

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	14 December 2022
Title of Report:	The Support the Council is Providing to Refugees from Syria/ Afghanistan/ Ukraine and Asylum Seekers
Lead Member:	Councillor Rebecca Smith (Cabinet Member for Homes & Communities)
Lead Strategic Director:	Anna Coles (Interim Strategic Director for People)
Author:	Jessica Dann
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Your Reference:	JD 14/12/22
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Briefing on the managed migration schemes for refugees within Plymouth, includes asylum seekers, for Councillors to note. There are no new recommendations included as a result of this report, purpose is to note for information only.

Recommendations and Reasons

No recommendations, for information only

Alternative options considered and rejected

N/A

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Contribution to :-

- *A friendly welcoming city*
- *An exciting and cultural place to live*
- *Delivering good quality, green homes*
- *Ensuring decent education*

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Grant funded activity

Financial Risks

No immediate financial risk as 3 and 5 year funding across ARAP/ACRS and SVPRS schemes.

Homes for Ukraine provides funding and the Home Office is currently working with Local Authorities to understand the full financial implications.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct carbon /environmental impacts arising

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

No other implications

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin		Leg		Mon Off		HR		Asset s		Strat Proc	
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Matt Garrett											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 06/12/2022											
Cabinet Member approval: [electronic signature (or typed name and statement of 'approved by email/verbally')] Councillor Smith											
Date approved: 06/12/2022											

1. Introduction

This report seeks to inform the committee regarding the current Resettlement Schemes undertaken by the Council.

The Council currently participates in 4 Resettlement Schemes:-
Syrian Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS)
Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)
Homes for Ukraine

2. Syrian Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS)

Following an executive decision Plymouth committed to welcoming 200 people (approx. 50 families) under these schemes, with the final families resettled in September 2021. In total we were able to welcome 211 people via this scheme to support the Home Office to meet its 20,000 person target. This scheme is no longer operational and therefore we have not accepted any further families post 2021.

3. Afghan Home Office Pathways in Plymouth

Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) ARAP and ACRS are Home Office managed migration schemes to relocate both Afghan Civilian Personnel who have been employed by the Ministry of Defence in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013 and Afghan Citizens who may be at particular risk because they have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk. People arriving through these schemes receive Indefinite Leave to Remain, which will enable them to apply for British Citizenship after 5 years of continuous residency in the UK.

An Exec Decision was made in October 2021 *that Plymouth City Council will resettle up to 50 people per year for the duration of the Schemes to support the Home Office to meet its target of 20,000 Afghans across a 5 year period. This is reviewed annually.*

There have been 53 people (12 families) resettled to date.

The Home Office has proposed a fully funded package for resettlement to support families in their initial three years post arrival to the UK. The tariff is £20,000 per person with the majority of funding received in the first year and then staggered across the final 2 years to reflect the lessening support needs as families integrate into life in the UK.

Families are accommodated within the private housing sector at Local Housing Allowance rates to ensure properties are affordable for families. There are substantial benefits to encourage landlords to participate in the scheme including contribution to minor improvements (e.g. heating/decorating) to ensure the property is fit for rental, void costs to cover council tax and rent whilst awaiting arrival, 2 months' rent in advance and deposit. We have been able to improve the standard of a number of properties in this way having a positive impact on the private rental sector when the families decide to move on. Further funding is available to landlords offering 4+ bed properties to mitigate the impact of the benefits cap and housing improvements required to accommodate a particular need.

The Refugee Integration Service (RIS) has been commissioned to provide housing; integration and arrival support, support access to the labour market as well as develop community cohesion initiatives. This contract is held by Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH) and is supported by three other providers; REC (Racial Equality Council) START and Open Doors International Language School

(ODILS). This ensures that families arriving receive the support they need to integrate on arrival to Plymouth.

In recent months it has been increasingly more challenging to source affordable accommodation to meet the needs of these families. This is despite the fact that there are still a large number of people that were originally part of the evacuation during June-September 2021 that are still residing in Home Office designated hotels for Afghan citizens outside of Plymouth. The scheme enables Local Authorities (LAs) to apply for additional funding for rent 'top-ups' for 3+ bed properties to incentivise Landlords to participate in the scheme. The Council also offers further incentives for Landlords such as void payments whilst awaiting an allocation of a family, 2 months rent in advance, paid deposit and money towards small renovation works to ensure the property meets rental standards.

Costs associated with these and the SVRS schemes have been and will continue to be met by specific Home Office Funding packages. The Home Office has committed to retaining the existing funding provision it uses for other Refugee Resettlement Schemes to support those being relocated by Local Authorities under ARAP and ACRS.

Households will be supported for the first 3 years post arrival at £20,000 per person through ARAP/ACRS and 5 years under SVPRS.

4. Refugee Integration Service (RIS)

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 as well as develop community cohesion initiatives. This contract is held by Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH) and is supported by three other providers; REC (Racial Equality Council) START and Open Doors International Language School. The contract also provides some funding to British Red Cross to support provision of legal advice for refugees relating to travel documents and further leave to remain applications.

A minimum of 8 hours ESOL provision is required by the HO for the first 12 months. Plymouth is fortunate enough to have a dedicated ESOL provider through Open Doors International Language School. City College offer vocational ESOL courses once English levels have improved and can accommodate 16-19 year olds. Women with younger children and limited access to crèche facilities were hindered by their ability to attend ESOL classes. These are offered through the core Adult Education Budget. Annual additional funding has been made available through the schemes to support provision of women only classes with an on-site crèche and family activities to continue learning throughout school holidays.

Children of school-age are accommodated in mainstream education. Most children have settled well, primary schools in particular have been receptive to welcoming those arriving through the schemes.

5. Homes for Ukraine

Councils have a critical role to play in the success of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and are uniquely placed to support local communities to offer people from Ukraine the warmest possible welcome to the UK.

The Scheme enables local residents to sponsor Ukrainian applicants to host them as guests within their home for a minimum of 6 months which can continue for 12 months.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched on 14 March 2022. The scheme is open to Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and also to their immediate family members who may be of other nationalities, to be sponsored to come to the UK.

Applicants can apply from Ukraine or from any other third country. The number of people who can access this scheme is uncapped and is dependent on the capacity of the sponsors who come forward. Guests will be able to live and work in the UK for up to 3 years and access benefits, healthcare, employment, and other support.

Those arriving need to meet standard security checks prior to being issued with a visa. Sponsors and all adults in sponsors' households will also be subject to initial Police National Computer (PNC). LA's are responsible for initial checks, including at least one in person visit, payments to sponsors, ongoing support, school places, and information about the local area and re-matching for the guest following termination of the host placement.

To date 166 Ukrainians have arrived and are currently still staying in Plymouth. 136 have arrived as a family/group and 30 have arrived as individuals. 61 families/groups have arrived and are currently staying in Plymouth.

The total number of adults that have arrived is 113. The total number of children that have arrived is 53.

There are currently 97 active hosts.

Since the ability to re-match guests has been made available, 16 re-matches have been completed. Of those guests, 5 guests have been re-matched from other Councils to Plymouth City Council. We are currently working on a further several rematches both within the city and transfers from other local authorities to Plymouth.

The government is providing funding at a rate of £10,500 per person to councils to enable them to provide support to families to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities. This funding is un-ring-fenced, and matches the tariff offered under the first year of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), although the role of councils will be different.

To encourage hosts to continue accommodating guests beyond the initial 6-month period the Council has agreed a payment of £150 per month from the Council in addition to the £350 monthly payment received from Home Office funding. This means hosts will be entitled to £500 per month from 6 month onwards. Contact made with hosts once they have reached 4 months has suggested that most people wish to continue the arrangement with their guests. This further supports the Council commitment to ensure that Plymouth is a Welcoming City.

There is also a flexible fund available to guests that are moving onto Private Rented accommodation. This is to support with Rent In Advance and deposits, alongside any additional goods they may need to move into a new home. The amount claimable is up to £1500 for families and £1000 for singles.

Support has been commissioned via the Refugee Integration Service to support both hosts and new arrivals. We are working closely with the Voluntary Community Sector to deliver this. This includes a Host Support and Liaison Officer, arrival and integration support for guests, trauma-informed training for hosts, Ukrainian community development and an employment mentor.

Education Support is being provided by the Ethnic Minority Achievement team for children under 16. There is one family with children with SEND and we are working closely with relevant council departments to ensure these children are assessed and allocated appropriate support as efficiently as possible. Children between the ages of 16-18 are being offered English lessons through Suzanne Sparrow Language School until they are able to join City College in September.

6. Asylum Seekers

Plymouth has been an asylum seeker dispersal area for over 20 years. Dispersal Accommodation – either licensed or non-licensed (where smaller than 5 beds) Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) and are used to accommodate families and singles.

As of September 2022 there were 348 asylum seekers accommodated in the city in 86 properties. Plymouth is the second largest dispersal area in the South West. There are currently no designated contingency hotels for asylum seekers in the city. There are hotels in Ilfracombe, Paignton, Tiverton and Torbay.

Asylum Seeker accommodation is required by the Home Office to house individuals whilst they are awaiting a decision on their asylum applications. During this time asylum seekers have no recourse to public funds and are financially supported by the Home Office who provide accommodation and weekly allowance of £40.85 for additional living costs such as food, travel and welfare.

Properties in the South West are procured and managed by the Home Office service provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes.

Accommodation of asylum seekers are outside of a Local Authority's remit and Councils are only required to provide support to individuals in specific circumstances e.g. reports of anti-social behaviour, community cohesion, adult social care where needed and housing improvement if specific issues are reported which would be deemed as a hazard. The majority of support offered to individuals surrounding integration, casework and advice is provided by the voluntary community sector who source funding through charitable grants.

Once an asylum seeker receives a substantive decision on their immigration status they will receive notice to leave the property provided to them by the Home Office. Where a positive decision of Refugee status or Humanitarian Protection is received the individual will be given 28 days' notice to leave asylum accommodation. At this stage they are also entitled to access public funds and therefore eligible to make a homelessness application in the Local Authority where they have been dispersed.