

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 MAY 2022

THE COUNCIL'S POLICY ON SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES

Summary

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an overview of the Council's policy on support for Refugees.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to attend the meeting to respond to any questions from Panel members.

Background

3. The war in Ukraine and the plight of Ukrainian people seeking refuge in other countries has prompted Central Government to introduce schemes of support. Worcestershire's response to the situation in Ukraine has been discussed at recent meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 23 March/26 April and Cabinet on 24 March (see background papers), and this has prompted this Panel to seek an overview of the Council's overall policy on support for refugees.

The Resettlement Programmes

4. Worcestershire are currently involved in four resettlement programmes:
 - a. UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) previously Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
 - b. Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy
 - c. Afghan Citizen Refugee Scheme
 - d. Homes for Ukraine Scheme

UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

5. **The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)** was launched by the UK government in 2014 to resettle the most vulnerable refugees affected by the Syrian crisis. In 2015, in response to the growing Syrian refugee crisis, the UK pledged to resettle 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict by March 2020. These 20,000 refugees would be part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).
6. This scheme changed in April 2021 and became the **UK Resettlement Scheme**

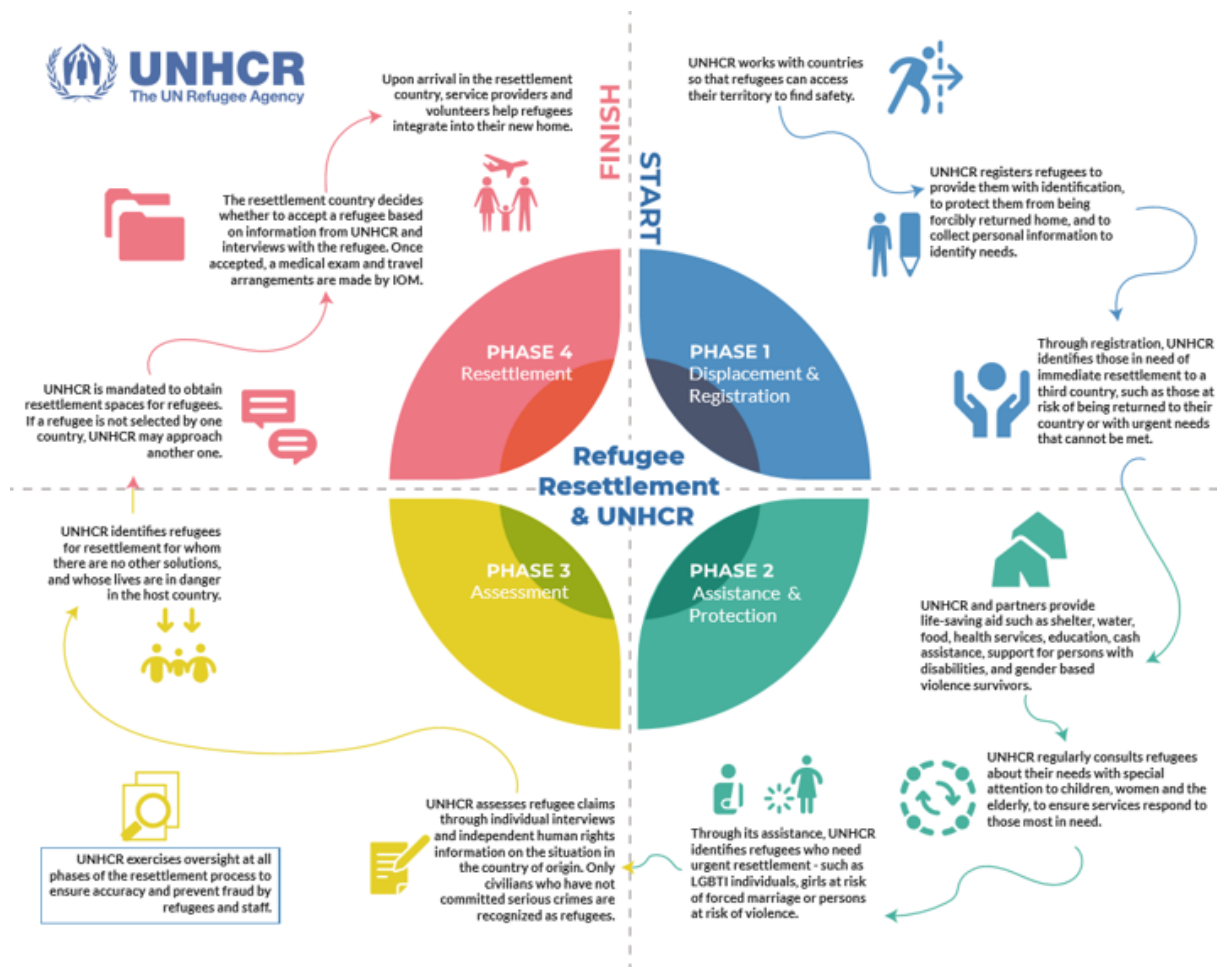
(UKRS) which extended the programme to refugees across the globe, although currently the focus remains on Syrian refugees.

7. The UK Government relies on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help them identify and process vulnerable refugees who would benefit from resettlement. UNHCR has responsibility for all out-of-country casework activity relating to UKRS, and will:

- verify identity and family composition.
- interview registered refugees to determine their experiences and current circumstances in the host country.
- identify refugees with potential resettlement needs and assess their vulnerability.
- conduct a full Refugee Status Determination (RSD); and
- conduct a resettlement interview and assess that refugees meet the criteria for resettlement before referring them to the UK for consideration.

8. UNHCR will conduct interviews with the family as they are mandated to determine whether an individual meets the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee and are best placed to assess their protection needs. Having determined that the individual is a refugee, UNHCR will then consider whether resettlement is the right long-term solution for them, and then to which country or resettlement scheme they should be referred. Refugees do not decide which country they are referred to, rather UNHCR looks at available quotas and decides which country criteria the family best fits.

9. Refugees are assessed for resettlement by UNHCR against their resettlement submission categories shown in the graph below:



10. Worcestershire became involved with the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme 7 years ago. Since then, 102 people have been resettled in the first two cohorts. Worcestershire's Local Authority Leaders agreed to a further 50 individuals as part of cohort 3 which began arriving in November 2021.

11. The Government is continuing to review the programme in light of further programmes that have come online, especially in terms of funding. Worcestershire receives funding from central government on a sliding scale over the five years the refugee forms part of the programme. The current commitment has been agreed with the current funding level, which is: -

- Year One - £8,500 per person
 - £2,250 per child ages 3 and 4
 - £4,500 per child aged 5 to 18
 - £850 per adult (over 19) for ESOL (English Language support)
- Year Two - £5,000 per person
- Year Three - £3,700 per person
- Year Four - £2,300 per person
- Year Five - £1,000 per person

12. It is expected that over the course of the programme, that any extended needs are absorbed into the normal council budgets as for any resident of Worcestershire.

Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy

13. The Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched to support the relocation of current and former locally employed staff by HM Government who were assessed to be at serious risk. Announced in January 2021, this programme has been open since April 2021 and the Councils of Worcestershire agreed to welcome 30 people to our County.

Afghan Citizen Refugee Scheme

14. The Government have also announced that there will be a further programme, the Afghan Citizen Refugee Programme (ACRS) and the Government aims to resettle c20,000 people over five years under this new scheme. This will include the recently evacuated and those referred by UNCHR from Afghanistan or other third countries. The scheme will prioritise those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law and vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+).

15. The Councils of Worcestershire have agreed to welcome 200 people over 5 years. The first arrivals under this scheme came in September 2021.

16. In the Autumn of 2021 the Government requested that the pledges made by Local Authorities for the two Afghan programmes were merged in order that the number of arrivals under the ARAP scheme could be accommodated. This is because many Afghans and their families are still being hosted in bridging hotels.

17. On that basis, Worcestershire's resettlement to date has been 66 in total (since September 2021).

18. The two Afghan programmes are 3 years in duration and funding is as follows.

- Year One - £10,500 per person
 - £2,250 per child ages 3 and 4
 - £4,500 per child aged 5 to 18
 - £850 per adult (over 19) for ESOL
- Year Two - £6,000 per person
- Year Three - £4,020 per person

Homes for Ukraine

19. This scheme, launched on 14 March 2022, is open to Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and their immediate family 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 scheme allows individuals to sponsor named Ukrainians.

20. Children under the age of 18 must be applying as part of a family unit which includes their parent or legal guardian to be eligible for the scheme. That family unit must stay together in the same sponsor accommodation. Children who are currently outside of the UK can use the scheme to reunite with their parent or legal guardian who is currently living in the UK, if they are the child's sponsor. Unaccompanied

children who are under 18 are not allowed to be sponsored by, or reside with, unrelated sponsors, unless they are their legal guardian.

21. Around 150,000 individuals across the UK have registered interest in being a sponsor, c2400 in Worcestershire. People arriving under this scheme will be able to:

- Live and work in the UK for up to three years
- Access healthcare, benefits, employment support, education, and English language tuition

22. Most will be women and children and older people, as able-bodied men aged 18 to 60 are not generally being allowed to leave Ukraine at present. More detailed information on the expectation of sponsor households can be found here. [Homes for Ukraine scheme: frequently asked questions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions).

23. This scheme does attract additional funding. A £350 per month 'thank you payment' has been offered to sponsors for between 6-12 months (6-month period is the minimum expectation set for sponsors). The 'thank you' payment is limited to one payment per residential address and will remain tax free. Payments are expected to be issued once accommodation and DBS checks are carried out.

24. £10,500 per person will also be provided to Local Authorities accepted under this scheme. The funding is "to provide much wider support to families to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities" and is paid to Upper Tier authorities on a quarterly basis, in arrears. Worcestershire Local Authorities have agreed to treat this resource as a pool and distribute across the seven authorities.

25. The Government is also providing additional funding to councils to provide education services for children from families arriving from Ukraine under the scheme. The Department for Education (DfE) will allocate funding on a per pupil basis for the three phases of education at the following annual rates:

- Early years (ages 2 to 4) - £3,000
- Primary (ages 5 -11) - £6,580
- Secondary (ages 11-18) - £8,755

26. Councils have several important functions in supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Councils are expected to offer support including accommodation checks, DBS checks on sponsors and other eligible individuals, checks on sponsors, interim payments for guests and thank you payments to sponsors.

27. The Leaders of the councils of Worcestershire agreed that this scheme would be a 'One Worcestershire' approach with the seven local authorities working together. The County Council is utilising its community services to support the programme including Libraries, Here 2 Help, Adult Learning and the Resettlement Team bringing skills and knowledge together to assist with this scheme.

28. The number of people who can access this scheme is uncapped and is dependent on the capacity of the sponsors who come forward. As of the 10 May 2022, the latest information on households and Ukraine guests in Worcestershire is below.

District	No of Host Properties	No of Guests	No of Pre-school age children	No of Primary school age children	No of Secondary school age children
To be confirmed		3	1		
Bromsgrove	38	95	6	14	11
Malvern Hills	83	216	16	45	26
Redditch	18	38	3	8	1
Worcester City	62	130	3	22	23
Wychavon	107	251	14	34	38
Wyre Forest	33	80	7	12	9
Total	341	813	50	135	108

29. The Homes for Ukraine scheme is different to the **Family Visa Scheme**, which the Local Authority does not participate in. The **Family Visa Scheme** is entirely dependent on whether Ukrainians living in the UK have relatives who want to support those leaving Ukraine. It is estimated there are around 130 Ukrainians in total living in the county according to provisional 2021 census data. This scheme does not attract additional funding, but it is envisaged that Councils will be expected to perform their duties in relation to housing / education etc.

Worcestershire's Resettlement Team

30. Worcestershire County Council has developed a Resettlement Team to lead on the support the individuals and families settling in Worcestershire under the UKRS, ARAP and ACRS schemes. The Team provide support in the following way:

- Co-ordination of appropriate housing and support including: understanding tenancy agreements, utilities, and bills; plus, budgeting skills.
- Cultural awareness and understanding the UK Laws.
- Orientation of area, including accessibility for public transport, religious buildings, and culturally sensitive shops.
- Assisting with access to benefits, employment, training, and education (including ESOL) and higher education for students at post 18.
- Supporting accessibility to all health provisions, including GPs, dentists, opticians, mental health support and specialist services; and
- Providing parents with support for ensuring all children are enrolled in school and helping them understand the processes within a school environment.

31. The team also has an ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) tutor who has continued to provide not only English language lessons, but also creates individual pathways to include well-being, aspirations and goals, employment planning and preparation.

32. There are also several activities and short courses in a variety of subjects to promote independence and building relationships with other refugees. The Team assists in applications for employment, interviews, and transport. In short, the Team help them with every element of their new lives in Worcestershire with the aim of promoting independence as quickly as possible.

33. The aim of the Team is to have families largely independent of the schemes by the end of year 3 (subject to any ongoing needs). For the UKRS scheme the remaining 2 years provide the safety net for those that are independent and with those that require further intervention and transitioning to other support services.

Impact for Worcestershire

34. Worcestershire prides itself on being a welcoming county as demonstrated by its commitment to welcome people to the county through the various schemes. One of the strengths of Worcestershire's communities is the desire to help and assist. The Welcomes Groups, other voluntary sectors, sponsors, and colleagues have all collectively ensured that refugees have been settled into the county.

35. It is fair to say that the various schemes have not come without their challenges. This includes timeliness of notification and guidance from the Government which has prevented plans being pro-actively developed in preparing for arrivals.

36. Access to health, education, and suitable, sustainable housing for those resettling in the County is also becoming increasingly challenging. The level of housing benefit has not kept pace with increased rental costs and therefore finding appropriate housing has become difficult. It is also well-documented the pressures on the health service in terms of GP and dental access as well as access to mental health services. This is only likely to be compounded with additional people arriving in the county through these schemes as well as the general population increase.

Feedback received

37. Whilst it is too early to provide meaningful feedback on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the other resettlement schemes have now been in place for some months. A change in operational delivery, implemented in 2020, provided the Resettlement Team with an opportunity to provide a bespoke programme for each person arriving in the county. This change in delivery covered all areas detailed previously, so the team could provide a complete wraparound package of support.

38. The success of introducing this model of working is illustrated in some of the stories below: -

“Sam”

39. Sam fled Syria with nothing when he was 19 years old, arriving in the UK when he was 26. Sam is a well-educated and hard-working individual, having started University before he had to flee. Since arriving here in Worcestershire he has continued to work tirelessly to pass all his English, Maths, and IT Courses at the local college in Bromsgrove. When the Resettlement Team met Sam in December 2019, he told the team of his aspirations, and then the Team worked with him to assist him in fulfilling his dream. Throughout lockdown 1 he studied a variety of online Cabin Crew courses and in September 2020 he successfully gained a place on a Cabin Crew course in Birmingham, which he passed with distinctions this summer and was offered a place on the Ryanair training programme. He is currently working in a local supermarket and has also recently passed his driving theory, whilst he waits for his training at Ryanair to commence. [\(2\) Home Office - Posts | Facebook](#)

“Mazen”

40. Mazen was a very successful journalist prior to arriving in the UK and is a well educated and self-driven individual with the aspiration to “help others”. When the resettlement team first met him, it was clear his direction would be driven by his desire for giving back. The Team have worked to support Maz on his journey to becoming self-employed and he now has an established business in the broadcast industry. His bio for his business is At Maz Broadcast, which focuses on inspiring stories, creating video content to raise awareness in society on a variety of topics. His work to date includes mental health and well-being, adult learning, and a variety of short films about aspect of the local community. You can find him on all social media channels and his website link is below. [Maz Broadcast | Creating Inspiring Stories Through Video](#)

41. In lockdown 1, Maz worked tirelessly to support the local covid support group, cycling for miles to deliver prescriptions and this was rewarded by being nominated and winning the Making a Difference, BBC Hereford & Worcester Radio Award which resulted in a train being named after him! Below is a photo of the train being unveiled:



“Amani & Mahmoud”

42. Amani & Mahmoud arrived in Worcestershire in 2016, with their 3 children. Amani was a teacher in her home country, and also worked for the Red Cross whilst in Lebanon focusing on ensuring all children had access to education. Mahmoud was a highly skilled tiler which is a vital trade in Syria. When the resettlement team met this family it was clear they all have the vision to work hard and start a new life in the UK. Both studied constantly to ensure they both passed all the English and IT courses. Mahmoud studied additional training courses in building and forklift driving and now holds a steady job in that field. Amani became a translator for a national organisation, whilst also doing a Teaching Assistant qualification. On completion of the course, Amani began working at a Girls College in Malvern, teaching Arabic and joined the team as the Key Support Worker for the UKRS families for Cohort 2 and beyond. They were the first two people to pass their driving theory and practical and both now have successful jobs within their community.

“Ahmad”

43. Ahmad and his family arrived at the end of 2016. His thirst for learning and

helping others is evident in all he does. His wife also studies hard, completing both Maths and English throughout lockdown, whilst home-schooling the girls. Ahmad has regularly attended college in Birmingham and has passed many English levels and won awards for his efforts. He now works a steady job in the Care Industry and has excelled over the past 3 years. He is a well-loved member of staff at the Care Home, and he has used his love of music to help the residents too, earlier this year he was featured in a video showcasing his work on the Alzheimer's Society Facebook page. [Music and Singing | Alzheimer's Society \(alzheimers.org.uk\)](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

“Salim”

44. Salim arrived in the county in September 2021 into the bridging hotel along with his wife. They relocated to Worcester City into private permanent accommodation in October. He applied and was successful in obtaining a position within the Resettlement Team whilst continuing to study at college. The Team have supported him through the programme to attend college to improve his IT skills and he is currently learning to drive after passing his theory in January. He is a valuable member of the team.

Purpose of the Meeting

45. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:
- consider the information provided in the report
 - determine whether any further information or Scrutiny is required at this stage; and
 - agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

- Agenda and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 23 March 2022
- Agenda and Minutes of Cabinet on 24 March 2022

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here](#)