



Refugee resettlement update

Communities & Localism Select Committee

5 October 2022



Introduction by Cllr Arif Hussain

Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities

- Over the last two years, Buckinghamshire has welcomed individuals and families from both Afghanistan and Ukraine; many of whom are at very genuine risk to their lives fleeing violence and war
- Whilst the resettlement schemes being provided by Buckinghamshire Council to Afghans and Ukrainians are very different, they share the same ethos – wrap around practical support and care
- Buckinghamshire is also accommodating arrivals who are in the process of seeking Asylum – this includes Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- This presentation is to provide an update on what we have done so far and what our future plans are for refugees wanting to resettle in Buckinghamshire

Refugee Resettlement in Numbers

Asylum Seekers

- Current population in Buckinghamshire: 91 (June 2022)
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC): 50 (September 2022)
- Home Office set Target: 431 (by December 2023)

Afghan Resettlement

- Current population in Buckinghamshire: 52 people, across 12 families
- Target: 30 families over the cycle of the resettlement scheme

Ukraine Resettlement

- Current population in Buckinghamshire: 1,217
- Target: no target. 551 Ukrainian citizens matched to Buckinghamshire sponsors but not yet arrived

Financials

The financial support via Central Government Grants are based on formulas driven by the take up of each scheme. Below is a snapshot on the current status for each Grant.

Grant	Rate if applicable	Income to date £000's		Spend/ commitments to date £000's	
Homes for Ukraine Visa Scheme	£10,500 per beneficiary for 12mths from arrival date	8,788		7,994	
Afghan Resettlement	12 families to date 3 year tariff funding	496		43	
Asylum Dispersal	£3,500 per dispersal bed occupied to 31-03-2023	n/a		n/a	
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	£143 per day for young people aged under 18 years	<18yrs	454	<18yrs	659
	£270 per wk for young people 18 years and over	>18yrs	158	>18yrs	330

Homes for Ukraine Visa Scheme

- Income received as at Qtr1, noting funding covers 12mths and will therefore span Financial year 2022-23 and Financial Year 2023-24.
- Costs cover £200 welcome payment, SLO staffing, housing check staffing, children's holiday scheme, employment support, voluntary sector infrastructure, accommodation costs

Asylum Dispersal : information is as per informal consultation

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children : Income and expenditure to date 2022-23 financial year (claims are in arrears)

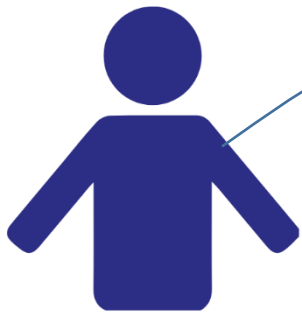


Ukraine

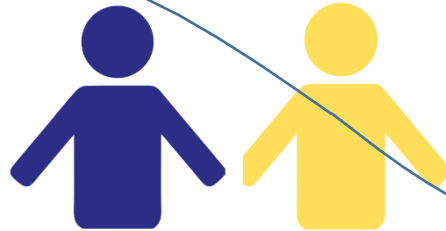


Ukraine

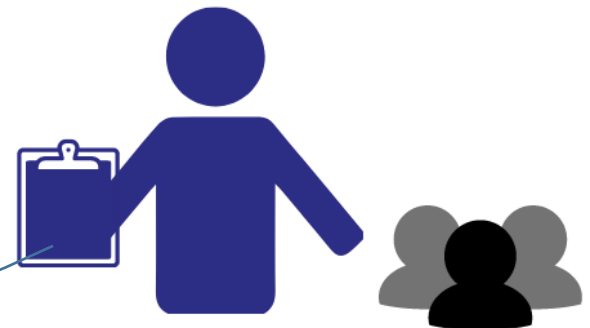
- There are two schemes: Family Visa Scheme and The Homes for Ukraine scheme
- The family scheme is a private arrangement with a three-year visa to join family members in the UK (we are not provided with any data about this scheme)
- Homes for Ukraine scheme - this is the national sponsor scheme where the Council has responsibility for administering funding and support
- Over 1,200 Ukrainian beneficiaries have arrived in Buckinghamshire, with 500+ more matched with Buckinghamshire sponsors but not yet arrived



Public 'sign up' to host an individual or family for minimum six months



Guests and hosts are matched (but not by the council)



The council provides coordinated support including education, housing checks and safeguarding

Operating model

- Formed a Local Strategic Partnership Board with sub groups to be in the best position to co-ordinate a strong response with partners to whatever scenario presents
 - Community Impact Bucks funded to support with community capacity and volunteer interpreters, workshops offering pre arrival advice
 - Support from BBF to guests looking for employment / setting up own businesses
- Programme team comprises of Head of Service, 12 Area Leads covering Community Board Areas and rematching, four refugee support officers including one of our Ukrainian guests, project and programme support officers.
- 150 Sponsor Liaison Officers - council staff, NHS and Fire service volunteers
- Services with additional responsibilities: Environmental Health, Housing, Safeguarding teams including DBS, School Admissions and Transport, Finance, Corporate Business Support



Sponsors
people offering a place
in their house



Guests
Ukrainians arriving –
sometimes called
beneficiaries



Sponsor Liaison Officers
Staff volunteers helping in
addition to their role

Being a Sponsor Liaison Officer

“

Being a Sponsor Liaison Officer is the **best thing I've ever done**, it's not just rewarding but **an honour**. In many cases, you are the representation of our area, our council and our country and at one of the most momentous periods in their life. Sponsors, guests and liaisons will **share these experiences forever** ”



Ryan, Chesham and Villages

“

Welcoming guests to Buckinghamshire and providing them and their sponsors with practical support and advice **has been an honour**. The Ukrainians I have met have been so happy and grateful to be here, I can't imagine being so brave and positive in their situation. **I am glad I have the opportunity to do something small to help them.** ”



Connie, Winslow and Villages - Wing and Ivinghoe


Homes for Ukraine scheme support

- Home Visit, DBS, safeguarding and welfare checks, School admissions support – including transport
- £350 monthly thank you payment to sponsor and £200 cash on arrival for guests
- Each sponsor assigned a Liaison Officer who provide benefits and employment signposting
- Partnered with Heart of Bucks to ensure crisis fund available
- Additional support packages some of which have been administered through community boards
- Adult Learning English Language courses available at 11 venues and new online offer
- Libraries, leisure centres, activities during the summer holidays (HAF)
- Hosting employment/jobs fairs for Ukrainian guests
- Support from business including toy vouchers from The Entertainer

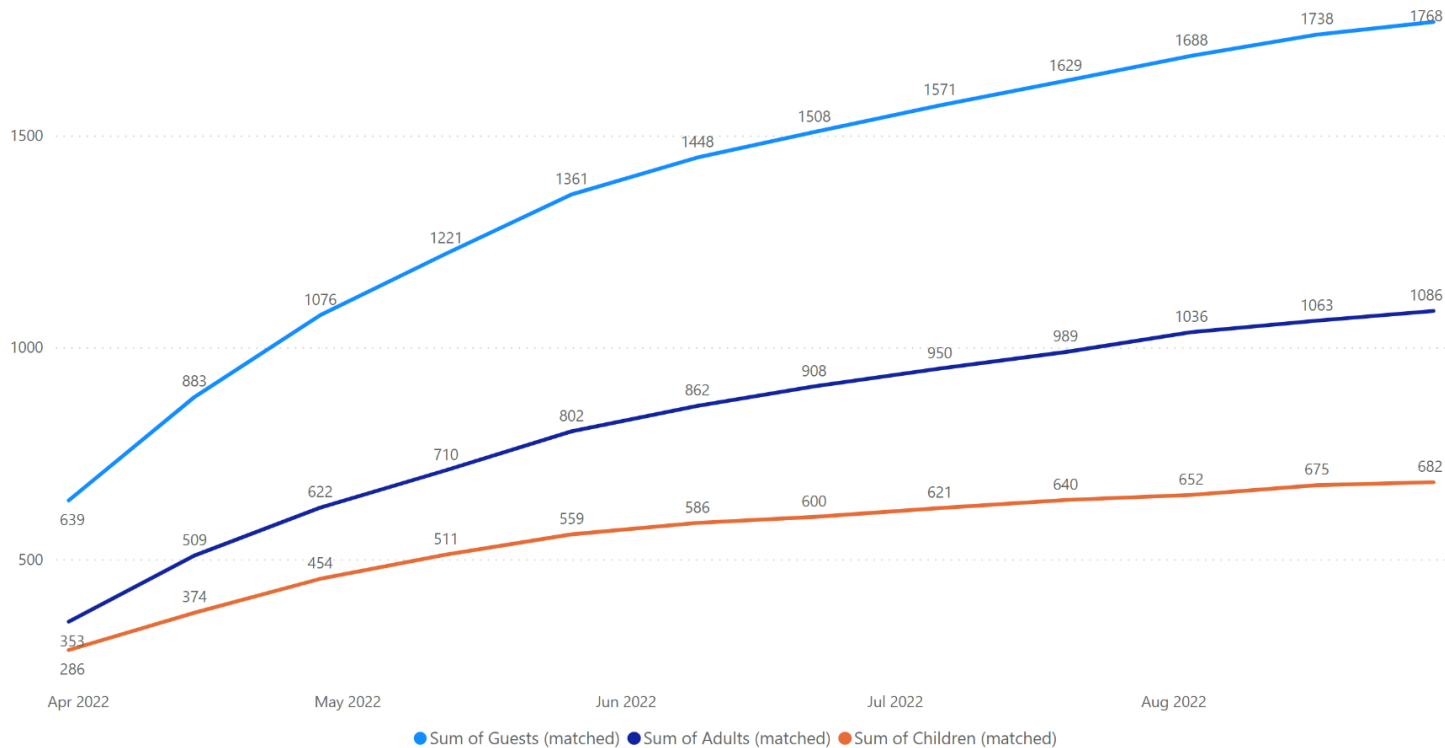
Communication

- Welcome pack for sponsors and translated version for guests
- Our webpages are being kept up to date [A Helping Hand for Ukraine | Buckinghamshire Council](#)
- Dedicated mailbox to understand emerging picture and ensure oversight of programme ukrainesupport@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- Buckinghamshire online directory is regularly updated to help identify what community support is available
- Sponsor and guest newsletter's circulated including housing options
- Attendance and presentations at community group sessions, Community Board meetings, Parish Clerk meetings

Current situation

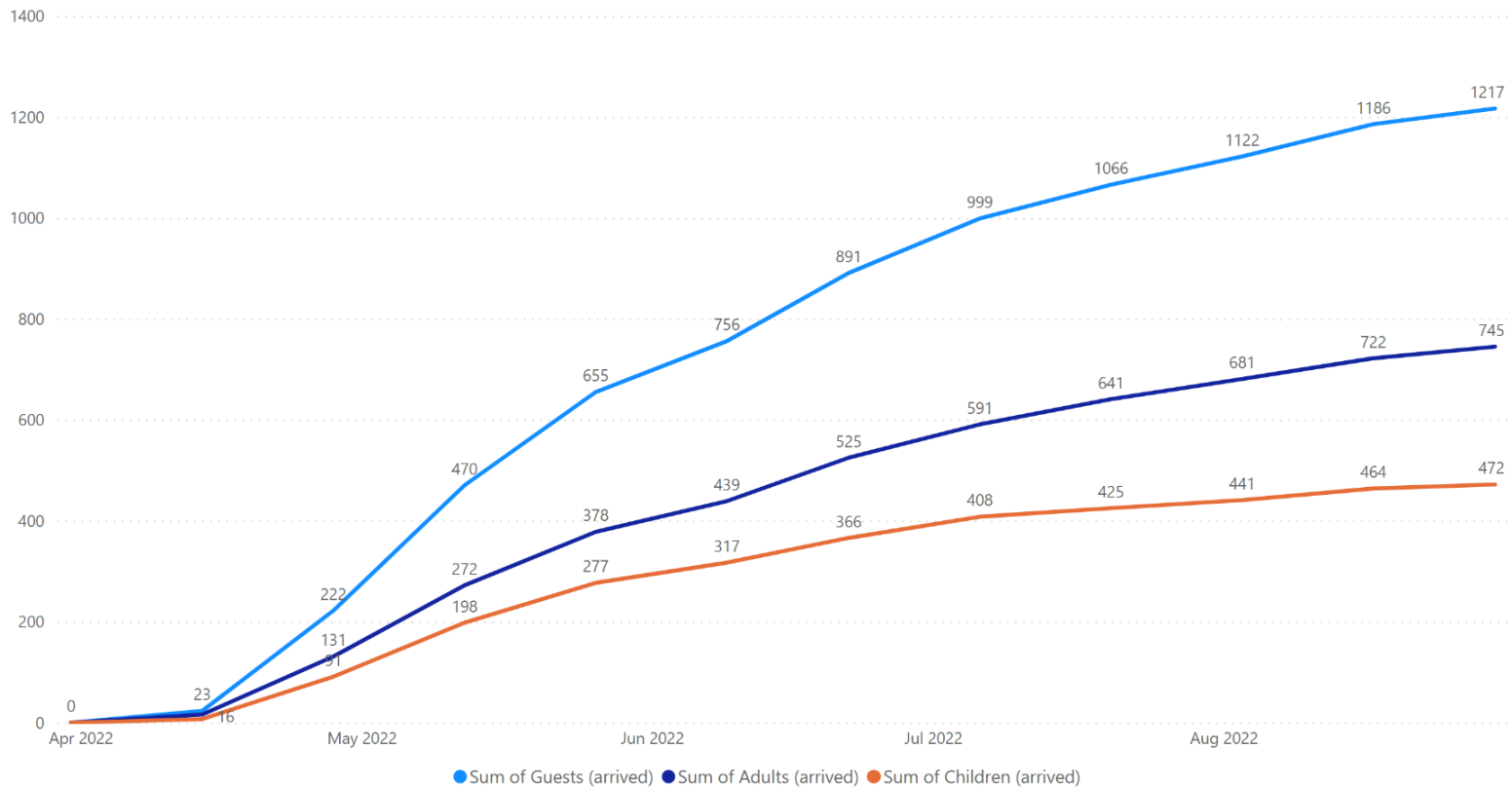
- Scheme launched end of March, first guests arrived in April
 - Significant activity and design of local programme within two weeks
 - High volume of sponsors in Bucks, particularly in the South of the county
 - Required housing checks, DBS checks and safeguarding checks for Children's and Adults. High volume and started with a backlog requiring emergency response
 - Developed good practice models based on fostering standards with safeguarding paramount
 - Volume of initial applications for checks slowed down but guest arrivals increased resulting in pressure points in different services
 - Inevitably there have been some relationship breakdowns which need to be managed
 - The majority of sponsors only signed up for the minimum 6 months support yet guests have right to remain for 3 years
- 

Metrics – guests matched



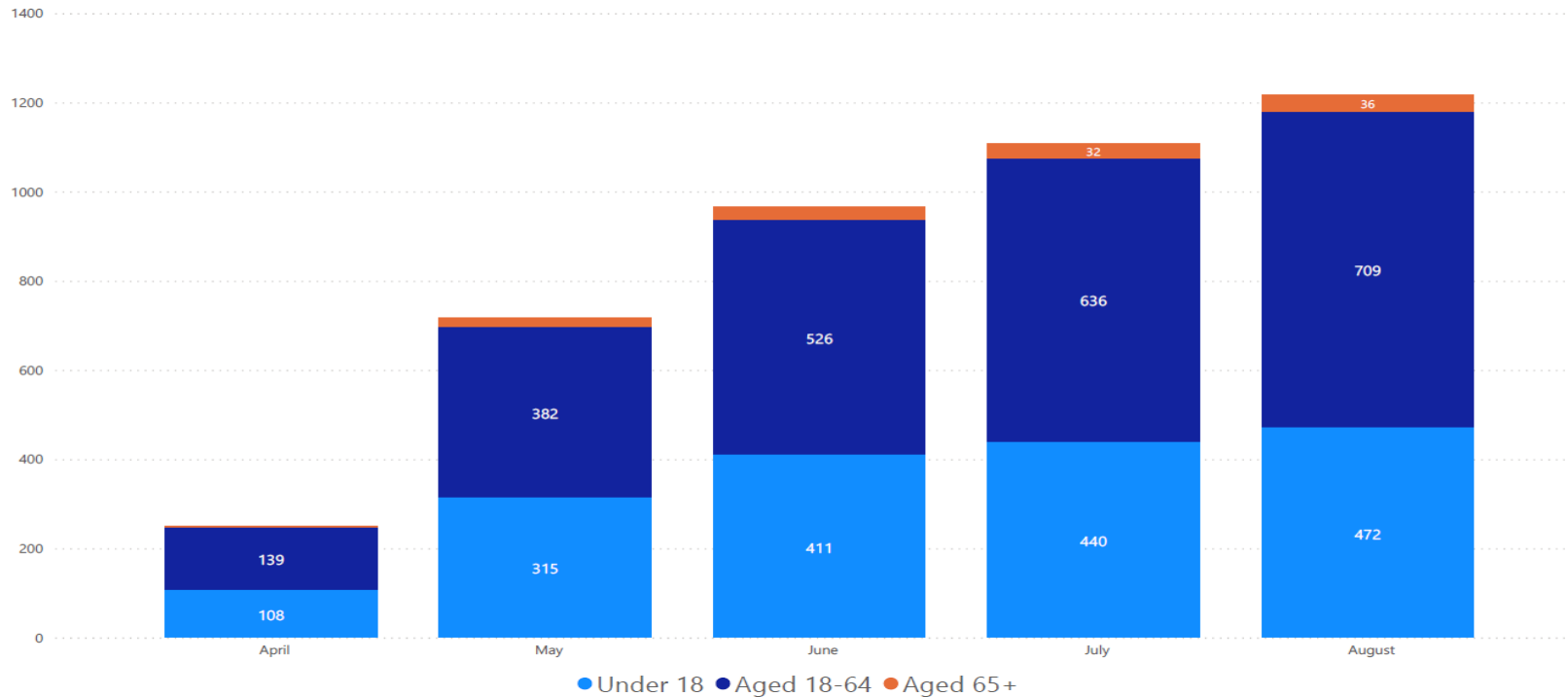
- Guests matched have continued to rise steadily following the initial high numbers in April and May, which highlights the need for ongoing resources to be assigned
- 682 children need school places, early education or post 16 support
- 61% of the matched guests are adults but we know there are a large number of family members left behind. It is important to remember these will be vulnerable and been through significant trauma

Metrics – guests arrived



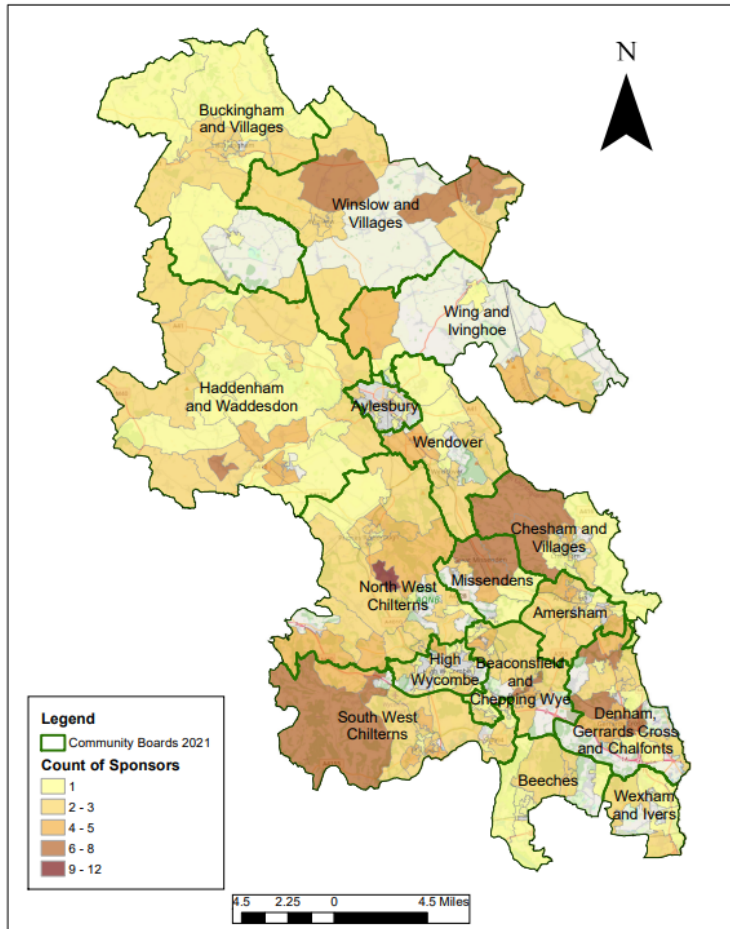
- Arrived guests have been steadily increasing. This is expected to level off in the coming months with the Council's emphasis shifting to deal with the need of rematches, as the end of the original 6 month sponsor agreement approaches

Metrics – beneficiaries arrived by age



- Beneficiaries in all age groups continue to rise steadily
- Arrival numbers have slowed in all age ranges however the 18-64 age group is increasing fastest with an 11% increase in August compared to July. This appears to be as a result of more working age males travelling to the UK
- Although 65+ lower than anticipated important to be mindful of adult social care needs

Metrics – sponsor location



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Produced by the DCE &
Resources BI Team



- There are a few areas across Buckinghamshire where we are seeing a high number of sponsors in one area
- This is predominately down to proactive community groups who worked to identify sponsors in their areas and have provided support
- The high proportion of sponsors in the South of the county is putting pressure on public services e.g. school places, school transport and doctors/dentist
- We have had local intel that the matching websites were encouraging Ukrainians not to match into rural areas due to transport difficulties. This explains the gaps in some of the areas

Local rematching

- Where hosts or guests want to end their agreement early rematching is available
- Rematched sponsors undergo the same checks as initial sponsors and a bank of available sponsors is being created
- There are instances where emergency rematching needs to take place due to a breakdown in the relationship between the guest and the sponsor
- The initial ask on sponsors was for a six month period. After six months, guests have the option of moving into private rental or social housing, both of which are expensive/in short supply in Buckinghamshire, therefore rematching may be their only option to remain the area they have settled in – with children in school and location of jobs
- We know that rematching will increase as we near the end of the initial six months

Post sponsorship options



1. Extending with sponsor

The sponsors can receive a 'thank you' payment for up to 12 months, so if the guest and sponsor are happy they can extend



2. Rematching with new sponsor

If a new sponsor can be found, the guest can move into a rematch. The 'thank you' payments can be transferred to the new sponsor



3. Private Renting

Guests can move into private rental, they are able to claim Local Housing Allowance through Universal Credit and the council can support with a deposit guarantee and first month rent upfront



4. Social Housing

Guests can apply to go onto the Housing Register and be assessed for priority need in line with the current policies

Post sponsorship challenges



1. Extending with sponsor

Some sponsors are clear they want to end at six months (either for practical reasons or due to the relationship with the guests)



2. Rematching with new sponsor

There are fewer residents coming forward to be rematches. We have a number of options for single people, but very few for larger family groups who need multiple rooms



3. Private Renting

Private rental accommodation is expensive, scarce and not always in settled location. Guests don't have credit history for checks. Local Housing Allowance may not cover rents



4. Social Housing

There is already a very high demand for social housing, in particular larger properties and in the South where we have a lot of settled guests

Additional Challenges

- Cost of living crisis - some sponsors have indicated £350 monthly payment not enough to cover the cost of hosting families
- Family members joining settled families in Bucks and increasing our numbers
- Sponsor Liaison Officers are finding it difficult to balance the additional work they have taken on alongside their day jobs so are stepping back from the role giving Area Leads a higher case load



Afghan Resettlement Scheme



Afghan resettlement scheme

- The situation in Afghanistan remains extremely concerning
- There are 2 schemes in operation: the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) scheme
- There have been over 21,450 arrivals into the UK from Afghanistan to date, with over 15,000 of occurring during Operation Pitting. Of these over 10,000 currently remain in Bridging Hotels and it estimated that between 500-1000 arrivals are entering the UK every month
- Funding is available to Local Authorities to provide Wrap around support for Afghans who are being resettled within an LA area
- Buckinghamshire Council is currently supporting 12 Afghan families (26 adults, 26 minors and 5 pregnancies) exceeding our target of 10 in the first 12 months. In the longer term we are expecting to accommodate 30 families over the cycle of the resettlement scheme.

ARAP Scheme

- The Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) launched on 1 April 2021 and remains open.
- Offers relocation or other assistance to former Locally Employed Staff (LES) in Afghanistan
- Any former LES can submit an application and are eligible to apply from any country (including Afghanistan) and regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.
- There are four categories for assistance, against which all ARAP applications are assessed.

	<u>Cohort</u>	<u>Assistance offered</u>
• Category 1	High risk / imminent threat	Urgent relocation
• Category 2	Eligible for relocation by default	Routine relocation
• Category 3	Not eligible for relocation	Other support offered
• Category 4	Special cases	Case-by-case basis

ACRS Scheme

- The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) launched on 6 January 2022.
- Priority cohorts:
 - 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
 - vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)
- The UK will resettle more than 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years.
- The ACRS scheme is not application-based. Instead, eligible people will be prioritised and referred for resettlement to the UK through one of 3 referral pathways, pathway 2 and 3 were launched recently

ACRS Scheme

- **Pathway 1** - vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme have been the first to be settled under the ACRS. Eligible people who were notified by the UK government that they had been called forward or specifically authorised for evacuation, but were not able to board flights, will also be offered a place under the scheme if they subsequently come to the UK
- **Pathway 2**, - referrals are now being received from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of vulnerable refugees who have fled Afghanistan for resettlement to the UK
- **Pathway 3** - designed to offer a route to resettlement for those at risk who supported the UK and international community effort in Afghanistan, as well as those who are particularly vulnerable, such as women and girls at risk and members of minority groups. In the first year this is for: British Council contractors, GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni.

Afghan resettlement support

- Ongoing liaison with Home Office and South East Migration Partnership to match families with suitable accommodation within Buckinghamshire.
- Linking with appropriate services to provide:
 - Healthcare
 - Education
 - English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
 - Employment support
 - Access to benefits
- Provision of friendly support and practical advice, and develop an integration plan alongside experienced local community members
- Liaison with partners and the voluntary and community sector
- Coordination of local offers of support

Current situation

- 12 settling families (across 13 properties) doing well with successful delivery of integration plans and ongoing support in place
- Really positive feedback regarding the support received from the Afghan resettlement officers
- All Afghan families accessing ESOL lessons (unless experienced Interpreters)
- Community Sponsors and welfare visits plans in place for all families according to level of support requirement.
- Financial support from Heart of Bucks Crisis fund, and further support with supermarket vouchers, food parcels and travel allowances.



Current situation

- All registered with GPs/Midwife – supporting complex health referrals to Hospital. Some under NHS Dental care
- Children of school age or early year (2yrs+) attending setting for education and developing English language skills.
- Family triage information to ensure support is delivered as appropriate.
- 8 further families in the pipeline - potential accommodation options being explored.
- Working with the Ministry of Defence to explore possibility of securing properties in Bucks suited to larger families

Recent policy changes

- Two recent developments in the schemes have been launched:
 1. **Find your own accommodation pathway** – to enable Afghans in Bridging hotels to source their own accommodation. Support within the system to ensure that families are sourcing appropriate accommodation and also to ensure the a receiving Local Authority is able to provide response back on the suggested accommodation. Buckinghamshire is not participating in this scheme due to availability of housing supply and volume of Ukrainian refugees accommodated
 2. **Enhanced Matching Process** - for Afghans in Bridging Hotels –Afghans in Bridging Hotels are now only able to decline 2 suitable accommodation offers. If neither are accepted, they are declared homeless and will be sourced temporary accommodation as per the Homelessness statutory responsibilities of the receiving LA.

Challenges and risks

- Many properties in Buckinghamshire will be unaffordable especially with many Afghan families requiring larger sized accommodation. A potential solution here is the use of MOD accommodation for ARAP families
- Complex language barriers where education system in Afghanistan was poor, especially for females. This is more acute in relation to written English which is essential for employment, especially more skilled employment. Work is in progress with Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) to explore solutions
- There can be a delay for families to receive appropriate benefit support as early as possible. Biometric Residence Permits (BRP), which are required for employment and driving licences can also be delayed

Challenges and risks

- Mental health issues and trauma can impact on the level of support required from the LA team to assist with their resettlement. Trauma-informed approach required to reflect family's experiences of prolonged war.
- Families at risk of exploitation with limited knowledge of their rights in the UK, vulnerability within community
- Cost of living crisis and ongoing support
- High levels of pregnancy rate (of 12 families supported 2 have given birth since arriving to Buckinghamshire and 5 are currently pregnant), resulting in provided accommodation may quickly become unsuitable.
- Further Bridging/Temporary Accommodation will need to be sourced by Govt which could be in Buckinghamshire. The pressure of this and the other schemes such as Ukraine scheme and Asylum Dispersal could see significant pressure developing within Buckinghamshire.