



Portfolio Holder Report

The portfolio holder will make a decision on this item after seven days have elapsed (including the date of publication).

Report of:	Portfolio Holder	Date of publication
Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities	Councillor Roger Berry, Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder	23 September 2021

Participation in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme and Operation Warm Welcome

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 All local authorities have been invited to be part of the relocation element of the Government's Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). The relocation element of this policy is the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme and Operation Warm Welcome. This report describes the LES Scheme and requests approval for Wyre Council to be involved.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 The resettlement of UK Government supported Afghan Nationals in Wyre.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Council agrees to support the Government's Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme, Operation Warm Welcome and associated resettlement schemes for vulnerable Afghan nationals and we enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Lancashire County Council to deliver such schemes.
- 3.2 That Wyre initially aims to support the relocation of five families under LES and associated Afghan resettlement schemes.

4. Background

- 4.1** 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. This is in recognition of their service and reflects the work they conducted and the risks involved.
- 4.2** Those arriving in the UK under the LES 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 indefinite leave to remain they can apply for permanent residence in the UK ensuring that they can settle here permanently and continue to build their lives and future here.
- 4.3** All Local Authorities have been asked to support the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme and Operation Warm Welcome.
- 4.4** Under the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme people relocated under the scheme are supported for a twelve month period by the local authority. This will involve an integration package that includes:
- accommodation
 - a package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply
 - registration with GPs and local Job Centre Plus including receipt of a National Insurance Number
 - assistance in securing school places for school aged children
 - financial support until they satisfy the Habitual Residency Test set by the DWP (which can take up to 3 months).
- 4.5** Funding is provided to participating local authorities from the Government to support families. There is no financial burden on local authorities. Lancashire County Council will hold a Lancashire allocation of funding and participating District Councils, following the agreement of an MOU, will invoice for costs according to an agreed funding schedule.
- 4.6** We are advised that the majority of LES Scheme supported Afghans are likely to be young couples or families, with an average family size of five (majority young children). The individuals are unlikely to have a high level of complex medical issues. Most of the husbands speak good English and are keen to work; most will have Pashto as a first language.
- 4.7** Operation Warm Welcome is the wider name given to the significant cross-government effort under way to ensure Afghans arriving in the UK receive the vital support they need to rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate into their local communities.
- 4.8** The Council previously took part in the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) and so has experience in welcoming and supporting refugee families.

To date the council has supported 11 Syrian families, five arrived in 2017 and a further five arrived in 2019. Support was provided to another family following a specific request for assistance which we were able to meet. A further cohort of families expected in 2021 did not arrive as planned owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 4.9** A successful network of agencies, providing support, has been established in Wyre (and across the wider Lancashire area) to provide integration support to new arrivals. It is anticipated that these networks will provide integration support to any arrivals under LES.
- 4.10** All arrivals will be co-ordinated with colleagues from Lancashire County Council. Engagement with Fylde Coast Clinical Commissioning Group has taken place. A Fylde Coast multi-agency forum attended by the County Council, CCG, neighbouring Councils and other appropriate partners from the Voluntary, Community Faith and Social Enterprise Sector has been established.

5. Key issues and proposals

- 5.1** That the Council agrees to participate in the Government's Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Scheme and Operation Warm Welcome.
- 5.2** The key limiting factor for the resettlement of Afghan households in the Borough is likely to be access to appropriate housing. As recorded in the latest Census of Population (2011) Wyre has a very high rate of home ownership (78.1%) and low rates of social housing (7.2%) and privately rented properties (13.5%). This serves to create some pressure within our housing market. Despite this, we are confident that we can source at least five properties in the Borough to support this programme.
- 5.3** That Wyre initially aims to support the relocation of five families under LES or other schemes associated with Operation Warm Welcome.

6. Delegated functions

- 6.1** The matters referred to in this report are considered under the following executive function delegated to the Portfolio Holder Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety (as set out in Part 3 of the council's constitution): "to consider matters relating to homeless people and vulnerable people in the borough".

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	There is to be no financial burden on participating local authorities. All costs associated with the LES Scheme are to be met by a specific Home Office funding package. Lancashire County Council will hold a Lancashire allocation of funding and participating District Councils, following the agreement of an MOU, will invoice for costs according to an agreed funding schedule.

Legal	A legal agreement is currently being negotiated and will be signed prior to commencement. Local Authorities participating in the scheme will be required to meet obligations set out in a funding instruction.
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Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	x
sustainability	x
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
ICT	x
data protection	x

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

report author	telephone no.	email	date
Mark Broadhurst	01253 887433	Mark.broadhurst@wyre.gov.uk	09/09/2021

List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
None		

List of appendices

None

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