

AFGHAN LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF (LES) SCHEME

July 2021

**INTRODUCTION**

The UK has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan, often in dangerous and challenging situations, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013.

The scheme currently consists of two elements:

- The ex-gratia scheme and;
- The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) which launched in April 2021, reflecting the changing situation in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of the Ministry of Defence and consequent risk to LES.

Both schemes are intended to support current and former LES who have worked for British Forces and to provide appropriate support that honours their service and properly reflects their work and the risks involved. The schemes provide a range of in-country packages of assistance in Afghanistan or, for those who meet the criteria, relocation to the UK with their dependants with 5 years limited leave to remain.

Those who qualify and choose to relocate to the UK with their families are not expected to return to Afghanistan. After completing the five years limited leave, they can apply for permanent residence in the UK, ensuring that they can settle permanently and continue to build their lives and future.

OVERVIEW OF PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL'S CURRENT ENGAGEMENT IN EXISTING SCHEMES

- **Ex-gratia Scheme** - PCC participated in this Home Office scheme from November 2014 to August 2016. We welcomed 84 individuals (16 households) to Plymouth in total as part of this scheme.
- **Refugee Resettlement Schemes** – in 2015 there was a national commitment to resettle 23,000 vulnerable families and child refugees with their families in the Middle-East and North Africa to the UK. Plymouth met its commitment to resettle 200 people in April 2021. The Home Office (HO) have confirmed that Refugee Resettlement will be a priority for them in the future. Plymouth has committed to resettling between 30 – 60 people. Eight people have arrived so far.
 - The Refugee Integration Service (RIS) has been commissioned to provide housing; integration and arrival support; deliver English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) provision; support access to the labour market; develop community cohesion initiatives. This contract is delivered by Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH), REC (Racial Equality Council), START and ODILS Learning Foundation.

NEW ARAP SCHEME – LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT

People who are relocated under the scheme have a financial support package for a 12-month period provided to the local authority to meet the family/individual at the arrival airport and take responsibility for their support post arrival.

The local authority is then responsible for providing a 12-month integration package.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognising that: this is a high priority for the Home Office; PCC has previously participated in this scheme; and that Plymouth has strong connections with the Armed Forces, ongoing involvement in the scheme would support the Home Office's objectives of ensuring a safe route of passage for the most vulnerable migrants and PCC's Welcoming City agenda.
- It is recommended that;
 - PCC relocate the dependent families of any individuals that were previously relocated in the City in 2014. They will qualify for the 12 month integration funding for dependents. It is advised that it is in the best interests of the children that these families are resettled in Plymouth.
 - PCC could accept and support between 30-50 people if they were providing integration support only.
 - Benefits to this approach enables PCC to mobilise quickly and at short notice to support the Scheme (PCC are cognisant that the HO have urgent timescales for resettlement of this population). Relying on limited availability and access to private rented sector accommodation may preclude Plymouth from participating in the scheme.
- PCC will balance its commitments to deliver the Refugee Resettlement Scheme alongside the ARAP scheme.