

SUBJECT: A COUNTY OF SANCTUARY: AFGHAN RELOCATION AND ASSISTANCE

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 15th September 2021

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To ensure that Monmouthshire plays its part in accommodating and supporting a number of Afghan nationals who have worked with the British Army. This is accordance with the UK Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and our existing commitment for Monmouthshire to be a county of sanctuary for those fleeing persecution.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the authority provides support for a number of families as part of the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and works with partners to identify suitable accommodation in the county.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 This authority has previously made a commitment to support Afghan nationals who had risked their lives alongside British forces in Afghanistan serving as interpreters. Six interpreters have been supported as a result of the initial scheme which commenced in 2014.
- 3.2 The decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan has resulted in the need to urgently relocate people, known as Locally Employed Staff, who find themselves at increased risk in their homeland as a result of the work they have done for the UK Government. Eligibility will be determined by the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy. The Home Office will provide funding to all authorities who resettle Afghan Local Employed Staff and this will fund and enable delivery of integration support for families.
- 3.3 The authority works jointly with Newport City Council to support vulnerable people across the two authorities through a small joint team, hosted by Newport. Support workers help families with things like: registering with doctors; applying for school places; help with budgeting; getting to know the local area and assistance with job applications or accessing volunteering opportunities. There is sufficient capacity within the team to support three families over and above those already in the area, if Monmouthshire's commitment extends above this level, Home Office funding will enable the team to grow accordingly without additional staffing costs to the authority.

- 3.4 It is recognised that there may be concerns in some communities about the impact on local public services. While the numbers will be small it will still be important to ensure that these matters are addressed through on-the-ground engagement with local communities. Importantly, there have also been considerable offers of support from people and groups such Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary.
- 3.5 The Council has a Community Covenant in place that recognises the contribution of the Armed Forces. Support for the relocation of these Afghan nationals who have worked alongside the British Armed Forces is a natural extension of that commitment. It is also consistent with the position taken by Cabinet in June of this year, that the authority should be a county of sanctuary for those fleeing persecution.
- 3.6 Officers will engage with the relevant agencies, including our Registered Social Landlord partners, to identify suitable accommodation. This is likely to be the single biggest factor limiting the amount of support we can offer, due to the shortage of available homes. In particular there is a need for larger properties which will be affordable for families in the longer term and have access to the amenities they require such as halal shops and places of worship. Once properties are found, a matching exercise takes place to identify suitable families and support arrangements will then be put in place to manage the arrivals and ensure that families arriving have access to local amenities and support networks.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 There are a number of equalities and safeguarding issues. These include some of the difficulties that will be associated with arrivals living in a different cultural context which could cause difficulties settling into new communities. The majority are likely to be Muslim and there is not currently a mosque in the county for families to practice their faith. Army translators will be eligible for benefits after 3 months residing in the UK which means risks of poverty will be significantly lower than those arriving through the Asylum Dispersal Scheme. Given the nature of their arrival in the UK some may need emotional support or access to mental health services and close links with ABUHB will ensure that health screening takes place on arrival.
- 4.2 The resettlement and cohesion teams will provide culturally and linguistic appropriate integration support, including cultural orientation, employment support and access to training in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The two clear options are either to participate in the scheme or not. There is a strong desire to engage positively in discussions and extend the offer of assistance to people who find themselves in the most difficult of circumstances. Not engaging in the scheme would place increased burden on other areas.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA:

- 6.1 Evaluation criteria will be identified as the scheme is developed. These are likely to include measures related to access to housing, health services and education.

7. REASONS:

To ensure that Monmouthshire is able to play its part in accommodating its share of people fleeing persecution and ensuring that responsibility is shared across Wales and the UK

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The Home Office will provide funding of up to £10,500 for each person settled as part of the scheme to enable provision of support. Additional funding is available to cover rental costs and other living expenses until individuals become eligible for benefits after three months. It is important that properties identified will be at rental levels which affordable for families in the longer term.

9. CONSULTEES:

Strategic Leadership Team
Cabinet
Housing and Communities Manager
Community Cohesion Officer

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

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