



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Response by the Portfolio Holder:

Thank you for your enquiry regarding Powys County Council's involvement with ACRS (Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme).

Powys County Council has recently been contacted by the UK Government's Home Office via the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) to determine if it intends to be part of ACRS. At present the Council is focused on meeting its' commitment made under the ARAP (Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme).

Powys County Council has pledged to offer sanctuary to six families as part of the 'emergency' resettlement of locally employed staff from Afghanistan. While ARAP was introduced in April 2021, it was given increased impetus by Operation Pitting, which was a military evacuation conducted by the UK Government in August 2021. This operation evacuated British citizens and some Afghan nationals to the UK (broadly, family members of British or Afghan nationals living in the UK, people eligible under the relocation schemes for UK Government employees, and other particularly vulnerable cases).

The actual properties which make up the Council's ARAP pledge are 6 family sized, fully carpeted and furnished properties (3 bedroom houses), 4 of which are drawn from the Council's own housing stock and 2 from our Housing Association partners (Barcud & Newydd Housing Association respectively). With regards to the housing-related support of the families that will move into the above properties, we are able to draw on our experiences from the successful SVPRP (Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Project) where we work in partnership with EYST (Ethnic Youth Support Team) to ensure that wrap around accessible support is in place. EYST will provide this front-line support and also assist with wider integration into the community by introducing families to support groups and if desired, helping to arrange voluntary work placements.

Housing Services are in regular liaison with the WLGA who are acting as an intermediary in matching families identified by the Home Office who are to be resettled under ARAP. However, the variety and complexity of the needs of these families, coupled with the rural nature of Powys has proven, and continues to prove, problematic in filling the identified 6 properties. To that end no families (as of 24th January 2022) have yet been resettled under ARAP, but a further 4 families have recently been 'matched' and the intention is that they will take up residence over the next month.

As you note in your enquiry, the UK Government has recently introduced (from the 6th of January 2022) ACRS with the aim to resettle up to 5,000 people in the first year of operation. The scheme will be complementary to ARAP and will initially focus on people who have already arrived in the UK through Operation Pitting, but in the

medium to longer term will also cover other Afghan nationals who would be at risk if they remained in Afghanistan. The focus of the scheme going forward will be on women and children, LGBT community and those with disabilities or otherwise at risk of harm.

It is widely accepted that there is an unmet housing need for families who are being supported as part of ARAP and more recently ACRS. Housing Services will continue to keep under regular review the number of social housing properties that the Council can provide either directly or via our partner local housing association to meet this need. This review will include requesting guidance from members on the possibility of swapping un-matched properties under ARAP to ACRS, should there continue to be a lack of families nominated by the Home Office.

In terms of maximising the number of Afghan families who can be resettled in Powys, Housing Services are aware that a family may be resettled via the Community Sponsorship Scheme. This is a scheme run by a local community group where they raise funds, find a property, and take responsibility for settling a refugee family in their area. The Home Office is promoting this scheme across the United Kingdom as they wish to see it grow and supplement the existing resettlement schemes. The community group would need to raise £9,000, secure a suitable property and then provide all the support and wider integration along the lines of what EYST currently do as part of the SVPRP and what they will do as part of ARAP and potentially ACRS. In order to be accepted as part of the Community Sponsorship Scheme, a community group would need the approval of the Council, Housing Services are currently in dialogue with one such community group who intend to make an application as part of this scheme.”