

**Report of the Cabinet Member for
Public Health, Communities and Equality**

Introduction

I will be reporting as follows for Full Council on 7 October 2021:

1. by Councillor Hannaford and Atkinson as follows:

The government has announced that under its Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme thousands of Afghan women, children and others most in need will be welcomed to the UK.

Those who have been forced to flee their home or face threats of persecution or even death from the Taliban will be offered a route to set up home in the UK permanently.

The UK government's ambition is for the new scheme to resettle 5,000 Afghan nationals who are at risk due to the current crisis, in its first year.

Priority will be given to women and girls, and religious and other minorities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses and dehumanising treatment by the Taliban.

This resettlement scheme will be kept under further review for future years, with up to a total of 20,000 in the long-term. The ambition is to provide protection to thousands of people fleeing Afghanistan, in the context of the complex picture on the ground that means there will be significant challenges delivering the scheme.

This new route is modelled on the successful Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, which resettled 20,000 Syrian refugees over a seven-year period from 2014 to 2021.

The government will work with stakeholders, including devolved administrations and local councils, to ensure that Afghans who will be rebuilding their lives in the UK have the support they need.

- a) Can the relevant Cabinet Member please update council on the work that we are doing locally to support this crucial new initiative; including how many refugees from Afghanistan will be welcomed and given sanctuary in Devon? How the Council is working with district councils and what will be the arrangements for their support and integration?**
- b) Can the relevant Cabinet Member please update and assure council what additional support and help we are providing for girls and women who have been subjected to female genital mutilation.**
- c) Can the Armed Forces Member Champion please update council specifically on the work that we are doing to help facilitate the Locally Employed Staff Resettlement Scheme for former Afghan interpreters and**

translators and their families, who were bravely working with our British Armed Forces.

2. by Councillor Letch as follows:

How Devon Registration Service engages when babies are being registered, to suggest if additional support is needed and signpost parents to relevant organisations.

3. by Councillor Hannaford as follows:

The Department for Work and Pensions has announced a new £500million Household Support Fund scheme aimed at helping the poorest members of society.

It will be distributed by councils in England which can assist the community through small grants to meet daily needs such as food, clothing, utilities and power bills.

How much money will Devon County Council receive and how will we work with others to make sure that our allocation gets out into our county to help those most in need?

4. by Councillor Leaver as follows:

Having read the report and strategy presented to the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee of 23 September 2021 (agenda item 11) can the relevant Cabinet Member provide Council with a report about the provision of, and demand for, safe accommodation for Devon residents who are victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse in Devon, and relevant support services over the last six years.

Response

1. Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

- a) DCC and Devon's district councils are using the existing partnership for Syrian refugee resettlement as the basis for a response to the Afghan Locally Employed relocation scheme. District councils source housing, usually through appeals to the private rented sector. DCC commissions direct support to help families integrate on arrival. Each district council takes its own decision on whether and how to source housing. Two firm property offers have been made (Teignbridge DC), though the Home Office have temporarily suspended the matching of available properties to families for resettlement so we are awaiting confirmation for when this property can be utilised. Potentially viable property offers have been passed to East Devon and Mid Devon for consideration. However, all district councils highlight an acute and rapidly intensifying shortage of affordable housing across the county.

The Government's priority request to local authorities is to offer housing to the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (ALES) relocation scheme. The scheme is open to Afghans who worked with UK armed forces and organisations. Many of these citizens and their families have been evacuated. The government has not confirmed the exact number who have arrived but it is understood that it is substantially more than the 3,000 originally estimated. Families enter Covid-19 quarantine on arrival and are then moved to "bridging hotels" waiting to be matched to a local authority property offer.

The media coverage of the crisis is prompting a steady stream of offers of accommodation from members of the public. A high proportion of these offers are for shared accommodation (spare rooms). These offers cannot be accepted because the overriding need is for long-term self-contained accommodation.

DCC is finalising an integration support contract with a local provider, which will be able to support Afghans arriving under ALES in much of Devon. Learning from our experience, we aim for families to be housed in major towns to reduce the risk of isolation and increase the speed of integration and moves towards employment.

In addition, the Council, alongside key partners, is currently supporting temporary bridging arrangements for 16 Afghan families in an Exmouth hotel as part of Home Office arrangements made direct with a series of hotels across the country. These arrangements and the relevant contracts with hotels have been completed with limited engagement with local authorities – in this case DCC was notified of the arrival of these families with around 24 hours' notice. It is important to note the distinction between the often immediate and complex support required for families in bridging hotels, to the needs of families within a wider planned resettlement programme as above.

Any potential allocations in Devon will be made from refugees currently in bridging accommodation across the country. There are no assumptions that families currently staying in Exmouth would be re-located for resettlement locally, even if accommodation could be found. Several members of families in Exmouth have links with relatives in other parts of the UK for example and therefore may not choose to stay in the South West.

The families, (most of whom arrived on 17/9 – with a further family arriving on 24/9) have received a warm welcome locally, and generally settled well. They have already received health, educational and wider wellbeing assessments. They have been given support to access the UK benefits system, and had support around ID and bank accounts, and have been given access to cash from the Home Office support arrangements. English language (for those who need it) and educational support is now starting to be delivered.

On 1 October Home Office confirmed its intention to move a further 67 Afghans to a bridging hotel in central Exeter. It is anticipated that these families will start to arrive in mid-October.

- b) This is a difficult question to answer as no single service or organisation is responsible for, or has a clear picture of **female genital mutilation** (FGM) in Devon – e.g. Police, Health, Children's Services (MASH) and specialist support services such as Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services (DRCSAS) are

all potentially a 'front door' for disclosure regarding FGM and recording any response and support. Understanding what medical support has been provided would be on individual patient records. Any child protection response that would be in MASH records. FGM is addressed in our DCFP safeguarding training and there is information about it on the DCFP website: [Worried about Female genital mutilation \(FGM\)? How to spot the signs \(dcfp.org.uk\)](https://www.dcfp.org.uk/worried-about-female-genital-mutilation-fgm-how-to-spot-the-signs) with a 'Getting Help' section towards the end of the webpage. Although Splitz are not commissioned to specifically offer specialist FGM support – DRCSAS offer FMG support for 13 year olds + ([Who Do We Support? – Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services](https://www.devon.gov.uk/who-do-we-support-devon-rape-crisis-and-sexual-abuse-services)). The Gov.uk page on the DCFP webpage has a link to: [National FGM Support Clinics - NHS - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/national-fgm-support-clinics) – showing Bristol is our nearest and only one dedicated support clinic in the South West.

In terms of prevalence of FGM in Devon, the DCFP have not been able to find any record of rates to date (ongoing enquiry) and a Devon and Cornwall Police 'Freedom of Information request' dated May 2018 (latest searchable data) asking: **Can you please tell me, how many files regarding cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) Devon and Cornwall Police have sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for charging decisions in the last 5 years?** states **The Performance & Analysis Department have confirmed that, each of the last 5 full calendar years – 2013 to 2017, there were no recorded offences of FGM in Devon & Cornwall.**

- c) As above. We are aware that some members of the families in Exmouth have served alongside British armed forces.

2. Devon Registration Service

All birth registrations take place face to face. The new parents are given a library card and a book start pack which contains useful contacts. If a parent appeared distressed/voiced that they were struggling then contact information for family/children's services would be sought for them.

3. Household Support Fund

To date the Council has still not received any further information regarding the Household Support Fund scheme beyond that which was made publicly available last week. [Government launches £500m support for vulnerable households over winter - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-500m-support-for-vulnerable-households-over-winter). The size of local allocation is not yet known. The Council would anticipate further closer working as Team Devon to draw together learning from the 2020/21 Covid Winter Hardship Fund, wider hardship and welfare funding, and expertise and experience from across Devon's district councils.

4. Safe accommodation for Devon residents who are victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse

The strategy for Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation in Devon outlines the current availability of safe accommodation in section 5. Devon County Council has not commissioned safe accommodation for the last six years and prior to the Domestic Abuse Act has not required to collect data on the demand for safe accommodation. This data is collected and held by District Councils who still retain a duty to provide people who are homeless, including those fleeing domestic abuse with accommodation. North Devon Against Domestic Abuse has provided a refuge for the last six years and a variety of providers have had Places of Safety over the last three years.

Councillor Roger Croad

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality