
UNITED KINGDOM RESETTLEMENT SCHEME – SAFE & LEGAL ROUTES

Report by Director Resilient Communities

Scottish Borders Council

28 March 2024

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report builds on the report to Scottish Borders Council on 27th August 2020 and provides an update the Council's participation in the various resettlement schemes. It also highlights a Home Office request for council pledges to accept refugees through Safe & Legal Routes during 2025. This is to enable a cap to be set based on these pledges.**
- 1.2 Up to February 2024 the Scottish Borders received nine Syrian families. Three Afghan families did arrive but have subsequently moved to be near family members in other parts of the United Kingdom (UK). There are currently 44 Ukraine households in hotel accommodation and a further 36 with host families.
- 1.3 The Scottish Borders has also been receiving Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and is expecting to receive adults through a UK wide national transfer scheme. These people generally originate from the small boat arrivals and are awaiting asylum decisions.
- 1.4 The Home Office via CoSLA is seeking pledges from councils on numbers of individuals/households they are willing to accept in 2025 through Safe and Legal Routes. These pledges are voluntary.
- 1.5 In addition to normal state benefits, the Home Office provide funding for the duration refugees are registered on the scheme, currently varying between 36 and 60 months. Principally this is to support integration and language development. Costs can vary depending upon the composition of families and their individual needs. The children of refugees born in the United Kingdom have **not** qualified for this funding.
- 1.6 Asylum seekers do not have the same funding arrangements and rights as refugees. They are limited in the services they can access, and remain the responsibility of the Home Office. Should an asylum decision go in their favour the eligibility changes and support would likely move to local authority services.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:-

- (a) Note the position regarding the current resettlement activity.**
- (b) Agree a figure of up to 10 household arrivals through Safe & Legal Routes subject to Home Office funding being maintained, the availability of suitable housing and resources locally.**

3 Refugee/Asylum Current Situation

- 3.1 Acting on behalf of the United Kingdom, the Home Office have the **UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)** for refugees. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees identifies those most at risk and brings them to the United Kingdom, strict criteria apply. The Scottish Borders Council's involvement has been with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme subsequently incorporated into the UKRS. There have been no new arrivals and the remaining households on the scheme have entered the final 12 months. Syrian households hold 60 month visas.
- 3.2 There are **two** schemes for Afghanistan, **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**, and **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)**. Discussions are currently underway with the Home Office, Ministry of Defence and CoSLA regarding potential household arrivals. Afghan visas have been for 36 months. No decision has been made though a number of individuals and households await resettlement offers.
- 3.3 Following the war in Ukraine **three** visa entry schemes exist, the **Ukraine Family scheme visa, Homes for Ukraine scheme** and the **Scottish Supersponsor Scheme**. The first two schemes involve UK based households hosting Ukraine arrivals. The third enables applicants to select the Scottish Government as the sponsor. This scheme has been paused to new applicants since 2022. Currently two hotels (commissioned by the Scottish Government) in the Scottish Borders are being used to accommodate Ukraine households, along with hosting. They are being assisted in finding suitable permanent accommodation. Generally, this is through applications for Registered Social Landlord properties. Ukraine visas have been 36 months, and there is an opportunity to extend for a further 18 months.
- 3.4 There are currently circa 80 Ukraine households that require permanent settled accommodation. The focus is on the households in hotels (44) given changes to the Scottish Government policy on hotel stay duration and reasonable offers of accommodation being made. The local authorities status as a stock transfer authority means it is likely to take some time to move all the households out of the hotels.
- 3.5 At the expiry of the visa under UKRS, ARAP, and ACRS an application is made for permanent leave to remain. In the case of the Ukraine households the visa can be extended.
- 3.6 Previously with the UKRS local selections are made by considering the profiles of eligible households that have been sent to council scheme leads from the Home Office via CoSLA. Representatives from NHS, Social Work and Education collaborate to assess prospective households as a match. Once a match is made arrangements are put in place to bring families to the United Kingdom.
- 3.7 Several sources of information exist in the form of guidance and instruction setting out how the scheme should be administered. There is also the Scottish Government's New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. These documents underpin our local arrangements.

- 3.8 The Scottish Borders also participates in the **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)** national transfer scheme along with other UK local authorities. This is on a pro rata basis. To date 18 young people have been received. They are classified as looked after children, and await asylum claim decisions. The number of UK arrivals will determine the number and frequency transferred to the Scottish Borders.
- 3.9 The Scottish Borders also expects to participate in the wider **asylum dispersal of adults**, based upon the local population size this would equate to circa 48 asylum seekers. While we have yet to have any arrivals the Home Office is actively working to procure suitable properties. Although they would remain the responsibility of the Home Office until an asylum decision is made support will be required from within the local authority.

3.10 Current and expected arrivals:

	Current Households	Current People	Projected Households	Projected People
Syria*	9	40		
Afghanistan**	0	0		
Ukraine***	80	166		
UASC	N/A	18		
Asylum Seekers	0	0	N/A	48

*Doesn't include children born in the UK.

**Three households of 8 people arrived in the Scottish Borders then left to be near family members. If agreeable we are likely to receive other households.

***Currently being supported in hotels and hosted accommodation.

Previous Council Decisions

- 3.11 In a report to Council dated 12th November 2015 Scottish Borders Council agreed that the Scottish Borders would participate in the UK Governments scheme for the resettlement of vulnerable refugee families. The number would be based upon the pro rata distribution across Scotland.
- 3.12 As the number of households approached 10 a further report was presented to Scottish Borders Council on 27th August 2020 recommending a further 10 households be supported. This was agreed.
- 3.13 Since these decisions the situation in Afghanistan, Ukraine and the widening of the asylum dispersal has occurred.

Household Support

- 3.14 In 2018, as refugee numbers increased support arrangements were strengthened by formally engaging a resettlement officer.
- 3.15 As the situation in Ukraine developed additional staff have been seconded to support the resettlement work funded by the tariff funding received from the Scottish Government and Home Office. There is a need to monitor and adjust the resource profile to meet developing need.

Availability of Housing

3.16 Demand for housing in the Scottish Borders and elsewhere in Scotland and the UK remains exceptionally high. There are approximately 450 fewer registered private landlords since 2018/19 equating to a reduction of 500 properties across the area, coupled with reduced turnover among the Registered Social Landlord stock. Demand on homeless temporary accommodation has grown year on year since 2018/19 and is at capacity. The availability of suitable housing will naturally determine the number and pace of any new resettlement arrivals.

3.17 It is of note that private rent prices compared to social housing, potential over and under occupancy, difficulty with mobility or other health conditions, and available amenity are all factors in assessing suitability. It is unlikely that arrivals would be able to work initially and therefore be reliant upon benefits.

4 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

It is expected that funding provided by the Home Office for participation in Safe and Legal Routes will prevent the scheme creating a budget pressure on the council. The other schemes the Scottish Borders has participated in have been self-funding.

(a) Existing current regular outgoings

The additional funding provided by the Scottish Government and Home Office has been used to provide:

A resettlement team and associated administration.

Support to local NHS services.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) split between Community Learning and Development, Borders College, and on-line.

Additional dedicated classroom support depending upon the number and specific needs of school age children for the first year after arrival.

Costs associated with training, travel and integration activities, and interpretation.

(b) Predicted one off payment

The preparation of properties prior to arrival has varying costs depending upon condition. Households take on the tenancy upon accessing the property and signing the agreement.

4.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) The report fully describes all the elements of risk that have been identified in relation to this project and no specific additional concerns need to be addressed at this time.

4.3 Equalities

- (a) The purpose of this report is to ensure that Scottish Borders Council and its strategic partners fulfil their obligation to those families settling in the Scottish Borders as refugees and take a position on future participation.

4.4 Acting Sustainably

- (a) None.

4.5 Carbon Management

- (a) None.

4.6 Rural Proofing

- (a) None.

4.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

- (a) none

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Director (Finance & Procurement), the Director (Corporate Governance), the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change) and Corporate Communications have been consulted and comments will be tabled at the meeting.

Approved by

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Author(s)

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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council meeting minutes dated 12th November 2015, Item 7, and Scottish Borders Council meeting minutes dated 27th August 2020, item 11.

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