

**Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

**Report of: Managing Director**

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**Subject: SAFE AND LEGAL ROUTES CAP CONSULTATION**

## **1. Recommendation**

**That the Committee:**

- 1.1 Notes the contents of the report and in particular the use of the Managing Directors Urgency Powers, in consultation with the Joint Leaders of the Council, to agree a countywide response to the consultation.**

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 On 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 the Home Office launched a consultation with councils on a cap on safe and legal routes to the United Kingdom (UK) for the calendar year 2025.
- 2.2 The Illegal Migration Act places a duty on the Home Office to consult councils on the development of a cap on the number of entrants to the UK.
- 2.3 'Safe and legal' routes are sanctioned immigration provisions that provide access to the UK for humanitarian reasons.
- 2.4 The consultation closes on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

## **3. Information**

- 3.1 Since 2020 Worcestershire County Council Resettlement Service deliver on the commitments made by Worcestershire Councils across the various programmes currently signed up to.
- 3.2 Programmes include –

**UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)** – The UKRS reaffirms the UK's ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement and provide a safe and legal route to vulnerable refugees in need of protection. Worcestershire has supported this programme since 2016 and have settled 112 individuals during that time. A number have gone on to attain British Citizenship.

**Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** - Opened in January 2022 the scheme prioritises 1) 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 2) vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+).

**Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** – Opened in April 2021 the scheme is for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles. 149 people have been settled since September 2021 across SCRS and ARAP. As part of this programme, the Resettlement Service also managed a contingency hotel for 2 years, working with the Home Office to resettle those residents within Worcestershire.

**Homes for Ukraine Scheme** – Opened in March 2022, this sponsorship scheme allows people and organisations in the UK to offer Ukrainians fleeing the war a home. This scheme lets individuals, charities, community groups and businesses offer a route to safety for Ukrainians, even if they have no ties to the UK. Previously only Ukrainians with family already settled were eligible. Over 1000 people have been supported as part of the scheme

**Community Sponsorship Scheme** – The scheme enables community groups to directly welcome and support (including the provision of housing) a resettled family into their local community, complementing those resettled to local authorities through the UKRS. There is one voluntary organisation that support arrivals in this way within Worcestershire, based in Malvern.

- 3.3 This most recent consultation asks councils to consider a figure that they can commit to (for calendar year 2025) for UKRS, ACRS and the Community Sponsorship Scheme.
- 3.4 The consultation emphasises that there are a number of 'safe routes' that will not be included in the cap including the Ukraine schemes, Hong Kong British National Overseas route, and ARAP.
- 3.5 In line with consultation guidance, the Resettlement Service have engaged with VCS organisations and community sponsorship groups to understand the potential capacity that might be met as part of this consultation, taking into consideration the already substantial pressure within the system from the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Asylum Seeker programme. These programmes are putting considerable pressure on districts, particularly in terms of housing.
- 3.6 Ahead of Worcestershire Leaders Board on 30<sup>th</sup> November, the Managing Director consulted with both Joint Leaders of the Council, and the Chair and Vice Chair of Communities Committee on a proposed county-wide response to the consultation, developed by the Resettlement Service on behalf of all 7 councils.
- 3.7 4 options had been developed, these included:

**Option 1** – do not respond to the consultation. The consultation information makes clear that not providing a response would be treated as a 'zero capacity' commitment.

**Option 2** – Each district commits to a number individually and districts take on responsibility for procuring accommodation. There are challenges with this option in terms of being flexible in terms of number and location that best suit the arrivals and their needs. In addition, the Resettlement Service already have effective arrangements in place and a good track record in procuring property.

**Option 3** – Each district commits to a number individually and the Resettlement Services continues their work to meet that number, procuring suitable

accommodation. This option would move councils away from the effective approach agreed to date when supporting such programmes.

**Option 4**– A single consultation response to be sent as a ‘county of councils’ and propose a figure without having to consider district boundaries. This will continue to provide the flexibility of location, infrastructure, and availability of properties with the Resettlement Service continuing to procure properties.

- 3.8 At Worcestershire Leaders Board, the following (**Option 4**) was agreed, as set out below:
- 1) A single response would be submitted by Worcestershire County Council on behalf of all 7 councils.
  - 2) A commitment would be made to accommodate a maximum of 35 individuals, with no more than 2 properties to be procured within any one district.
  - 3) No properties to be procured from the social rented sector.
  - 4) The submission to set out the partnerships expectation that all costs associated with delivering against the commitment, should be fully funded.
- 3.9 It was agreed that following the existing successful programme of delivery and agreeing a countywide number that will meet the county’s desire to support the programmes but also providing the greatest flexibility in how to do it.
- 3.10 35 individuals was considered a suitable number based not only on previous experience, but also taking into consideration that not all the resettlement programmes are included in this consultation.
- 3.11 With over 15000 people on housing waiting lists across Worcestershire and 200 in temporary accommodation, it was felt appropriate to specify that only properties from the private rented sector would be procured in respect of this programme. It was felt that utilising 12 properties from the private rented sector (maximum of 2 from any one district) would not unduly impact the private rented market in respect of affordability or availability.
- 3.12 A final report will be published by the Home Office in response to the consultation, and officers will ensure to keep Political Group Leaders and the Chair and Vice Chair of Communities Committee briefed accordingly.
- 3.13 The Government intend to lay a Statutory Instrument in Parliament to set the cap in Summer 2024, including both the number and the routes subject to that cap, with the cap expected to be in operation in 2025. The cap will be annual but exemptions can be made in humanitarian emergencies.

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<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>N/A</b>