over the Local Housing Allowance levels, this is only for a period of 3 years. Our experience with other schemes is that families then have to apply for social rented housing.

Adult Safeguarding concerns/incidents can occur in any setting and the potential for such issues to be raised within the Hotel setting remains. Some issues may be raised due to historical trauma, some due to incidents of power, coercion and control, or some due to Hate Crime, Exploitation or Radicalisation. The Wrap Around Support has enabled such incidents to be escalated quickly and appropriate advice and support has been provided. Bespoke Safeguarding Training has been provided on site to enable individuals to understand what is abuse and how to report it.

7.7. Rural Communities

This does not have rural implications

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

Early Help and Prevention Services have supported the families at the hotel since they arrived in August 2021. Initially daily support was offered from a number of Early Help Staff, this reduced at the start of November as the children were identified school and Nursery places. We currently offer Early Help Support every day however, 2 days on site, 3 days virtually.

Demand on the Early Help and Prevention services to help provide the ongoing wrap around support and coordination that is required both onsite and offsite with only temporary arrangements in place and no capacity for cover

On-going support has been offered to the 5 families who have settled in Cheshire East – each having their own Family Support Worker to ensure wrap around support is continuing while they settle into their community.

7.9. Public Health

COVID-19 outbreak was reported within the bridging hotel on 03/01/2022. Infection rates are high across the Country and the outbreak management plan has been implemented. This did cause staffing capacity issues and required additional security.

7.10. Climate Change

No climate change implications are expected.

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| Access to Information | |
| Contact Officer: | Position: Community Development Manager Contact Name: Dan Coyne Telephone: 07816144062 Email: Daniel.Coyne@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | The following appendices are not attached to this report but are available for inspection as background papers: |

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| | <p>Appendix 1 - Housing Demands across Cheshire East</p> <p>Appendix 2 - ODR for bridging hotel wrap around support and upfront costs</p> <p>Appendix 3 - 2021 22 - ARAP-ACRS HOTEL WRAPAROUND SUPPORT Funding Instruction.V1.0docx</p> <p>Appendix 4 - 2021 11 18 Final ACRS-ARAP LA Funding Instruction v1.0</p> |
| <p>Backgr ound Papers:</p> | <p>Policy Committee on the 7th September 2021 acknowledge and supported the urgent decision made to provide permanent accommodation for up to 5 families.</p> <p>Item 31 “<i>Reporting of Urgent Decisions</i>”</p> <p>http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=959&MId=8660&Ver=4</p> <p>Connected Communities Operating Model</p> <p>https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s90008/Communities%20Team%20Update.pdf</p> |