



## Report to

Meeting Date – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024

Key Decision – No

Public/Private – Public

Portfolios – Cllr Markus Campbell-Savours, Governance and Thriving Communities, Cllr Emma Williamson, Deputy Leader and Statutory Lead for Children’s Services, Cllr Elaine Lynch, Lifelong Learning and Development

Directorates – Adult Social Care and Housing and Children and Family Wellbeing

Lead Officers – Chris Jones-King, Director of Adult Social Care and Housing and Martin Birch, Director of Children and Family Wellbeing

**Title – Refugees, Evacuees and Asylum Seekers Support**

### Summary:

This paper provides Scrutiny members with detail relating to the Refugee, Evacuee and Asylum programmes now operational within Cumberland. The report outlines the current position in relation to each programme. Including providing an overview of the current support provided, in relation to Housing, Communities, Social Care and Education and identifies longer-term plans.

### Recommendations:

Scrutiny is asked to note the attached report and its contents.

### Tracking

Executive:	
Scrutiny:	
Council:	



## **1. Background**

- 1.1. The report provides an overview of migration routes currently operational within Cumberland. Many of these programmes were introduced at short notice in response to government announcements. Each programme has separate Local Authority funding streams and are funded through Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 1.2. The Refugee, Evacuee and Asylum Strategic Partnership is currently chaired by Tracey Ingham, Assistant Director, Thriving Communities in Westmorland and Furness. This arrangement came into place following the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and is still in place following the Global Resettlement Service disaggregation in October 2023. Attendees are Police, Health, Public Health, DWP, Education, Housing, Social Care, Education and Skills, Third Sector, Cumbria Voluntary Service and Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP). This Strategic Partnership, during the disaggregation met on a monthly basis and currently meets on a 2 monthly basis or more frequently when issues arise that require a coordinated multi-agency response.

## **2. Proposals**

- 2.1. To note the report

## **3. Alternative options considered**

- 3.1. n/a

## **4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

- 4.1. n/a

**Implications:**n/a

**Contribution to the Cumberland Plan Priorities -**

**Relevant Risks – n/a**

**Consultation / Engagement -**

**Legal – n/a**

**Finance –n/a**

**Information Governance – n/a**

**Impact Assessments –**

Have you screened the decision for impacts using the Impact Assessment? n/a

**Contact details:**

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**Appendices attached to report:**

- Cumberland Council Global Resettlement Service-Service Plan 2024-2025.

**Background papers:**

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: n/a

**Title of Briefing:** Refugees, Evacuees and Asylum Seekers Support

**Author:** Rob Cartner, Resettlement Programme Manager

**Directorate:** Adult Social Care and Housing

**Date:** 01.03.24.

**Purpose:** To provide an overview of current migration routes and the support provided.

## **Executive Summary**

- Provides an overview on all the Refugee, Evacuee and Asylum programmes now operational in Cumberland.
- Outlines current position in relation to each programme.
- Identifies current delivery and future longer-term plans in relation to Housing, Community, Education and Social Care.
- Appendix 1: Service Development Plan, provides an overview of areas for service development.

## **1. Background**

**1.1** The Cumberland Global Resettlement Service (CGRS) became operational in April 2017 in response to the Syrian conflict. CGRS now delivers and supports the following programmes:

- **United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)** this programme provides safe and legal routes into the UK for humanitarian purposes. Eligible refugees come from the following regions-Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kurdish population across the Mena region. This programme provides support to refugees for a 5-year period.
- **Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP)** became operational in April 2021 with the first arrivals in Cumberland in July 2021, ahead of the fall of Kabul. This programme is for citizens who worked alongside the UK Military and UK Government. Those eligible for relocation under ARAP may do so with a partner, dependant children and wider family members. This programme provides support for a 3-year period.
- **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** formally opened in January 2022. This programme prioritises those who assisted with 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 and minority groups at risk (including ethnic, religious, and LGBT+). There are 3 separate ACRS Pathways:

**Under Pathway 1;** vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme have been first to be resettled under ACRS. This means Pathway 1 families all arrived into the UK immediately following the Fall of Kabul.

**Under Pathway 2;** referrals come via the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), made up of vulnerable refugees who have fled Afghanistan, individuals and families are assessed under their vulnerability criteria. This makes Pathway 2 similar to UKRS, in that there is a longer assessment process completed by UNHCR, and families may have been living outside of Afghanistan for some time.

**Under Pathway 3;** a route to offer resettlement to those at risk who supported the UK, as well as vulnerable groups, who have fled Afghanistan to neighbouring countries or remain in the country.

Regardless of Pathway, support is provided for resettlement for a period of 3 years.

- **Homes for Ukraine** became operational in March 2022. This programme provides Ukrainian's fleeing the conflict and who were resident in Ukraine prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 to be sponsored to come to the UK. This route is uncapped and dependant on the number of Sponsors/Hosts who come forward. Sponsors/Host match with Ukrainians (Guests) over social media, we then undertake accommodation assessments, suitability assessments along with enhanced DBS checks on all adults within the Hosting family. Once these are complete a visa is issued. Thank you payments are made to Hosts on a monthly basis with the expectation that they will continue their hosting arrangement for a minimum period of 12 months.
- **Homes For Ukraine Unaccompanied Minors** is a programme for 'eligible minors' who are coming to the UK without their parent(s)/legal guardian. Sponsors of these applicants must follow a different process to the main scheme, including providing parental consent, and will need to meet relevant eligibility criteria and pass enhanced safeguarding checks before a visa can be issued.
- **Ukraine Family Support Scheme** is a scheme where Ukrainian residents in the UK are able to support family, friends or general Ukrainians who wish to flee the conflict. This scheme is not funded by the UK government and we are unable to assess the number of Ukrainians who have settled into this arrangement in Cumberland. National data based on visa's issued to those coming via this route into the UK is in the region of 56,600. Some case work has been delivered to this group due to breakdowns in relationships and families requiring general support.
- **Asylum Contingency Hotels**, all 3 hotels within the Cumberland footprint closed in December 2023. A small portion of the occupants were dispersed into dispersal accommodation within Cumberland, the remainder were relocated to out of county asylum estate.
- **Asylum Dispersal** is new to Cumberland and as a Local Authority we have been allocated 166 bed spaces. Serco is the northwest regional contracted provider for the Home Office, who procure accommodation across the region. All properties are homes of multiple occupancy (HMOs) and can accommodate 4 or 5 individuals per property. Once an individual within dispersal accommodation receives their Leave to Remain (LTR) they are given 28 days' notice to leave, the bed space is then reoccupied.

- **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)** are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but have arrived and been separated from their parents. This programme is delivered by the Children Looked After and Leaving Care Team. Those who arrive under this programme are age assessed and then supported dependant on age in either foster care, residential care or supported living.
- **Community Sponsorship Programmes (CSP)** enables community groups to directly welcome and support resettled families into their local community. These groups need to raise £10,000, have a property for use of the family and have developed an integration support plan. The CSP is supported by Caritas who are the lead sponsor. The CGRS inspect the property and review the integration plan and provide ongoing support to the group as well as the family if required.
- **Hong Kong British Nationals** became operational on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2021. Citizens can apply for limited leave to remain to work or study in the UK for up to 5 years and become eligible for settled status after 5 years of qualifying residence. To date Cumberland has not seen or had formal requests for support from anyone arriving within this scheme.

## 2. Current Position

**2.1 United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme:** Since commencement of this scheme in April 2017 we have resettled 171 individuals ( 41 families). During this time we have seen in the region of 14 births in Cumberland and 34 individuals have left county during this time. We have only had 7 individuals (2 families) arrive during 2023.

As part of this scheme, we provide wrap around Resettlement support, with the first 12 months delivered through early help assessments and plans. Support is provided for up to 5 years, at which point families can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain or Settlement Status.

As part of the safe and legal routes consultation, Cumberland has agreed to accept 50 individuals through this route in 2025. This will equate to approximately 12 families.

**2.2 Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme:** Each arrival under these schemes have an early help assessment and plan for approximately 6 to 8 months. Following this period, they continue to receive support from the service up to 3 years from point of arrival.

Since commencement in July 2021 of both ARAP and ACRS, Cumberland has resettled 113 individuals with a further 11 individuals arriving in February 2024. There has been no formal request by Home Office for a resettlement pledge in 2024, however we are working towards 50 individuals.

Whilst the Home Office has now closed all Afghan Bridging Hotels, eligible Afghans overseas are being moved to the UK with around 3,500 arrivals from both ARAP and ACRS arriving in the UK in the last quarter of 2023. Arrivals either go into transitional

accommodation such as the 4 interim hotels, Service Family Accommodation (SAF) or MOD sites. These are short stay accommodation and all LA's are asked to put forward suitable accommodation.

Additionally, MEARS a contracted provider of the MOD is securing properties for Afghans and to date one property has been put forward in Cumberland. Once this property is ready to receive a family, the CGRS will provide integration and support.

- 2.3 Homes for Ukraine** has seen 440 Ukrainian Guest arrive in Cumberland since the start of the conflict in Ukraine. The 440 Guest were accommodated by 231 Hosts. There are currently 62 Hosts accommodating 148 Ukrainian Guests, including 52 children under the age of 18yrs, with a further 18 Hosts awaiting Guest arrivals. We have seen an additional 177 Ukrainians leave their hosting arrangement and move into social housing or private rental. We have also seen 117 Ukrainians move out of Cumberland either to other local authorities or returning to Ukraine or Europe.
- 2.4 Homes For Ukraine Unaccompanied Minors** has seen only 2 arrivals through this route since the start of the conflict.
- 2.5 Asylum Dispersal**, changes on a daily basis, and currently stands in the region of 30 active properties with approximately 120 occupants. Numbers will continue to fluctuate as occupants of the properties receive Leave to Remain (LTR) outcomes. Home Office has indicated that 40,000 claims will be processed before the end of April 2024. This in turn means that the pace of asylum dispersal and LTR outcomes may increase in Cumberland, which in turn may impact on available housing for those who receive a positive LTR and are then given notice to leave the dispersal accommodation.
- 2.6 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs)** has seen an increase in the number of assessments in 2023, linked to the Asylum Contingency Hotels. Currently there are 40 UASCs under the age of 18 years, placed in a combination of foster placements, supported living and residential care, both locally and outside county. In addition to the above group there are 43 young people over the age of 18 years supported by Leaving Care Advisors.
- 2.7 Community Sponsorship Programmes (CSP)**, only one programme exists in Cumberland (Carlisle) and is called Our Lady of Perpetual Hope. This group supports one family of 5 who came through the UKRS route in August 2022.

### **3. Housing**

- 3.1** The availability of housing stock within Cumberland Council is under pressure. Serco as part of their asylum dispersal accommodation procurement have a pipeline of properties. Many of these properties will not come to fruition. However, this means that these



properties are no longer available to the public, or our housing options teams to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- 3.2** Mears who are contracted by the Ministry of Defence have secured one property to date for the placement of Afghans. Placements of this nature will receive CGRS wrap around support and the LA Funding tariff. As this is a recent national response we do not know at this stage what levels of accommodation will be secured through this route in Cumberland.
- 3.3** Properties for the refugee and evacuee programmes, UKRS, ARAP and ACRS were, historically, solely sourced through social housing. This has recently changed and the service is now actively engaged with private landlords and hosting arrangements across all our programmes. Projected accommodation needs for 2024 will be in the region of 12 properties.
- 3.4** Additionally, we have seen 177 individual Ukrainian Guests move into either social housing or private rental. They have been supported through the Global Resettlement Services Re-Matching and Housing Officer in securing accommodation. Whilst this is positive for these individuals it does further compound the availability of housing stock at a time when homelessness is on the increase, fuelled by the cost-of-living crisis and affordable homes.

#### **4. Housing Support Plan**

- 4.1 Home England Funding:** It has recently been announced that Strategic Partners with Homes England can now apply for capital grant to fund replacement homes alongside net additional affordable housing. This may bring opportunities to regenerate housing that registered providers have previously deemed unviable to replace or bring up to decent homes standard where there is capacity to build new homes as well. This is something we will be discussing with our strategic partners in terms of general affordable housing.
- 4.2 Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF):** The Local Authority Housing Fund is a capital fund that supports local authorities in England to obtain housing for those who are unable to find settled accommodation on resettlement schemes. Round 3 of the LAHF was announced in the Autumn statement, worth £450 Million, to help support and we are currently awaiting detail. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The grant is for 40% of the median property price in the area plus an allocation of £20k per property for refurbishment costs, so there is an expectation that local authorities put forward funding themselves. It is expected that a minimum of one bridging unit and one Temporary Accommodation unit is delivered should funding be allocated.

**4.3** The Local Authority Housing Fund will support selected local authorities in England to obtain and refurbish property in order to provide sustainable housing for those unable to secure their own accommodation who are here under the following schemes: ARAP, ACRS, HFU and Ukraine Family Scheme.

**4.4** As well as helping to fulfil the UK's humanitarian duties to assist those fleeing war, this fund will reduce the impact of new arrivals on existing housing pressures and ultimately create a lasting legacy for domestic households by providing a new and permanent supply of accommodation for local authorities to help address local housing and homelessness pressures.

**4.5 Empty Homes:** In November 2022 empty homes figures for the 3 former district areas were (from CTB1 extract):

District	Empty Homes	Second Homes	1 in every x homes out of use
Allerdale	647	1270	25
Carlisle	668	569	44
Copeland	468	1097	22

We know that many homes remain empty as owners are unable to fund works to bring them back into use or are unwilling to sell them below market value as they still see the property as an asset, even in a dilapidated state. Some properties are also bought by people outside of the county who hold them as part of a portfolio with no intention of making available as housing.

There has been a reduction in long term empty homes which may be due to the increased Council Tax premium, however numbers remain significant. The recent press release about an empty home in Carlisle being brought back into use through the Enforced Sale Policy has led to numerous other properties being reported by residents, and Councillors, with little resource or funding available across Cumberland to respond. Consideration should be given to what could be enabled through use of empty homes.

**4.6** Working in partnership with Housing and Homelessness an application for LAHF funding will be made. CGRS has allocated £200,000 in support of securing and providing accommodation that will help address housing and homelessness pressures. This allocated funding will come from the Homes for Ukraine budget.

## **5. Community**

- 5.1** The experience to date in relation to Asylum Dispersal accommodation and its occupancy is challenging. Serco do not routinely inform the Council when properties are occupied. Those moving into dispersal accommodation generally come from out of county and are supported remotely by Migrant Help. This often means that those occupying the accommodation are unfamiliar with the local area and the service that could support them, impacting on community and integration.
- 5.2** Third sector play an important role in supporting Asylum Dispersal as well as Refugees and Evacuees. The resilience and capacity of third sector, voluntary and community groups is of particular concern, given the reliance on the work they undertake to provide basic supplies, support with English lessons, one to one support, and general activities that promote integration into our communities, especially for Asylum Seekers.
- 5.3** In general terms there are numerous localised social events which involve local communities, which enhance community integration and breakdown perceived barriers to migration. These are most often organised through third sector and supported by the CGRS and other partners. Weekly drops ins run by both Council, partners and third sector are held across the Cumberland footprint, providing access to support across a range of issues.
- 5.4** Access to immigration lawyers/advice through legal aid nationally is limited and overwhelmed. There are currently no Immigration Advisors in Cumbria, and there are no legal firms preparing to take on this work around asylum. Supporting asylum seekers in Cumberland with their application to remain, will prevent destitution and homelessness in our communities where failed application occurs. Using recognised Immigration Advisors, will ensure national standards are applied.
- 5.5** Funded by CGRS 'Escape to Safety' is an interactive, multi-media walk-through exhibition (designed by Global Link in Lancaster) where you put yourself in asylum-seekers' shoes and listen to and experience refugees' stories as you navigate through the exhibit and complete activities associated with it. It involves a powerful combination of a reconstructed journey with audio, some short films, VR, conversations with the students and thought-provoking introductory and follow-up exercises.

Closely linked to the schools' curriculum and Post-16 studies, the project will be open to all the college pupils, local schools and the wider community.

## **6. Community Support Plan**

- 6.1** Supporting those arriving via asylum dispersal as well as refugees and evacuees in our communities is essential, if these groups of people are to become valued members of our communities. In support of all migration routes and our valued Third Sector and Support groups an allocation of £150,000 for 2024 has been awarded to support integration.

- 6.2** The Office of Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) Levels 1,2 and 3 training will enhance Cumberland's offer in relation to asylum. The above funds will assist Third sector who are currently training a volunteer.
- 6.3** We are in the process of developing a Resettlement working group, made up of Refugees, Evacuees, and Asylum Seekers. This group will provide opportunity for these groups to feed into our services to better enable us to deliver initiatives that are more meaningful to those receiving support. This will provide us with an opportunity to gain feedback on services delivered already and assess how much families and individuals already engage with existing community initiatives outside of their own.
- 6.4** We will be seeking to secure a Community and Volunteer Coordinator from our migrant community. The purpose of this role will be to develop a volunteer programme made from the resettlement community with a focus on cohesion and integration in our communities.
- 6.5** Links with all the Carlisle City of Sanctuary network partners are established. The purpose of which is to build culture of 'hospitality and inclusiveness', predominantly for asylum seekers and refugees, by coordinating and supporting network of community groups.

## **7. Social Care**

- 7.1** All refugees as part of the UKRS, ARAP, ACRS are supported by the Cumberland Global Resettlement Service through an Early Help assessment and plan. This provides the right support at the right time using the Signs of Safety approach and prevents escalation into the Safeguarding Hub. Since April 2017 we have seen 4 families referred into the Safeguarding Hub from our UKRS programme and 1 from ARAP. Early Help plans for those arriving via the Homes for Ukraine Scheme are only opened where issues/concerns are identified.
- 7.2** Each new Refugee and Evacuee as part of the intensive orientation are taken through, UK culture awareness, British laws, and British values. Both the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service and Cumbria Constabulary are involved in this process. This supports families to know what is and is not acceptable within the UK.
- 7.3** The UASC service has experienced some challenges in relation to the number of age assessments, and access to interpreters. This was a direct result of the Asylum Contingency Hotels however this is now resolved following closure of the hotels. Delays in receiving asylum outcomes and access to solicitors pose a significant problem within all the asylum population for adults. In relation to UASC, legal aid is available,

where a Solicitor is required this is sourced outside of county, due to no legal firms in Cumbria currently providing legal advice on migration issues.

- 7.4** There are currently 6 UASC Care Leavers who were offered move on accommodation, but refused, resulting in all moving into homelessness accommodation. Access to available housing poses a risk of further homelessness or the need for homelessness accommodation as we see an increase in adult Asylum Seekers entering the county.
- 7.5** The CGRS reports directly to the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) a minimum of twice yearly. Providing updates on all migration routes along with detail relating to themes and barriers. This Board is valued and contributes to assisting CGRS in the delivery of services.

## **8. Social Care Support Plan**

- 8.1** Recently CGRS in partnership with the International Organisation of Migration have delivered training to staff within the UASC team and wider partners. This training has involved bespoke training packages based on nationalities and has provided cultural awareness, beliefs and values, religious practices, ethnicity, and culture shock. This type of training will continue and be offered to social care and other partners.
- 8.2** Further training has been delivered through Migrant Help and offered to the wider council services in relation to Asylum seekers. Enabling staff to gain knowledge on the different aspects of migration, status and entitlement. Sharing practice and greater levels of training and support to practitioners across the Council will enhance Cumberland's offer.
- 8.3** Work will commence as part of the development plan to identify settled families who might be interested in becoming a Homestays provider, with a view to supporting young people 16 to 21 years who are UASCs.
- 8.4** Through funding Third Sector/Community Groups that support all migration routes the UASC service will be able to establish closer links with these organisations. For the UASC service users this would mean contact with others of the same nationality, age, culture, beliefs, and values. Access to the wider public, support and social activities will enhance integration and resettlement.

## **9. Education**

- 9.1** All educational establishments are invited to contribute to Early Help plans and team around the family, many of these meetings, whilst coordinated by the CGRS are held within school establishments. This enables the family and professionals to work together to achieve positive outcomes for the family.

- 9.2 Access to interpretation within schools is often sporadic, where capacity is available within our service area we are able to support with Arabic, Pashto, Dari, Ukrainian and Russian.
- 9.3 Education reports that there is current capacity within school's admissions, however dependant on individual schools this may mean that learners don't get the nearest school. Education is currently providing exceptional transport costs.
- 9.4 Education establishments receive the following payments from CGRS in relation to school age children:

Programme	Children 5-18 years	Children 3-4 years
UKRS/ARAP/ACRS	£4,500	£2,250

- 9.4 Maximus, Refugee Employability Programme is a new programme to Cumbria and is delivered on behalf of the Home Office. This service helps refugees prepare for work and life in England, with individual support and a learning plan to improve their English and career skills.
- 9.5 ESOL provision for those 18 years and above is available from a number of organisations, such as Adult Learning who are funded directly for 8 hours per week provision per learner. Additionally, Carlisle and Lakes College, Brook Street School, Maximus and Third Sector also deliver ESOL.
- 9.6 CGRS are currently delivering the B1 Citizenship English classes for families to get ready for their citizenship applications and test following receipt of their Indefinite Leave to Remain. To date 8 families have made an application of which 2 families have been successful and awarded citizenship.

## 10. Education Support Plan

- 10.1 The CGRS is currently developing an educational resource pack, which highlights what financial support is available as well as support from the service. It also provides links to training resources, promotes best practice as well as information on culture, beliefs, and values across a range of nationalities. We will be working closely with the SEND Team in developing resources. This resource pack will be distributed/disseminated through the cluster meetings for heads of school.
- 10.2 In addition to the above CGRS are working with partners such as Migrant Help and Third Sector in the development of information, which can be presented in school assemblies.
- 10.3 International Rescue Committee, provide the Healing Classrooms programme, which aims to support schools and educators to develop inclusive and nurturing learning

spaces where refugee and asylum-seeking students can gain the necessary academic, social and emotional skills to develop their full potential. They offer free training sessions and resources to educators and schools supporting refugee and asylum-seeking students in the UK.

**10.4** Links into the Primary Heads Association and the Multi Academy Trusts are in the process of been established, providing a direct route into education.

**10.5** As part of the safe and legal routes consultation it was identified that when CGRS secure properties for incoming Refugees and Evacuees that school catchment areas need to be taken into consideration to prevent over subscription in school settings. As such, when properties are put forward we will discuss with education prior to accepting the property and also identify what availability there is within education settings, this will then inform Home Office referrals.

**10.6** In relation to Homes for Ukraine, Hosts put forward their hosting arrangement and we have no authority to refuse the offer unless there are safeguarding concerns, or the property is unsuitable. Where a local school is unable to accept a Ukrainian child and they secure a placement at a different school then CGRS will cover the cost of school transport.

## **11. Appendix**

Appendix 1: Cumberland Council Global Resettlement Service-Service Plan 2024-2025.