

Agenda Item	<b>16.</b>
Report No	<b>HP/34/24</b>

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Housing and Property

**Date:** 6 November 2024

**Report Title:** Update on Resettlement and Humanitarian Schemes

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – Place

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the Highland response to national resettlement and humanitarian programmes.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- (i) **NOTE** the efforts made by Council Services, partner agencies and communities in delivering services to households requiring resettlement and humanitarian support.

## 3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** - Resource implications are detailed in this report.

3.2 **Legal** - There are no legal implications arising from this report. The resettlement support detailed in the report is not statutory and the Council voluntarily agreed to provide support first under the Vulnerable Persons Scheme, the Syrian Scheme and latterly the Ukrainian programme.

3.3 **Risk** - Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary. Risks were considered and mitigated appropriately as part of the partnership Resettlement Steering group.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no Health and Safety risks arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## 4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights

and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is a monitoring update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5 Summary of Resettlement and Humanitarian Programmes in Highland**

5.1 Highland Council has a strong track record in supporting refugees and displaced persons in recent years. The first scheme to be supported was the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) which enabled families from Syria to be resettled into properties provided by the Council.

5.2 The Afghan Relocation and Resettlement Programme (ARAP) was launched in 2021 to support the emergency evacuation of Afghans who had been employed by the UK Government in Afghanistan and assessed to be at high risk of imminent threat to life. Other Afghan nationals have since been resettled in Highland under the UK Resettlement Scheme.

5.3 The Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022 and the UK Government set up the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme to support Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs) who fled their homes because of the invasion. Highland had one of the highest numbers of 'expressions of interest' following the request by UK Government to the public to open their homes to UDPs.

5.4 This report will focus on the schemes referred to at sections 5.1 to 5.3. The individuals and families supported are all in Highland as a result of national programmes which have determined they have a right to reside, work and claim statutory entitlements. This is separate to adult asylum dispersal schemes which have not taken place in Highland, unlike many other local authorities across the UK.

5.5 Members should however note that Children's Services continue to work with Housing, Education and other agencies to support and accommodate Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in Highland.

5.6 Inverness Members will also be aware of the use of Cameron Barracks since June 2024 to host Afghans in Ministry of Defence (MOD) transitional accommodation. There are currently 153 Afghans resident there. Children have been enrolled in local primary and secondary schools. Welfare support has been contracted to The Mears Group through the Home Office. 8 MOD properties in Inverness have also been ringfenced by the MOD to support some of the families who have indicated a preference to remain in Highland rather than move to settled accommodation elsewhere in the UK.

## **6. Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)**

6.1 In 2015, Highland Council committed to resettle 25-30 families in Highland under the VPRS scheme. Since then, 20 Syrian families have been resettled under the scheme

across Highland in secure Council house tenancies. A further 3 families were accommodated and supported in Highland but have subsequently relocated to be closer to families and communities in other parts of Scotland and the UK

- 6.2 The programme included 5 years of resettlement support and a requirement that individuals were supported to apply for their 'indefinite leave to remain' (ILR) to enable them to stay in the UK. All families have now applied for their ILR, and the final ones are in the process of being awarded their British citizenship.
- 6.3 The formal Home Office funding for the VPRS ended in October 2024. However, many of the support links built up between community groups, agencies and the Syrian families will continue on an informal basis.
- 6.4 The Council's Resettlement Team have worked with key partners, including community partners, to help the families manage the impact of the trauma and displacement they experienced and to overcome cultural and social diversities so they can start a new life in Highland. The families have received assistance from HLH for classes of English as a second language and housing support from New Start Highland.
- 6.5 Factors such as age, level of literacy and health issues have resulted in some individuals still requiring support, which will be delivered by mainstream services. However, the majority are fully integrated into the community and are in employment and/or education.
- 6.6 There have been a number of recent highlights which demonstrate the individual achievements of those who have come through the scheme. One individual has commenced studies for a Master's degree. Another individual has been shortlisted for the i-care 'Inspiring Young Leader Award' for their achievements in sharing the Arabic language and culture. A household has also started a very successful and highly recommended food catering business.
- 6.7 The children have become confident English speakers, and the older people are making progress with their English language skills and learning to drive. A common characteristic has been the desire of the families to make a significant contribution to their local communities.

## **7. Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**

- 7.1 In September 2021, Highland Council agreed to support Afghan families to receive vital support to rebuild their lives, find employment, pursue education and integrate into the local community following the evacuation of Kabul by the British military. 13 families arrived in Autumn 2021 to Highland under a three-year programme of resettlement support. 5 of these families were accommodated and supported in Highland but have subsequently relocated to be closer to families and communities in other parts of Scotland and the UK.
- 7.2 Lord Harrington, Minister of State for Refugees wrote to all local authorities in 2022 to request a commitment to resettle refugees under the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), particularly to support Afghans placed in bridging hotels. 11 families have been welcomed to Ministry of Defence properties in the Inner Moray Firth area since December 2023. These were Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) who have worked for the UK and risked their lives alongside British forces in Afghanistan. 8

of these properties have been leased to the Council, while Pinnacle manage the other 3 properties on behalf of the MOD.

- 7.3 Highlife Highland (HLH) provide the ESOL (English for speakers of another language) provision for the ARAP scheme. They have designed a programme of integration according to the needs analysis and trauma-informed practice, providing pathways to work, managing everyday life as well as driving theory and digital skills.
- 7.4 Afghan women have embraced the opportunities provided by HLH and this includes participating in women's-only swimming tuition, cycling lessons, and driving theory tests. They have also participated in hill walking as part of the Wellbeing and Mental Health Project, funded by Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI). The women have also attended sewing training with a volunteer instructor while working towards an SQA qualification.
- 7.5 In August 2024, HLH hosted a very successful visit from Maree Todd, Minister for Sport, Social Care and Wellbeing to showcase some of the extra-curricular activities that they have organised outside of the core ESOL adult learning provision, which have been funded by the Scottish Government Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. Afghan women attended to discuss their personal experiences and the challenges and successes of their resettlement journey.
- 7.6 The Afghan men have also been heavily involved with community activities. In May 2024, The Afghan ESOL Literacy group took part in a volunteering experience with Hilton Church organised by one of the ESOL tutors, which involved maintaining and landscaping the green spaces of the Hilton Church. The men were recommended to a well-established landscaping company in Nairn and 5 Afghan men have subsequently been offered employment.
- 7.7 Formal resettlement support came to an end in August 2024 for the first 8 families housed under the ARAP scheme. The event was celebrated by the families, volunteers and business partners who have supported them in their journey to build a new life in Highland. The event date was specifically selected by the families as it marked the 3-year anniversary of their arrival in the UK after having been evacuated from Afghanistan and it was a joyful evening of music, delicious food experiences and connecting with the community.
- 7.8 Expressions of gratitude for the support were made by the families to the Council, HLH and New Start Highland, as well as to the numerous other individual volunteers and agencies who have contributed to their integration into the local community.
- 7.9 One of the families has stated that the programme has provided the "tools to settle in Highland." Many of the households have been able to find employment, the children are all attending school and their level of competency in English has improved substantially. The families will now transition to receiving support via mainstream services. However, they can still reach out to the Council or its partners, who will be able to signpost them to the organisations and/or individuals who will be able to assist them.

## **8. Ukrainian Programme**

### **8.1 Homes for Ukraine (HFU)**

The Highland Council debated the Ukraine crisis on 10 March 2022 and gave unequivocal support to the people of Ukraine. Council agreed it would help deliver

Government schemes and build on existing programmes and structures to support Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs).

- 8.2 A number of Council Services and partner agencies have helped sponsor families who have accommodated Ukrainian households. This has included but is not limited to: the administration of host payments; access to benefits; facilitating English language classes; providing employability support; developing links to higher education; and other means to help the households integrate into Highland life.
- 8.3 Most UDPs have settled in Highland very successfully and been well supported by community groups to integrate into local life. Many have gained employment, and their children have engaged well in local schools. Some have advised that they consider Highland to be their new home, while others advise they will return to Ukraine as soon as it is safe to do so.
- 8.4 As of September 2024, 6,426 Ukrainians have arrived in the UK under the HFU scheme, with the named sponsor located in Scotland. Highland sponsors have hosted a total of 233 UDPs to date with new arrivals continuing at a slower rate.
- 8.5 A package of funding support was agreed for the HFU scheme based on previous resettlement programme tariffs, removing pressure on local authorities to fund support for UDPs. There have been national and local housing pressures due to the high number of UDPs arriving to Scotland and the limited number of properties available to meet their needs as well as existing housing needs.
- 8.6 There have been limited homelessness presentations in Highland to date as clients have either voluntarily moved to other accommodation sourced through the Resettlement Team and Scottish Government or through their own personal arrangements.
- 8.7 **Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme (SSS)**  
21,267 Ukrainians have arrived in the UK under the 'Warm Scottish Welcome' Scheme and hold Scottish Super Sponsor visas. At its peak, 88 UDPs were in hosting arrangements through the SSS across Highland. From June 2022, the Scottish Government have placed Ukrainians in temporary hotel accommodation in response to the high number of Ukrainians arriving in Scotland and seeking sanctuary. By December 2022, there were 7 contracted hotels across Highland that accommodated 412 UDPs.
- 8.8 Education - All children in temporary hotel accommodation were registered in local schools and provided with school uniforms, school transport where required and given access to school meals. Adults were given access to ESOL classes provided by HLH and many registered for full-time ESOL classes at UHI Inverness.
- 8.9 Housing - Over the past two years, the Resettlement Team have collaborated with Scottish Government colleagues and teams in other local authorities, in line with the Move-on Policy issued by Scottish Government, to support UDPs with their housing options. Several families chose to remain in Highland in private rentals and 74 UDPs have been successful in the allocation of social tenancies on the Highland Housing Register. Some have been able to return to Ukraine while others were supported into properties in other local authorities in Scotland.
- 8.10 As of October 2024, only 1 hotel in Highland continues to be used by the Scottish Government for UDP placements (21 in total). The Resettlement Team will continue

to collaborate with key partners and our Scottish Government colleagues to fully support those individuals and families wishing to settle in Highland.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive Place

Date: 07 October 2024

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Photo gallery of resettlement and community activity

End of Resettlement Support Event August 2024

Traditional costume with Afghan flag



ESOL Certificate Presentation by HLH



**Food Prepared by the Afghan Families for the Event**





**Afghan ESOL Men's Group Volunteering in Hilton Church Garden**



**Afghan Women Practising their English to Communicate with the Sewing Instructor and the Centre's Staff.**





## Hill Walking



*“These are amazing moments to walk in the hills together with other Afghan women. To see nature, receive a good vibe and positive experience. For me, it is one of my best memories of my life. Thank you!” Yalda*





*“Hillwalking with John is a great sports activity. John also gives us interesting information about the plants and animals. It is a very pleasant experience to see the views from those high, green, and beautiful mountains.”* **Shafikullah**

## Maree Todd Visit with Afghan Learners August 2024



**A Class on how to Maintain Donated Bikes Attended by Resettled Families**



**Strathpeffer Community Sharing a Meal with Ukrainian Hotel Guests**



**Community Led Art Classes for Ukrainian Children at the Craigmonie Hotel**

