

EXECUTIVE ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY SITUATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's constitution gives specific delegations to the Chief Executive in accordance with Section 3 Part C paragraph 3.2.5. This provides the Chief Executive with power in an emergency situation to instruct executive action subject to advising as appropriate (a) the Leader, (b) the relevant Policy Lead, and where the emergency is likely to affect significantly a particular part of the Council's area (c) the Chair of the relevant Area Committee and (d) Ward Councillors, reporting to the Council as soon as possible thereafter, on any items of expenditure for which approval would normally be necessary. This provides a basis for any urgent decisions which require to be made in response to an emerging situation.
- 1.2 This report advises Council on two situations in recent weeks where such measures have required to be invoked subject to appropriate consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is invited to:-

- a) Note the decisions that have been taken with regards to participation in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme as set out at paragraph 3.1.3.
- b) Note the decision that has been taken with regards to a request for a variation to Council's Fees and Charges in relation to an event in Oban.

DETAIL**3.1 Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme**

- 3.1.1 The situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly in recent weeks with Taliban forces having control of the country. The UK Government with support from the allied forces increased their efforts to bring the eligible locally engaged staff and their families who were still in Afghanistan to the UK. Flights from Afghanistan have now ended and the approximately 8,000 Afghans who reached the UK safely are being housed in Home Office arranged accommodation. The UK Government is urging all local authorities to support the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme and identify appropriate housing.

3.1.2 The Chief Executive, after consulting with the Council Leader and notifying the chair of Bute and Cowal area committee and Bute elected members, exercised emergency powers to agree to resettle Afghan families in Rothesay as per the recommendations and arrangements in a briefing note issued to all Councillors on 1st September. (Appendix 1).

3.1.3 Council is invited to note the following actions that have been taken in response in response to this situation:

- Argyll and Bute Council have given a commitment to the Home Office that we will participate in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme, initially accepting three families to Rothesay.
- The Resettlement Team will secure the two 3 bedroom properties and one 2 bedroom property ACHA and Fyne Homes has available and make them ready for arrivals.
- The Resettlement Team in Rothesay will deliver all of the support required to the Afghan families and any school age children will attend Rothesay joint Campus. All costs to provide support will be met from the Home Office funding.
- The programme of support will be coordinated through the multi-agency Resettlement Group which was established in 2015 and is chaired by the Council's Business Improvement Manager.

3.1.4 All Councillors will continue to receive updates on the resettlement programme.

3.2 Event Application – Request for variation to Council's Fees and Charges

3.2.1 Evans Fun Fairs normally hold their Funfair annually at Mossfield Stadium car parking area in Oban, however due to COVID-19 and the restructuring of the Mossfield Car Park they were unable to do this in 2021. In July 2021 they subsequently applied for the use of Lochavullin Car Park Oban from 15-28 August 2021. The use of Amenity sites such as Mossfield Stadium has its own standard charges and would normally cost the Fun Fair in the region of £500.

3.2.2 Argyll and Bute Fees and Charges places a duty on the Council to charge for the use of any car parking bays per day and the use of the full car park would incur a cost of £7 per bay per day totaling over £8,000 for the two week application period.

3.2.3 An urgent decision was necessary with regards to the level of charges taking into account the potential loss of income for the two week period. This was estimated to be in the region of £2,090, however to provide support for the event and promote a wider economic benefit to the town of Oban it was considered reasonable to reduce the charge to the equivalent cost associated with Mossfield Stadium and the estimated £1,500 loss of income would be absorbed within current budgets.

3.2.4 As it was not possible for a report to be taken to the Council for approval within the necessary timeframe, the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services, with the approval of the Chief Executive, consulted with the Council Leader, Policy Lead for Roads and Infrastructure, the Chair of the Oban, Lorn and the Isles Area Committee and Ward Councillors in relation to this decision. This was considered to be a unique situation due to the exceptional circumstances.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 In accordance with the arrangements outlined in Section 3 Part C paragraph 3.2.5 of the Council Constitution the Council is invited to note the circumstances and decisions with regards to the exercise of emergency provisions with regards to two urgent matters relating to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme and the waiver of arrangements for Fees and Charges. Each of these decisions was subject to appropriate Elected Member consultation as outlined within this report.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – Emergency/urgency provisions put in place in accordance with arrangements in Council Constitution.
- 5.2 Financial – Associated costs are absorbed within existing departmental budgets and additional costs associated with the Afghan resettlement programme will be met from the Home Office funding.
- 5.3 Legal – Application of the powers delegated to Officers within the Council Constitution.
- 5.4 HR – none
- 5.5 Equalities/Fairer Scotland Duty – It is not anticipated that any of the recommendations in this report will have a potential negative impact on any particular group or discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or religion and belief.
- 5.6 Socio-economic Duty – none
- 5.7 Risk – None.
- 5.8 Islands – None
- 5.9 Customer Services – supports arrangements for critical customer services.

Douglas Hendry

Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support

8th September 2021

Policy Lead – Councillor Mary Jean Devon

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Briefing to All Councillors

The Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

There are currently two schemes which are in place to support and relocate eligible Locally Engaged Staff (LES) in recognition of their service and an assessment of likely current and future risk to them due to the nature of their work for the UK government and British armed forces in the evolving situation in Afghanistan. The Afghan Ex Gratia Scheme originated in 2014 to provide funding to local authorities to support resettled Afghan locally engaged staff and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme went live in April 2021 and provides similar support but to a wider range of staff.

The level of the tariff and associated support costs has been agreed to allow local authorities to provide a high level of intensive interventions and support in the 12 months following arrival into a local authority area and the commencement of the provision of housing and support to enable self-sufficiency for those relocated under these Schemes.

(From July '21 Funding Instruction and [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria and offer details \(Updated 4 June 2021\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#))

The situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly with Taliban forces having control of the country. The UK Government with support from the allied forces increased their efforts to bring the eligible locally engaged staff and their families who were still in Afghanistan to the UK. Flights from Afghanistan have now ended and the approximately 8,000 Afghans who reached the UK safely are being housed in Home Office arranged accommodation. The UK Government is urging all local authorities to support the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme and identify appropriate housing.

Local Authority Support

LES and their families are accommodated on arrival in hotels and other temporary accommodation where they will be quarantined and take the necessary Covid tests. Once the 10 day quarantine period is over the families are moved into holding hotels until such a time as they can be transferred to a Local Authority. The Afghan Relocation Scheme funding officially begins from the date of arrival in the LA lasting for 12 months.

The Local Authority is responsible for providing:

- Fully furnished, affordable accommodation which meets LA standards. Families must also be provided with a welcome pack including suitable groceries on arrival.
- A package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare, benefits, housing, health, education (including ESOL for adults) and utility supply
- Registration with GPs and local Job Centre Plus including receipt of a National Insurance Number, distribution of Biometric Residency Permits
- Assistance in securing school places for school aged children

- Cash support for up to four months

Relocated LES and their dependents are not eligible for benefits until they can satisfy the Habitual Residency Test set by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which can take up to 3 months, so the local authority provides financial support to those who arrive under the relocation schemes for up to 4 months in the form of weekly cash payments.

Due to the scale of people who have been evacuated from Afghanistan in the last two months, families are mainly being assigned to Local Authorities based on property availability. Afghan families tend to be large so require more 3 and 4 bedroom houses.

Funding

The Integration Support package consisting of £10,500 per individual over 12 months will be paid to the LA in three stages, 40% can be claimed on the day of arrival and instalments of 30% at the end of the 4th and 8th month.

In addition, weekly cash payments can be claimed in the first four months varying according to age at arrival and family composition in addition to an allowance of £15 per person per day for rent.

Similarly to the VPRS scheme, there are £850 payments per individual (19 years old and above) to facilitate 8 hours of ESOL per week to those who require it.

Argyll and Bute Support - Rothesay

- ACHA and Fyne Homes have confirmed the immediate availability of two 3 bedroom properties and one 2 bedroom property. Both RSLs have indicated a willingness to support the scheme.
- Furnishing the property would be the responsibility of the Resettlement Team and would be to the same basic standard as for the SVPRs scheme. The LES funding tariff will cover all property costs.
- The package of advice and support already exists for the Syrian refugee families. It is anticipated that at least one member of the Afghan household will be fluent in English so translated material is not required. The Home Office have indicated that we can make fluency in English a requirement of our participation in the scheme.
- Strong partner links are in place with the DWP in Rothesay. Rothesay Job Centre and Gourock Job Centre share a manager and Inverclyde Council has been participating in the Afghan scheme for number of years including taking some new arrivals in the past few weeks. Advice and support is available to us if we should need it.
- Strong partner links also exist with the medical centre in Rothesay. Unlike the Syrian scheme Afghan's are not generally in poor health when they arrive. However it is anticipated that their mental health will deteriorate with lengthy stays in holding hotels and the anxiety and fears for family and friends remaining in Afghanistan.

- Our SVPR scheme continues to fund 62.5 hours of ASN support at Rothesay Joint Campus. In addition there is a part time Principal Teacher of EAL (English as an Additional Language) who coordinates the support. The support hours for the refugee pupils are due for review as many no longer need such an intense level of support. If we put this review on hold there is capacity within the ASN team to support more pupils who do not speak English and there are the skills and knowledge across the staff team on how to do this well. ASN support would be fully funded by the Resettlement budget.
- There is funding for ESOL classes for adults and there is capacity in classes at all levels in the Resettlement Teams ESOL programme. The SVPR commitment is also to deliver 8 hours accredited ESOL per week.
- The Resettlement Team have just secured £90k of grant funding from the European Commission's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) to fund integration activity in the Scottish Government's New Scots Strategy. Our project will see us work in partnership with Live Argyll, Mount Stuart Trust and Argyll College. Any Afghans resettling in Rothesay would be eligible to take part in the programme which will focus on integration partnering with volunteers in the local community, language, employability – developing skills for work, health and wellbeing.
- COSLA in their role as Strategic Migration Lead for Scotland are liaising with Home Office on behalf of all LAs and have set up fortnightly planning meetings to discuss support and share experiences and learning. We are participating in these meetings.

Recommendation

- Argyll and Bute Council give a commitment to the Home Office that we will participate in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Scheme, initially accepting three families to Rothesay.
- The Resettlement Team secure the two 3 bedroom properties and one 2 bedroom property ACHA and Fyne Homes has available and make them ready for arrivals.
- The Resettlement Team in Rothesay will deliver all of the support required to the Afghan families and any school age children will attend Rothesay joint Campus. All costs to provide support will be met from the Home Office funding.
- The programme of support will be coordinated through the multi-agency Resettlement Group which was established in 2015 and is chaired by the Council's Business Improvement Manager.

Morag Brown
 Business Improvement Manager
 01.09.2021