



Community, Leadership & Libraries Committee

20th June 2022

Title	Resettlement Schemes in Barnet
Report of	Chair of Community, Leadership & Libraries Committee
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	Non-key
Enclosures	None
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Summary

This report provides Committee an update on the update on the resettlement schemes currently operating within the borough. It has been provided for information – there are no decisions required.

Officers Recommendations

1. That the Committee note the content of this report.

1. Why this report is needed

- 1.1 Barnet has a proud tradition of being a borough that welcomes people displaced from their own country into the community. Since 2016 we have been supporting Syrian families to establish new lives in this country and have in the last 2 years, as a result of global events, seen a significant step up in the numbers of displaced people coming to the Barnet. The borough is now supporting people from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and

Ukraine settlement schemes, as well as hosting asylum seekers (placed here by the Home Office) in four contingency hotels across the borough.

1.2 This note provides members with an update on these schemes and identifies some of the actions we are taking to support those who have been resettled in the borough.

1.3 Resettlement schemes in the borough are:

Ukraine Resettlement Schemes

1.4 In March 2022, in response to the war in Ukraine and humanitarian crisis, the government established new visa routes - principally the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Family Visa scheme - to enable those fleeing the conflict to come to the UK. The most significant in terms of impact on local authorities is the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Homes for Ukraine

1.5 This is an uncapped visa scheme which enables those fleeing from Ukraine to come to the UK for a period of up to 3 years and once here, have full access to benefits. Phase 1 is operating on the basis of 'private matching' meaning that sponsors (those providing accommodation) and guests (those coming from Ukraine) find each other by any means (typically prior connections or through social media) and to match. Phase 2 will seek to match sponsors and guests in a more structured fashion e.g. through community groups and do more pre-match suitability testing prior to the visa application being submitted.

1.6 Sponsors are asked to commit to provide accommodation for a guest for a minimum 6-month period for which they're entitled to a £350.00 per month "thank you" payment and asked to support the guests settle into the UK.

1.7 The role of councils is to undertake an in person check of the sponsor accommodation (ideally before the guest has arrived) to establish its suitability, verify the DBS checks and where there are children or vulnerable adults, ensure that safeguarding visits are completed. Any concerns about the suitability of the match need to be flagged the Home Office and councils should be provide alternative accommodation either through re-matching or providing temporary accommodation.

1.8 Councils are also asked to support Ukrainians settle here through school admissions, sign posting to work and benefit services, wider health and public health service referrals, community integration and homelessness assistance

1.9 Councils are funded for the administering the Homes for Ukraine scheme as follows:

- £200.00 'welcome' payment for each Ukrainian to meet immediate needs – paid in cash or in a UK bank account where that exists.
- £350.00 "thank you" payment to sponsors - subject to completing system checks (home inspections, DBS and welfare checks)
- £10,500 per person to councils (in the first year - there is no commitment to funding future) and expected to cover scheme administration costs as well as community support, language training etc.

- Additional funding for education services: Early years (ages 2 to 4) - £3,000, Primary (ages 5 -11) - £6,580 and Secondary (ages 11-18) - £8,755

- 1.10 As of 08 June 22, 360 Ukraine guests have arrived in the borough through Homes for Ukraine, with a total of 900 expected (based on the latest information in a Home Office run database¹).
- 1.11 We are working with groups in the community to provide a cohesive package of community support and on 19 May the council, in partnership with Barnet and Southgate College, held the first of a series of information and support events. More than 60 people attended the event, which was translated live, to find out more about the opportunities to work, learn English, access healthcare and other local services. Specialist advice was provided by partners including Barnet and Southgate College, Barnet Libraries, Barnet Homes, BOOST, Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS), Barnet Wellbeing Hub, Department for Work and Pensions and Inclusion Barnet.
- 1.12 The scheme is being overseen and co-ordinated by the Strategy and Engagement Team, with support provided by Environmental Health inspectors, Barnet Homes inspectors, the HR team who are overseeing the DBS checks, the Children's Safeguarding and MASH Team who are looking after safeguarding requirements, and the Finance team who are ensuring the necessary payments are getting made on time.
- 1.13 It is resource intensive and complex to manage, not least because we are reliant on information in a Home Office data base which we have found to contain wrong and/or duplicate data which takes time to unpick. This has affected our ability to get an accurate understanding of how many people are coming and when. Where sponsor/guest relationships break down councils are asked to 're-match' (i.e. find a new sponsor) rather directing guests to homelessness services -so far we have had very few cases of this in the borough but are anticipating more of this to occur as existing matches approach the 6 month point.

Homes for Ukraine vs. Ukraine Family Visa scheme

- 1.14 The schemes share a number of characteristics – numbers are uncapped, eligible Ukrainians can stay for a period of up to 3 years and have a right to work and have full access to public services and benefits. The critical difference between the schemes is that the Ukraine Family Visa scheme is not funded.
- 1.15 This lack of parity between the schemes is problematic. We have no sight of how many people are coming to the Borough under the Family Visa scheme, what kind of accommodation they're going in to [overcrowding is more of a risk here and intelligence from Barnet Homes suggests that there are a higher number of homelessness presentations in this cohort] or what their other needs might be. Also, as the family visa scheme is not funded the council must absorb costs.

¹ NB: the information in the data base is constantly updated, causing a high degree of change in the numbers of sponsors and guests expected to come to the Borough and when.

UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) - formerly the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (SVPR)

- 1.16 The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) is an important component of the UK's humanitarian response and represents an ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement offering a safe and legal route to vulnerable refugees in need of protection.
- 1.17 Through this councils are asked to identify the number of individuals and families they are willing to resettle, the Home Office then identifies families for placement and councils are able to review each case and see if there are any suitable properties available to accommodate them. Funding is provided for a 5-year period, starting at £8,000 (per person) in year 1, tapering to £1,000 (p.p.) in year 5.
- 1.18 Under UKRS, the Council has pledged to take on 12 individuals (three to four families).
- 1.19 Under its guise as the SVPR, the council has resettled 70 individuals (in 15 families), since 2016. We currently have one family of four individuals left in their fifth year.
- 1.20 Using the Home Office funding, commissioned Barnet Homes to provide housing and wraparound support for the families through a Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. This has allowed us to provide a rounded support service aiding families with the various aspects of their daily lives in the UK; including healthcare, education, social network and financial stability; both benefit entitlement, and support securing and sustaining employment.

Afghan Resettlement Schemes

- 1.21 There are two resettlement schemes for people who have fled Afghanistan:

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- 1.22 Operating since 2013, this scheme makes ex gratia offers to eligible 'locally employed staff' (LES) who have been or will be made redundant as a direct consequence of the UK's military drawdown from Afghanistan.
- 1.23 Those who qualify for this scheme (regardless of when they arrived) are given indefinite leave to remain in the UK and, under existing rules and subject to the appropriate fee, are able to apply for British citizenship after five years in the UK.

Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

- 1.24 Announced in August 2021, in response to UK's withdrawal from Afghanistan, this scheme will resettle up to 20,000 people (5,000 in the first year) at risk. The ACRS provides a route to safety and prioritises:
 - those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights and freedom of speech, rule of law (for example, judges, women's rights activists, academics, journalists); and
 - vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT).

- 1.25 Councils are funded (by Home Office) to provide a complete package covering health, education, and integration support costs.
- 1.26 To date Barnet has supported the resettlement of two Afghan families under the LES scheme - one family arrived at the beginning of June 2021 and the other in the middle of July 2021. We have pledged to take in three more Afghan families (under either scheme). In common with other London boroughs our biggest issue with this scheme and which limits our ability to take large number is the availability of suitable accommodation (which for this cohort needs to be large family housing).

Hong Kong Visa Scheme

- 1.27 Since March 2021 British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders ordinarily resident in Hong Kong, and their immediate family members, are able to settle in the UK to live, work and study. Applicants need to demonstrate they have 6 months' worth of savings to sustain themselves before being provided entry and do not have recourse to public funds.
- 1.28 Funding for the scheme is as follows:
- Funding for LA's - £30m will cover destitution costs (£2,720 per household) and ESOL (£800 per adult)
 - Civil society - VCS - £1m - funding to support to help BN(O) status holders and their families settle into their new communities and understand the services available to them, UK wide support on issues such as employability, wellbeing alongside funding for educational resources for schools and the establishment of a hate crime reporting service.
 - Funding for strategic migration partnerships - GLA will receive £900,000 to set up welcome centres
- 1.29 As a visa scheme there is no advanced notification for councils of who (or when) is coming to the borough. We have no single source of information and are reliant on sharing intelligence across a range of partners (e.g. school admissions and VCS contact). Through this we believe that Barnet (currently) has the highest number of visas issued (582) and the third highest for actual arrivals (263).
- 1.30 We have been working with organisations across the borough that support the arrivals from Hong Kong, including Barnet & Southgate College to deliver ESOL classes and Meridian Wellbeing (who have obtained funding from Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing) to run a welcome programme for arrivals of:
- A monthly welcoming party
 - Community supporting services
 - Social Activities & Mental Wellbeing

Asylum Seekers in contingency hotels

- 1.31 The UK has a statutory responsibility to provide people who have entered the country seeking asylum with temporary accommodation and subsistence expenses while their

claim is being considered. This is in accordance with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The responsibility to provide this support lies with the Home Office.

- 1.32 This includes the provision of temporary accommodation (also known as dispersal accommodation). As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and decision to pause all asylum claims for most of 2020, demand for dispersal accommodation significantly increased with large numbers of people being held in the system while awaiting the outcome of their claims.
- 1.33 As a stop-gap solution, asylum seekers began being accommodated in hotels, which were otherwise unused due to lockdown restrictions. These are known as contingency hotels. Though pandemic restrictions have eased, the population of asylum seekers accommodated in hotels has continued to rise. Around half of the contingency hotels being used are located in London. As of 13 May 2022, there were 12,625 people accommodated in contingency hotels across 23 London boroughs.
- 1.34 Barnet has been home to four asylum seeker contingency hotels since 2020, and the current population (as of 08 June 2022²) stands at 915 people. Of these, 186 are aged under 18, with one hotel accommodating 32 children under five years old.
- 1.35 Our focus for asylum seekers has been to ensure that basic health and wellbeing needs are met and, where there are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) that they are identified as quickly as possible, with the appropriate support being provided.
- 1.36 The Strategy and Engagement team provides central coordination of the various agencies working in Barnet to support asylum seekers and refugees. Faith and community groups are providing welcome and practical support and we have commissioned specialist outreach workers from the New Citizens Gateway (formerly Barnet Refugee Service) and Persian Advice Bureau to provide a holistic range of services including a one-to-one counselling service (funded by NCL CCG), translation services, ESOL classes and a range of leisure activities including football, access to youth provision and an allotment. The local 0-19 Early Help Hub also provides a weekly stay and play session in the Colindale site.
- 1.37 Placing of so many asylum seekers in our borough by the Home Office creates pressure on council resources.
- 1.38 As of 7 April 2022, there were 69 UASC in our care and 133 former UASC who are now accessing leaving care services. As most UASC do not have recourse to public funds at 18, the local authority remains fully responsible for the cost of their subsistence and accommodation until their asylum application is finalised or until they are 25. This means that the financial burden of this increased UASC cohort will be felt by the council for several years to come.
- 1.39 We have only been able to support those in contingency hotels because of government provided COVID– 19 funding. There is no established or on-going budget for this. Recent correspondence from the Home Office has stated that funding for local authorities to assist with contingency hotels will be assessed under New Burdens Doctrine following a consultation. Changes have also been made to increase the source

² Numbers taken from Clearsprings weekly update.

of dispersal accommodation where asylum seekers can be moved into from the hotels. The aim being to eventually discontinue the use of hotels for this purpose.

- 1.40 In addition to our concerns about the funding burden, we have, since the establishment of the contingency hotels, been raising concerns with Home Office and Clearsprings (the HO contracted delivery partner managing the hotel population in the borough) on a number of issues including the appropriateness of the support provision, functionality of payment cards and the age assessments for USAC. Following a member's item in January, the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee invited Home Office and Clearsprings representatives to the June Committee meeting to discuss and answer questions on these matters.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and breadth to work we are doing to support a number of resettlement schemes and sizeable population of people coming to the borough as result of these schemes.

3. Alternative options considered and not recommended

- 3.1 None – this report is for information only.

4. Post decision implementation

- 4.1 No issues arising from this report – it has been provided for information.

5. Implications of decision

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 No issues arising from this report – it has been provided for information

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 No issues arising from this report – it has been provided for information.

5.3 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.3.1 The council's Constitution, Article 7.5 Committees, Forums, Working Groups and Partnerships, sets out the functions of Community Leadership and Libraries which include:

- (1) Responsibility for libraries, culture, civic events, the mayoralty, voluntary, community and faith sector strategy and engagement, community safety, environmental crime (excluding littering, fly-tipping, fly-posting and graffiti), registration and nationality service, food security and Covid-19 enforcement.
- (2) To act as the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006 (Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny Regulations))

2009

- (3) To receive nominations and determine applications for buildings / land to be listed as an Asset of Community Value (Community Right to Bid)
- (4) To receive reports on relevant performance information and risk on the services under the remit of the Committee.
- (5) Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls
- (6) Reducing reoffending
- (7) Safeguarding Vulnerable Adolescents and Adults at Risk of Violence

5.4 Insight

5.4.1 No issues arising from this report

5.5 Social Value

5.5.1 No issues arising from this report

5.6 Risk Management

5.6.1 No issues arising from this report

5.7 Equalities and Diversity

5.7.1 No issues arising from this report

5.8 Corporate Parenting

5.8.1 No issues arising from this report

5.9 Consultation and Engagement

5.9.1 No issues arising from this report

5.10 Environmental Impact

5.10.1 No issues arising from this report

6. Background papers

6.1 None