

North Yorkshire Council

Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10 June 2024

North Yorkshire Refugee Resettlement

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update and progress report on refugee resettlement in North Yorkshire relating to the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme and Afghan resettlement programme.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2019, the UK government announced the **United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme**. The intention of this was to introduce a single refugee resettlement scheme for the UK to respond to refugee crises anywhere in the globe. North Yorkshire district councils and North Yorkshire County Council responded to the government's call to participate in the UKRS by agreeing to resettle 200 refugees between 2020 and 2024 on a pro-rata population basis. However, the Covid-19 pandemic delayed the first arrivals in North Yorkshire until February 2021.
- 2.2 From August 2021 to date North Yorkshire has helped to respond to the evacuation of people from Afghanistan who qualify to come to the UK under the **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**¹, or the **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme**². This has involved resettling families into housing in the county and co-ordinating the service provision to Afghan households in two 'bridging accommodation' hotels in North Yorkshire whilst they awaited to be moved into properties elsewhere in the UK.
- 2.3 In January 2021, following China's clampdown of political freedoms in Hong Kong, the UK government opened the **Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route** – a UK-wide welcome programme to support the integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong. BN(O) status is a form of British nationality created for people from Hong Kong who were born prior to the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 so they could retain ties to the UK after Hong Kong's handover to China. Those with BN(O) status and their eligible family members can apply to come to the UK to live, study and work and then after five years in the UK will be able to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, followed by British citizenship after a further twelve months.³ Local authorities have a limited role in terms of support

¹ Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan and may be eligible for relocation to the UK.

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria, offer details and how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy)

² The ACRS scheme prioritises 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.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>

³ Media factsheet: Hong Kong BN(O)

provision, chiefly in relation to providing English language classes for the adults (if required) and destitution support. There has been some take-up of English language classes by this group, particularly in the Harrogate and Scarborough areas. The Hong Kong BN(O) scheme is not covered in further detail in this report due to its minimal impact to date in North Yorkshire.

- 2.4 Since February 2022 North Yorkshire has experienced the arrival of families from Ukraine, initially in relation to households who arrived through the **Ukraine Family Scheme**⁴ and then through the **Homes for Ukraine scheme**⁵ (HfU). Those schemes work in a different way to previous refugee resettlement schemes, so are not covered in further detail in this report. Update reports on North Yorkshire's response to the Ukrainian crisis are provided to North Yorkshire Council's Area Constituency Committees.
- 2.5 Separate to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, a **community sponsorship scheme** has been in existence in the UK since 2016. This has allowed community groups including charities, faith groups, churches, and businesses to resettle refugees in the UK, providing they meet qualifying criteria⁶. A community sponsorship group in Settle was the first in North Yorkshire (and in the region) to do so and since then has been followed by Pateley Bridge, Ripon, Scarborough and Thirsk. Nationalities typically include refugees from the Middle East and North Africa region.
- 2.6 In February 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities announced a new Afghan specific Community Sponsorship programme for people on the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme called **Communities for Afghans**⁷. Modelled on the community sponsorship scheme and drawing on lessons from Homes for Ukraine, the project is led by DLUHC with operational support from the Home Office. The delivery model is decentralised with responsibilities delegated to Citizens UK, sponsor groups and local authorities. Local authorities will play a principal role in funding delivery (as in HfU), providing longer-term integration support, and statutory responsibilities including homelessness, safeguarding and social care provision.
- 2.7 North Yorkshire Council responded in December 2023 to the Home Office's consultation on the **Cap on Safe and Legal Routes**⁸: a requirement set out in the Illegal Migration Act 2023. The cap is expected to take effect from 2025. We concluded that resettling more than 55 people a year in the county under safe and legal routes (UKRS and Afghan ACRS) would not be sustainable due in large part to the number of recent arrivals (Homes for Ukraine and Afghan ARAP), the lack of affordable housing available especially for larger families, and other competing service pressures and demands. Homes for Ukraine and Afghan ARAP will sit outside the cap to be set by government.

3 United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

3.1 General overview – North Yorkshire

<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/24/media-factsheet-hong-kong-bnos/>

⁴ The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members, or extend their stay, in the UK

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa>

⁵ Homes for Ukraine allows UK based sponsors to offer accommodation to Ukrainians in their own homes or other property.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship>

⁷ [Communities for Afghans project: DLUHC policy update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communities-for-afghans-project-dluhc-policy-update)

⁸ [Home Office – Report on Safe and Legal Routes – Illegal Migration Act 2023 \(Section 61\) \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-report-on-safe-and-legal-routes-illegal-migration-act-2023)

Planned UKRS arrivals into North Yorkshire continued throughout 2023 up until September 2023. However, local authorities waited throughout the duration of 2023 for Ministerial sign-off to allow new family cases to be provided. This sign-off was approved in 2024 for new cases to be brought forward by the Home Office.

3.2 North Yorkshire has resettled 175 persons (42 households) under the UKRS across six of the former North Yorkshire districts. One person has since moved out of county.

3.3 Future participation in the UKRS scheme is uncertain and so the original agreed target of 200 persons by 2024 is unlikely to be achieved. This is due to other competing service pressures and demands including those arising from Afghan and Ukrainian arrivals. Probably for these reasons, the UKRS scheme has had a lower than anticipated take up amongst local authorities elsewhere in the UK, especially when compared to the predecessor Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. There was also a delay in new UKRS cases being brought forward by the Home Office in 2023. The Home Office's intention instead was for 'backlog' complex cases to be resettled first. However, these cases were often not suitable for resettlement if adaptations could not be made to a property or there was not specialist health or SEND provision in the area.

District	UKRS target by 2024	Actual number of UKRS persons resettled	Number of UKRS persons remaining in North Yorkshire
Craven	19	0	0
Hambleton	30	30	30
Harrogate	52	57	57
Richmondshire	17	17	17
Ryedale	18	17	17
Scarborough	35	26	26
Selby	29	28	27
Total	200	175 (45 households)	174 (45 households)

3.4 The bulk of the UKRS arrivals in North Yorkshire have been Syrians. However, as part of the scheme we have also resettled a small number of Iraqis, Afghan Hazara (a persecuted ethnic group in Afghanistan), Sudanese and South Sudanese.

3.5 Wherever possible we tried to ensure that newer arrivals had a similar cultural background and language to earlier arrivals within a given town (typically Arabic speakers). However even where this has not been the case there have been examples of existing refugee families helping to support new arrivals. This new dynamic of support has not only allowed the new arrivals to feel more settled but in turn has led the existing families to reflect on how far they themselves have progressed since arriving in the UK. Some of the earlier arrivals have become official volunteers trained by the Refugee Council.

3.6 The period of resettlement support for UKRS refugees has been for five years. From 2022/23, the period of support it was anticipated that the Home Office would reduce this to three years, to make it in line with the support period provided to Afghans resettled through the ARAP and ACRS scheme. However, this has not occurred to date. Locally, we have found that three years resettlement support is a more suitable period as it encourages families to become independent more quickly and not to build up a dependency culture. Consequently, the integration support that we provide in North Yorkshire for UKRS households is tailored towards the first three years post-arrival in the UK. The employability

support that we provide though continues for up to five years should it be required. Adult learners of the English language are signposted to mainstream ESOL classes beyond three years.

- 3.7 The Home Office has from 2023 onwards, speeded up the payments to local authorities for the resettlement support provided to individuals resettled under the UKRS scheme (and the Afghan resettlement schemes). Previously, there were extensive delays in receiving the payments.

4.0 Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)/Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

4.1 General overview – North Yorkshire

As of 31 May 2024, North Yorkshire has resettled 382 persons (77 households) under the Afghan resettlement schemes. From that figure, 30 persons (six households) have moved out of county.

- 4.2 September 2023 onwards has been a particularly busy period. 35 ARAP households have moved into MOD Service Family Accommodation (SFA) and five households have moved into Local Authority Housing Fund⁹ Round 2 properties in the county.

District	Original target number	Actual number of persons resettled	Number of persons remaining in North Yorkshire
Craven	15	14	14
Hambleton	20	38	28
Harrogate	25	116	116
Richmondshire	45	177	162
Scarborough	0	16	16
Selby	23	21	16
Totals	128	382 (77 households)	352 (71 households)

- 4.3 The ARAP and ACRS scheme remains open for people eligible to come to the UK. The Home Office's focus throughout 2022 to Autumn 2023 was to move Afghan households in bridging hotels in the UK into settled accommodation. Over 560 Afghan persons passed through the two bridging hotels in North Yorkshire between August 2021 to August 2023.
- 4.4 Close partnership work between the Home Office, North Yorkshire Council, the Refugee Council, and a property search provider employed in the months leading up to the closure of the remaining bridging hotel in North Yorkshire, helped minimise the number of households who were made homeless. In the end, North Yorkshire Council accepted three families for homelessness duties at the point that that bridging hotel closed. Other households from the hotel were accepted for homeless support in other parts of the UK or found private rented property or were moved to 'interim accommodation' by the Home Office whilst the property that had been assigned for them had not been made ready at the time that the bridging hotel closed. Nationally, throughout the bridging hotel estate, people with high medical needs and other families classed as 'vulnerable' were moved into 'interim accommodation' if they could not move into a property at the time that their bridging hotel closed.

⁹ [Local Authority Housing Fund - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

- 4.5 In part due to the slower than anticipated movement of households out of the bridging hotels in the UK, it meant that throughout part of 2022 and 2023, the government required eligible Afghan households who remained stranded in third countries such as Pakistan and Iran to have found their own housing in the UK before travelling. This requirement was later removed in Autumn 2023 amid safety fears that Afghans who had fled to Pakistan were facing a real and imminent threat of being deported by the Pakistani authorities. It also coincided with a High Court case brought against the government.¹⁰
- 4.6 Since Autumn 2023, the Home Office has put arrangements in place to allow remaining Afghans who are eligible for relocation to the UK, and who are in Pakistan and other third countries, to arrive. The latest available figures (as of 31 March 2024) show that over 1,000 ACRS eligible persons have arrived on flights since mid-December 2023. Over 3,100 ARAP eligible persons have arrived in the UK from Pakistan since October 2023. In total 27,182 individuals have been resettled in the UK under the Afghan ARAP and ACRS scheme. This figure comprises arrivals prior to Operation Pitting¹¹, during Operation Pitting and after Operation Pitting up to 31 March 2024.¹²
- 4.7 Wherever possible new arrivals are being moved straight into settled accommodation. Recent ARAP arrivals, are largely being accommodated in MOD SFA, including in North Yorkshire, which has brought the total up to 44 households that have been accommodated in SFA properties in the county since 2021. For ACRS households, the majority are pre-matched to settled accommodation including properties allocated under the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2. However, a small number of hotels in the UK with existing contracts are being used to accommodate ACRS households waiting to move into housing.
- 4.8 Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3
The government announced a third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund in 2024.
- 4.9 North Yorkshire Council qualifies for the funding. However, a key concern is that the Afghan element of Round 3 currently only allows the properties to be used to accommodate households on the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).
- 4.10 North Yorkshire Council has written to DLUHC to put the case that local authorities, with SFA accommodating Afghan ARAP should be allowed to use the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2 properties for those households. Afghan households have a neutral impact upon housing supply when accommodated in LAHF properties in local authority areas that are not using SFA properties. For North Yorkshire, this is not the case. An SFA property is not settled accommodation as the households occupying those properties will be made homeless at the end of the three-year lease term unless a replacement property can be found for them. The growing number of households we are now obliged to move into replacement properties from SFA, means we need to start planning now to manage the risk of homelessness that we will otherwise face. This needs to be well in advance of the expiry of the leases.
- 4.11 Future Afghan ARAP Arrivals into SFA
Regular flights into the UK bringing Afghan ARAP (and ACRS) arrivals are continuing. Consequently, North Yorkshire might be required to accommodate further ARAP families in

¹⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/afghanistan-home-office-pakistan-iran-refugees-b2433086.html>

¹¹ [Remembering Operation Pitting \(ukdefencejournal.org.uk\)](https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/remembering-operation-pitting/)

¹² [Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data)

SFA properties. If this occurred, it would compound the existing challenge of finding affordable move-on properties for the current households accommodated in SFA. Another concern is that for future arrivals, SFA in more rural and sparsely populated areas of the county might be used. This would make integration more difficult. Integrating Afghans into wider British society is also a greater challenge when high numbers of households arrive in a concentrated period; the focus being on the mechanics of resettling a family and then moving on to receiving the next family.

5 UKRS and Afghan resettlement service provision

5.1 Integration Support

UKRS and Afghan households resettled into permanent housing in North Yorkshire continue to have the benefit of the Refugee Council to assist with day-to-day issues.

5.2 The Refugee Council provides a three-year integration support model; the aim is to facilitate the successful integration of clients and to empower them to be independent.

5.3 There are two phases to the integration support:

- Phase 1 (0-18 months) is intensive casework support where a household has a Resettlement Worker assigned to them and support is a combination of face-to-face home visits, accompanying to appointments weekly drop-in meetings in the local area and remote communication such as WhatsApp and Video Calling. This phase involves the refugees in their own plans and progress in the initial stages of their lives in the UK with the aim of promoting independence and self-responsibility.
- Phase 2 support: (19-36 months) intensive casework support ends and families no longer have a designated Resettlement Worker, rather they contact a Phase 2 worker via an advice line and will be encouraged to engage with the service in English, interpreters will be available if necessary. It is recognised that some households will still require support and can experience crisis but in general the Refugee Council's approach is to encourage clients to do things for themselves where possible.

5.4 The Refugee Council uses an assessment tool ('outcomes star') to assess an adult's progress, showing the person's integration journey in eight key areas (Housing, Money, English, Education and Work, Family and Children, Community and Connections, Law Systems and Health and Wellbeing). It demonstrates the impact of the Refugee Council support and identifies key trends.

5.5 Community Development is an integral part of the Refugee Council's service model alongside volunteer support and is available throughout the three years. Community Development focuses on partnership working with external agencies and raising awareness of the refugee journey; group activities are facilitated such as women's groups across the county, picking up trends in support needs and facilitating group briefings with external agencies to address priority areas.

5.6 Volunteer support bridges the gap between refugees and host communities, reduces isolation and builds confidence such as helping families to develop English Language skills and orientating them around their local area.

5.7 English Classes

North Yorkshire Council's Adult Learning Service provides UKRS and Afghan ARAP/ACRS adults who have a poor to moderate understanding of English, with eight hours formal language learning (ESOL) each week in their local area. This entails bespoke English

language courses focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and skills to scaffold successful resettlement. The provision includes face-to-face lessons in classrooms as well as online sessions. In addition to ESOL, learners can study supplementary subjects such as ICT, ESOL for Driving Theory, Work based Communication, Life in North Yorkshire, and Pathway into Maths, where not only do they learn new skills, but they also have the chance to practice their English conversation. An online learning platform called 'Flash Academy' has also been introduced to help support and accelerate progress.

- 5.8 Young adults with some understanding of the English language are encouraged to attend a College of Further Education so that they can pursue vocational-related training. This also has the benefit of being able to expand their social circle.
- 5.9 In some parts of the county, volunteers run conversational classes, either in groups or on a one-to-one basis. This helps supplement North Yorkshire Council's formal provision and provides invaluable befriending support to the families and wider connections in their town. The English@Home project was set up specifically to support ESOL learning. North Yorkshire Council's Adult Learning Service works closely with the volunteers and coordinators and this has proved to be a very successful partnership. Two of our Adult Learning ESOL teachers, one in Harrogate and one in Scarborough, are the area co-ordinators for English@Home. Volunteers also help with some of the classroom lessons giving learners further opportunity to take part in real-world, local, British English as well as providing invaluable encouragement and support.
- 5.10 Support in Schools
North Yorkshire Council's Minority Inclusion Support Team (MIST) have clear processes in place so that all children and young people arriving in North Yorkshire through resettlement schemes access an appropriate school or educational setting, including access to two-year funding and FEAST programmes, as quickly as possible after arrival.
- 5.11 Where details of families are available prior to arrival, school applications are made in advance so the children can resume their education as quickly as possible. Staff in the team also liaise with Further Education colleges to secure places for +16-year-olds and young adults.
- 5.12 The team offers ongoing support and advice to schools and families with home school liaison, applying for EHCAR assessments and around educational transitions (nursery to reception, primary to secondary school).
- 5.13 A 'Living in the UK: Support for Families' presentation is delivered to new families within their first two months of living in North Yorkshire. This includes information and guidance around education, health care, internet safety, and sources of support available including the Solihull Approach and Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust's parenting resources and app (available in a wide range of languages).
- 5.14 Additional staff have been recruited recently, chiefly to provide key worker support to growing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) aged 16-18 living in supported accommodation in North Yorkshire, but also for the growing number of children arriving through the Afghan ARAP/ACRS schemes. Some of the successful candidates who were appointed include previous or existing clients on the SVP/VCRS/UKRS/Afghan ARAP/ACRS schemes.
- 5.15 Employment

Progress in getting the UKRS and Afghan adults into employment continues to be steady but slow. We are finding that although the spoken English of the Afghan males can be reasonably good (especially if they have been interpreters), their written understanding is less so. This impacts upon their ability to provide good quality employment applications and to perform well in written tests in interviews. Interview technique can also sometimes be poor.

- 5.16 Jobs range from professional (a minority of cases) to the bulk being in semi-skilled or low-skilled employment. Some clients have set up their own businesses. Two clients who have previously been employed as doctors in Afghanistan are studying to become doctors in the UK. Some clients have secured employment in North Yorkshire Council, having successfully gone through the normal competitive interview process.
- 5.17 Barriers to getting into employment continue to be the lack of skills match; physical and mental health problems; high levels of competition for jobs from people educated in the UK; poor understanding of the English language; and sometimes, lack of access to a car/English driving licence. A significant number of clients also prefer to work part-time rather than full-time hours, which further reduces their chances of securing better paid jobs.
- 5.18 Utilising the Home Office grant, North Yorkshire Council continues to fund one full-time member of staff in the HR Resourcing Solutions team to provide employment support to the working age adults. This also involves the provision of relevant training to validate existing skills and to provide additional skills and training. A full report is contained in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.19 Health & Social Care Services
All family members are registered with a local GP practice and GPs are asked to provide them with a medical health assessment when they first arrive in North Yorkshire. NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are reimbursed by the Home Office for primary and secondary health care costs for the first 12 months after a family has arrived in the UK. Exceptional health care costs can be applied for separately.
- 5.20 North Yorkshire Council can claim back funding from the Home Office for 'exceptional costs' relating to an individual's social care support and for the initial costs of special educational needs provision (SEND). Several families continue to access counselling support through the regional children and families' specialist mental health service provided by Solace. This provision allows clients to be fast-tracked for support from trained counsellors (with interpreters) experienced in supporting survivors of persecution and exile.
- 5.21 Volunteer Support
There are refugee support groups in most of the towns where refugees have been resettled in North Yorkshire. They provide additional invaluable support including befriending support to the families. Some of the volunteers are Refugee Council trained volunteers assisted by a Refugee Council Volunteer Co-ordinator.
- 5.23 Volunteers have helped families feel more settled in their local area and helped them to develop wider links in their local area. Some volunteers for instance have signposted families to clubs and activities. Volunteers have also provided conversational English sessions and organised trips and activities.

6.0 Migrant Programmes Team

- 6.1 Since May 2024, a new Migrant Programmes Team has been established as a service under the Localities Team within North Yorkshire Council. Work is underway to bring

together the range of programmes that support resettlement (Homes for Ukraine, UKRS, Afghan ARAP/ACRS, economic migrants and asylum seekers).

- 6.2 The new team will continue to provide direction to a range of specialist posts that are currently based within Resourcing Solutions (employability support), Housing, Adult Learning and Early Help. This will include identifying opportunities to consolidate delivery, taking a locality-working approach to ensure the best possible outcomes for migrant populations.

7.0 Key Implications

7.1 Local Member: None.

7.2 Financial: There are no additional financial implications to North Yorkshire Council arising directly from this report. The Home Office funds the UKRS and Afghan refugee resettlement schemes in North Yorkshire.

7.3 Human Resources: There are no additional human resources implications to North Yorkshire Council arising directly from this report. North Yorkshire Council employs staff on the refugee resettlement programme but they are funded through the Home Office grant.

7.4 Legal: There are no legal implications to North Yorkshire Council arising directly from this report. The UKRS and Afghan refugee resettlement schemes are voluntary schemes. However, participating local authorities are required to meet specific obligations set out in the funding instruction to local authorities from the Home Office.

7.5 Equalities: None.

7.6 Environmental Impacts/Benefits including Climate Change Impact Assessment: No Impact.

8.0 Recommendation:

- 8.1 That the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress of the UKRS and Afghan resettlement programme in North Yorkshire.

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31 May 2024

Background documents: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - North Yorkshire Council Refugee Employability Project. (UKRS/Afghan ARAP and ACRS): May 2024