

Guildford Borough Council

Report to:	Executive
Date:	28 November 2024
Ward(s) affected:	All
Report of Strategic Director of:	Housing, Communities and Environment
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Lead Executive Member:	Cllr Carla Morson
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Status:	Open
Key decision:	No

Afghanistan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP) & other refugee schemes – extra support from Guildford Borough Council

01 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Home Office and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have approached Guildford Borough Council to request support in increasing the number of refugees from Afghanistan that we are supporting. The MOD has offered up to 10 properties on the Pirbright estate for 3 years to house refugees under the ARAP scheme. The landlord will be the MOD and the contractor Pinnacle will maintain, furnish and repair the property.
- 1.2 Guildford Borough Council are being asked to support these families for 3 years. This support includes assessing the families' needs and connecting them with local services such as health, education and English classes as well as help find employment. The overall aim will be for the Afghan families to move on to further accommodation following the 3 year lease.
- 1.3 The Home Office often approaches Guildford Borough Council to request our help in supporting refugee families settle into our borough. These approaches are via the MOD offer as mentioned

above, through MEARS¹ sourcing large properties and through the Find your Own accommodation pathway.² At the moment, approaches we have received are specific to the ARAP scheme but we may see approaches under similar schemes such as the Afghan Citizens resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). Each scheme has the same funding tariff and the same request in terms of support.

- 1.4 As a borough, we need to respond to such requests quickly, taking into consideration the capacity of the team.
- 1.5 We are currently being asked by the MOD if we can support two large families into MEARS resourced private rent properties and two families through Find Your Own accommodation requests.
- 1.6 An update report on our Borough Response to Refugees (Appendix 1) was delivered to the Services Overview & Scrutiny on Monday 30th September and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive with no objection to the support we are currently providing to our refugee families.
- 1.7 The link to the minutes of the meeting is below and also provided in Appendix 2.
<https://democracy.guildford.gov.uk/documents/g2950/Printed%20minutes%2030th-Sep-2024%2019.00%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee%20Services.pdf?T=1>
- 1.8 The Executive is asked to note Minute OSS19 concluded with the committee recommending the Executive support the delegation to officers relating to ARAP families as outlined in sections 7.11 – 7.14 of the report submitted to the Committee.

02 Recommendation to Executive

That the Executive resolves to:

¹ MEARS Group is a housing and social care provider.

² The Find Your Own Accommodation scheme is run by the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

- 2.1 Commit to supporting an additional 11 ARAP families in properties offered by the Ministry of Defence, MEARS and the Find Your Own pathway.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Community Services in consultation with the Strategic Director for Housing, Communities and Environment and the Lead Councillor for Communities to decide any further approaches the council receives from the Home Office to support refugees into the borough.

03 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The resettlement team at Guildford is already well established after successfully supporting various families under Home Office resettlement schemes and we will be able to support vulnerable people with the professionalism and compassion required at no extra cost to the council budget. All support is Home Office grant funded.
- 3.2 The increase of refugee households in Guildford adds to the diversity of the area and the families will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work. This results in a vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages. The resettlement schemes present an opportunity to promote community spirit, to encourage individuals and families to welcome and support refugee households and for our communities to be more resilient in times of need. Resettlement contributes to an inclusive borough.
- 3.3 We recommend that delegated authority is given in this situation as there is a need to respond to requests quickly.
- 3.4 Under the Find Your Own pathway, local authorities are only given 7 days to decide on whether they can support a family.

04 Status of Report

This is an open report.

05 Strategic Priorities

Expanding our offer to refugee families further strengthens our commitment to helping the most vulnerable in our communities

and underpins our corporate strategy of being a more inclusive borough.

06 Background

- 6.1 The ARAP launched on 1 April 2021 to offer relocation or other assistance to former Locally Employed Staff who helped the British government and Armed Forces and were now deemed at risk due to the changing political dynamics within Afghanistan.
- 6.2 Guildford Borough Council made an initial commitment to support two ARAP families on the Pirbright estate within MOD housing. These families are due to come to the end of their three-year support during January/February 2025.
- 6.3 Guildford Borough Council made a further commitment to support one additional ARAP family who arrived in our borough in February 2024. This family are being housed by MEARS in collaboration with the MOD due to the large size of the family.

07 Options

- 7.1 That the Executive agree to support additional ARAP families in the borough and give the Assistant Director of Community Services (in consultation with the Strategic Director and Lead Member for Communities) to give consent to any further approaches from the Home Office to house refugee families – should funding and resource be available.
- 7.2 That the Executive do not agree to support any additional ARAP families in the borough and officers will inform the MOD that we are not able to offer any further service under the ARAP scheme.

08 Consultation

There is no legal duty for us to consult on this matter, but we have reported to the Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the Borough Response to Refugees and sought their views on accepting more refugee families. The Committee's response was supportive.

09 Key Risks

- 9.1 The risk to the council, if agreeing to support extra refugee families, is minimal as the scheme is completely funded by the Home Office and housing provided by the MOD – who will function as landlord.
- 9.2 Should the government remove refugee support funding we would expect an exit plan to be provided by them for any families still under the three-year scheme, prior to the ceasing of grant monies.

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from refugee support the council offers. We operate under agreed comprehensive government guidance for all of the schemes. This guidance stipulates information around the provision of accommodation, the initial reception arrangements and casework support that the families should receive including the provision of education and English classes for adults.
- 10.2 Legal implications may arise around the issue of homelessness prevention should refugees present as homeless, and these cases would be assessed by the Housing Team and legal advice sought on a case-by-case basis.

11 Financial Implications

The Home Office provide grant funding to the local authority for each family member we support under the scheme at a value of £20,500 per person. This funding is spread out across three years and is a generous budget which allows us to cover all associated costs.

- Year 1 £10,500 per person
- Year 2 £6000 per person
- Year 3 £4020 per person

12 Human Resources Implications

Support of the additional families will be absorbed by the resettlement team who are already a well-established team providing the service that is being requested. If the Executive agree the recommendations, we will look to recruit one additional

resettlement coordinator whose salary would be fully funded by the Home Office grant funding.

13 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 An inclusive borough is an equal and diverse borough, and we are committed to ensure that all refugees are treated with respect and compassion as per our council values.
- 13.2 The Resettlement Team are fully aware of the equality and diversity implications in supporting refugees and we will continue to adhere to the appropriate guidance from the Home Office as well as our own safeguarding practices.

14 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

No climate change or sustainability implications specific to refugee resettlement have been identified.

15 Next Steps

The Home Office are seeking support from local authorities to help move refugees into more secure housing and to offer them support to thrive here in the UK. Guildford Borough Council already have the resources, team and experience to support this which also aligns with our corporate strategy. We would like the Executive to agree the recommendations so we can begin to accept further families under the ARAP scheme.

16 Background Papers

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria, offer details and how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

17 Appendices

- 17.1 [Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Report: Borough Response to Refugees.](#)
- 17.2 [Appendix 2 – Minutes of 30th September Overview and Scrutiny Meeting.](#)

Report clearance progress:

Your report will not be published by democratic services unless the below is completed and there is evidence of the correct clearance process.

This box must not be deleted and will be published with the report.

Finance	Mark Riley/Louise Kolmar	30 th Oct 24
Legal & Governance	Claire Beesly	17 Nov 24
Human Resources	Ali Holman	25 th Oct 24
Equalities	Ali Holman	25 th Oct 24
Strategic Director	Julian Higson	24 th Oct 24