

# North Yorkshire Council

## Executive Member for Corporate Services

18 July 2023

### Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: use of MoD SFA

#### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive for Localities

#### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- (i) To consider the UK government's revised approach of giving ARAP eligible individuals and their family members currently residing in the bridging estate in the UK, priority to use the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) Service Family Accommodation (SFA), in place of ARAP eligible individuals and their family members currently residing abroad.
- (ii) To seek approval to use the 10 additional MoD SFA properties at Catterick Garrison to accommodate ARAP households from the bridging estate in the UK, in place of ARAP eligible Individuals and their family members currently residing abroad.

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) is for Afghan citizens ('Locally Employed Staff') who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles. It includes the offer of relocation to the UK for those deemed eligible. The policy was implemented in April 2021 to reflect the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and consequent 'serious risk to life' of Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES).
- 2.2 Afghan citizens who are eligible for relocation to the UK under the ARAP may relocate with a partner, dependent children and additional family members who are also deemed eligible for relocation. Those arriving in the UK under the scheme are granted indefinite leave to remain. There is currently no end date for the scheme.
- 2.3 Following the announcement that NATO military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan, the UK government accelerated the pace of relocations under the ARAP. In August 2021 British military personnel arrived in Afghanistan as part of Operation Pitting to evacuate British and eligible Afghan nationals from Kabul following the rapid insurgency of the Taliban to take control of Afghanistan. Over 15,000 eligible Afghans and British nationals were evacuated during Operation Pitting<sup>1</sup> (13 August to 28 August 2021). To date, in the region of 12,200 individuals have now relocated to the UK under ARAP.
- 2.4 In early 2023, the MoD offered additional empty SFA units in various parts of the UK to accommodate eligible Afghan families still stranded in Afghanistan or in third countries. The intention was to try to ensure that more families who qualify under the ARAP could come to the UK at a time that the Home Office was seeking to reduce and ultimately end the use of bridging accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data)

- 2.5 On 14 February 2023, the Executive approved in principle the use of 10 additional SFA properties in Catterick Garrison for eligible Afghan citizens currently residing in Afghanistan or in third countries seeking relocation to the UK under the ARAP.
- 2.6 The UK government subsequently decided to close all bridging hotels in the UK by autumn 2023. Consequently its priority now is to use vacant MoD SFA properties for ARAP households currently in the bridging hotels in the UK, to reduce the number of those households becoming homeless.
- 3.0 Use of additional MoD SFA empty homes in the UK for ARAP households currently in the UK**
- 3.1 The longer than anticipated use of hotels as bridging accommodation and lack of progress in resolving barriers to finding suitable long-term accommodation has hindered the effective integration of the families into British society.<sup>2</sup> The use of bridging accommodation has also come at considerable cost to the taxpayer.
- 3.2 Nationally, the first hotel closures will occur later this month, followed by a series of closures in short succession throughout August.
- 3.3 In the meantime, the Home Office expects households in the bridging hotels to lead the way in finding their own accommodation or to accept a housing offer from local authorities. These two routes alone however are unlikely to be sufficient to move all the households into sustainable housing. Challenges remain around affordability of private rented properties especially for large households incurring the benefit cap, and competition in the UK's private rental market generally.
- 3.4 There remain about 6600 individuals in bridging hotels in the UK. Of that number, approximately 4000 people qualify under the ARAP scheme – ARAP eligible individuals and their family members. This compares to in the region of 4,300 people qualifying under the ARAP scheme who are awaiting relocation to the UK.
- 3.5 Based upon family size of the ARAP households in the bridging hotels, the highest demand is for three-and four-bedroom properties. Four-bedroom properties are particularly difficult to source.
- 3.6 Considering the above, the UK government is now requiring that the MoD's surplus SFA properties identified for ARAP households should be used in the first instance to accommodate ARAP households currently residing in the bridging estate in the UK. This will help reduce the number of families facing homelessness when their hotel closes.
- 3.7 In recent discussions with representatives from the Home Office, DLUHC and the MoD, North Yorkshire Council raised several concerns about this change of approach, including humanitarian concerns about the plight of the Afghan households who are eligible to come to the UK but are not able to do so because they have not secured accommodation in the UK. The MoD properties would have provided the opportunity for some of those families to be able to come to the UK. Meanwhile, the bulk of the Afghan families in bridging hotels in the UK are by now expecting to be accommodated in permanent housing when their hotel closes. Several Afghan households in the bridging estate in the UK chose to reject the original nine SFA properties that were offered for use at Catterick Garrison in 2021 and 2022, and it took several months before those properties were occupied. The same issue could arise again whereas ARAP households currently not in the UK would be much more likely to accept the properties in view of the peril that they face to their lives.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9307/>

3.8 In response, we were advised that should the Home Office be unable to match households in the UK bridging estate to the MoD properties, it would seek to match ARAP households currently living outside of the UK to any remaining unallocated properties that we have selected.

3.9 In the first instance, the Home Office will seek to find households in the UK bridging estate for the properties in Catterick Garrison. However, in doing so the Home Office has agreed to take account of the rurality of the area when undertaking case-matching, to get a 'best fit'. Households with access to a car and/or do not have a high level of health care needs requiring regular hospital visits will be identified as well as those who are more willing to live in a rural area. North Yorkshire Council has also supplied the Home Office with information about which year groups are near to or at full capacity in the primary and secondary schools in Catterick Garrison and Richmond.

#### **4.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

4.1 At this present time, the option to use the additional SFA properties in Catterick Garrison for ARAP households living abroad is not available unless ARAP households in the bridging estate in the UK cannot be matched to the properties.

4.2 The use of the SFA properties for ARAP households in the bridging estate in the UK means that it will avoid them being made homeless when their hotel closes. It will also allow those households to live a more independent life within mainstream society, an experience which has been borne out by the nine Afghan families originally accommodated in the first round of SFA properties.

4.3 There might be opportunities to relocate eligible families in the bridging hotel in North Yorkshire to some of the SFA properties in Catterick Garrison, thereby avoiding them becoming homeless in the immediate term. We might otherwise become responsible for housing them in temporary accommodation anyway if they do not have an alternative property to move into when the hotel closes.

4.4 A collaborative, cross-government approach is in place to support the effective integration of the Afghan families under the ARAP.

#### **5.0 Recommendations**

5.1 That the Executive Member for Corporate Services:

- i. Notes the UK government's revised approach of giving ARAP eligible individuals and their family members currently residing in the bridging estate in the UK, priority to use the MoD SFA properties, in place of ARAP eligible individuals and their family members currently residing abroad.
- ii. Agrees to the use of the 10 additional MoD SFA properties at Catterick Garrison to accommodate ARAP households from the bridging estate in the UK, on the understanding that should any of those properties remain unallocated the Home Office will seek to match ARAP households currently living outside of the UK to those properties.

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12 July 2023

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**Background Documents:**

- Report to Executive 14 February 2023: Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: use of additional MOD properties  
[Agenda for Executive on Tuesday, 14th February, 2023, 11.00 am | North Yorkshire Council](#)
- Letter to Leaders of the Council and Chief Executives from The Rt. Hon. Ben Wallace: Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), 4 July 2023
- [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria, offer details and how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

**Appendices:** None