

Report of:	Director of Environment and Community Services
Relevant Executive Member:	Executive Member for Neighbourhood Safety
Submitted to:	Executive Member for Neighbourhood Safety
Date:	13 December 2023
Title:	Safe and Legal Routes – Refugee Resettlement
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Strategic priority:	All
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will incur expenditure or savings above £250,000
Subject to call in?:	Yes
Why:	Not Urgent

Proposed decision(s)

That the Executive:

- Agrees for Middlesbrough Council to sign up to UKRS
- Agrees for the pledge of supporting 15 families to be changed to 5 per year. These families will be a mixture of ARAP/ACRS and UKRS, with an expectation of 2 families through ARAP/ACRS and 3 families through UKRS per year. This level of resettlement has proven to be manageable through the work already done on ARAP/ACRS since 2021.
- Agrees to extend the contracts of the current team to cover the period of this grant. Funding will cover any redundancy costs if the grant funding ends.
- Agrees to the recruitment of a team leader ensure consistency and specialist support to the team.
- Agrees to the recruitment of a Project Support Officer.

Executive summary

This report recommends Middlesbrough Council accepts UKRS (vulnerable people resettlement) and combines this with existing pledges towards ARAP/ACRS (Afghan resettlement) to five families per year.

The report seeks approval to participate in refugee resettlement schemes via UKRS to ARAP/ARCS.

It also seeks approval to extend the current pledge of 5 families per year, totalling 15 families over the 3 year period. This pledge was for the period 2021 to 2024. This report is seeking approval to welcome 5 families per year from any of the schemes over the period 2024 – 2028. This would generate potential grant-funded income total of £2,757,950.

Approving this scheme will support vulnerable people and the implications of the recommendations outlined in this report have been considered by the appropriate officers of the Council which are set out in the main body of the report.

Purpose

1. To seek approval to extend participation in refugee resettlement schemes by adding UKRS to ARAP/ARCS and any new schemes in the future.
2. To seek approval to extend the current pledge of 5 families per year, totalling 15 families between 2021 to 2024. This report is seeking approval to welcome 5 families per year over the period 2024 – 2028.

Background and relevant information

3. Prior to the Covid pandemic and a scrutiny report recommended to Executive to sign up to UKRS (UK Resettlement Scheme). However, due to the pandemic, this was put on hold and no new funding instructions were released by central government.
4. Since then, the local authority pledged to resettle 15 families under ARAP (Afghan Resettlement Assistance Policy) and ACRS (Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme). 13 of those families have now arrived and remain in Middlesbrough.
5. Middlesbrough is home to a significant number of asylum seekers. However, the number of asylum seekers has not exceeded the cluster limit in a number of years. This level has been constant and manageable throughout. In addition, excellent support both within the local authority and through VCS partners is in place, which means there have not been unmanageable pressures in some time. Work to reduce pressures includes the EMAT (Ethnic Minority Achievement Team), NAP (New Arrival Pathway), and REP (Refugee Employment Program).

Background to ARAP/ACRS

6. The UK formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 6 January 2022. The government will resettle more than 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years.

7. This is in addition to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme, which has already settled thousands of Afghans who have worked with the UK government, and their families. The ARAP scheme is a separate scheme to the ACRS and offers Afghan nationals who have worked for or alongside the UK government, and meet the ARAP criteria, relocation to the UK.
8. Middlesbrough pledged to home 15 families in total and we are working towards achieving that pledge. In addition, a small number of families have now made their own way to Middlesbrough and are also supported under the ARAP/ACRS tariff. This showcases that Middlesbrough is seen as welcoming and supportive, with people choosing to find properties here of their own volition.

Background to UKRS

9. The UK Government launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in 2015 in response to the huge humanitarian crisis faced at the time. This was a UK wide pledge to resettle 20,000 Syrian Refugees by March 2020. A further commitment was made for up to an additional 3,000 refugees in the Middle East and North Africa.
10. The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) reaffirms the UK's ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement, which continues to be an important component of the UK's humanitarian response. Under the UKRS, the UK will continue to offer a safe and legal route to vulnerable refugees in need of protection.
11. The government makes funding available to allow local authorities, healthcare providers and community sponsors to support refugees for the duration of the scheme (currently up to 5 years).
12. This is a national voluntary scheme where Local Authorities (LAs) pledge to assist families. LAs can determine the amount the amount of families they are able to help and can adjust this at any stage. This allows LAs to have flexibility with the delivery of the scheme.

Regional Contributions to Resettlement

13. The North East was quick to respond to assist with resettlement in 2015. All north east local authorities take part in ARAP/ACRS and the majority also take part in UKRS.
14. The regional commitment to resettlement schemes reflects the North East's experience and commitment to continue to provide much needed humanitarian support.
15. Middlesbrough Council was not part of the original eight LAs to participate in UKRS. This was due to asylum dispersal numbers being 33% over cluster limit. Since this time, however, those numbers have reduced and Middlesbrough has consistently been just slightly below cluster limit. Point 5 and 16 highlight that the pressures associated with dispersal have been appropriately managed in Middlesbrough. In addition, Middlesbrough was one of the first LAs to sign up to ARAP/ACRS.
16. As a Local Authority, Middlesbrough has excellent relationships with partners, including VCS organisations, who deliver various initiatives to manage the pressures associated

with asylum dispersal. This includes, for instance, the New Arrivals Pathway, which has been developed and delivered in partnership with the North East Migration Partnership, Mears (the Home Office's housing accommodation provider), and the Methodist Asylum Project.

Eligibility, Rights and Entitlements

17. For someone to be eligible for resettlement under UKRS, they will need to be assessed by UNHCR before being given permission to travel to the UK, as they must fit one or more of the following criteria:

- a. Legal and or Physical Protection Needs
- b. Survivors of Torture and/or Violence
- c. Medical Needs
- d. Women and Girls at Risk
- e. Family Reunification
- f. Children and Adolescents at Risk
- g. Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions

18. It is anticipated that those arriving through UKRS will be largely from Syria. However, with a changing geopolitical landscape, the scheme will respond to new and emerging international humanitarian crises.

19. Those arriving through ARAP/ACRS and UKRS receive Indefinite Leave to Remain immediately.

20. All new arrivals through both UKRS and ARAP/ACRS will have immediate access to mainstream welfare benefits to support their housing and living costs. They will also have the right to work and access further and higher education, meaning they can immediately access ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), education, and training to progress into the job market.

Screening and Background Information

21. Under UKRS, refugees will be taken from border camps and nations largely in the Middle East and North Africa to avoid refugees being encouraged to make dangerous journeys to central Europe; to ensure that the most vulnerable can be prioritised; and to help break the business models of criminal gangs preying on human misery.

22. The Home Office take the utmost care to ensure that those people coming here undergo rigorous security checks. They work closely with UNHCR through the screening process and would not accept individuals with any security risks, war crimes, or other grounds for concern.

23. UNHCR has procedures in place to assess each refugee who is submitted for resettlement. These include registration, checking of documents, multiple interviews and review processes. It is the UK which makes a final assessment and will determine who is accepted for resettlement.

24. LAs receive information about each person in advance of arrival including a record of their previous history and an up to date medical assessment of needs which are

facilitated by UNHCR and IOM (International Organisation for Migration) in the refugees' host countries. The medical screening before departure includes testing for COVID 19, and other communicable diseases.

25. The Council would be able to consider these cases, taking into account limitations of what needs it can meet and are able to accept or reject these cases. From acceptance of a case, it takes between 8-10 weeks for their arrival on average.

Outcome Requirements

26. The Council enters into a voluntary agreement with the Home Office and commits to deliver a series of outcomes across a 5 year period from first arrivals into the UK in order to receive the UKRS funding from Central Government.

27. The Council is required to secure appropriate housing in advance of arrival, funding through the UKRS can be used to cover short term costs this may incur such as rent, bills, and council tax whilst awaiting arrivals or furnishing and preparing the property. The accommodation should meet housing standards, be fully furnished to enable families with very little belongings to start their life in the UK. The Council would not be expected to provide items such as TV's, DVD players or other electrical entertainment appliances. This does not preclude the Council sourcing additional goods through other sources of funding or charitable donations.

28. The Council is required to ensure that families are provided with a support plan and have a dedicated source of advice and support through a combination of office based appointments, drop in sessions, outreach surgeries and home visits. This would include:

- Assisting with budgeting and registration with utilities
- Ensuring registration with GPs and or other healthcare providers including dentistry
- Securing school places
- Claiming welfare and benefits and providing assistance with access to employment
- Sourcing appropriate literacy and language support for adults and young people
- Welcome arrangements and connection into local groups and services to encourage early integration and prevent social isolation
- Ensuring interpreting services are available as appropriate

29. Other LAs delivering resettlement in the region have used the funding in creative ways to support the integration of families into their local areas. Examples include, provision of informal conversational ESOL, events and orientation visits within the region, employment related activities, solutions to enable learners to progress quicker with their English language skills, and more.

30. The outcome requirements for ARAP/ACRS are as those for UKRS and Middlesbrough already has a lot of experience in managing this since having welcomed its first ARAP family in 2021.

Planning and Governance

31. If the Council supports the decision to assist the UKRS, a corporate and partnership coordinated response will be needed to develop the offer and manage arrivals. This has shown the greatest success in other areas. Initially it would be proposed to set up a UKRS planning group, harnessing expertise from a variety of council areas to help

prepare and meet the range of needs. The group would develop the operational aspects of supporting and accommodating families in Middlesbrough, the evaluation, and feedback mechanisms.

32. This would include representatives from housing providers, education, health and social care, Community Learning, and Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as police, communities, and the voluntary and community sector. The group would need to link into other key corporate partnerships.
33. A similar group was formed when Middlesbrough first pledged to resettle under ARAP/ACRS and relationships are therefore already in place.
34. The group will develop an integration plan which will feature all the key elements of the statement of outcomes for resettlement but also consider the broader aspects of good integration based on the Government's Indicators of Integration. At its heart the fundamental cornerstones of good integration practice, learning from other LA areas and partners who have delivered services to refugees, and listening carefully to our statutory and voluntary sector partners.
35. A Personal Integration Plan has been developed for those welcomed under ARAP/ACRS, which can be delivered to UKRS arrivals. This takes a "team around the family" approach and explores families' own aspirations and wishes for their personal integration.

Staffing Proposals

36. A team is already in place to support the delivery of ARAP/ACRS resettlement. However, this team is currently under review to have a more linear approach to asylum, refugee, resettlement, cohesion, and resilience issues. All proposed team members are already in post, but it is proposed that they will all have the same role of Community Development and Cohesion Officer.
37. The current review also includes a proposal to recruit a Locality Team Leader. However, this will be subject to vacancy control panel approval.
38. The funding instructions are expected to remain in place for five years.

ESOL

39. In the first year of resettlement the Council can claim £850 per adult for ESOL in addition to the per person tariff. Possible activities that be funded with this includes funding for fees to access mainstream learning, language training which supports access to employment or higher education, commissioning classes that address pressures to accessing ESOL.
40. This allows the Council to make best use of the funding and fund ESOL provision for the wider population. This ensures the benefits reaches others who are less funded and provides a mixed class of languages which is seen as the quickest way to encourage progress as learners are encouraged to be immersed in the English language.

41. There is sufficient capacity within Middlesbrough Community Learning to provide formal learning to adults under the UKRS. There is expected to be a range of abilities, however it is likely most will need pre-entry level ESOL before being able to progress further.
42. Middlesbrough Council is currently working together with the North East Migration Partnership and Teesside University to support the training of CELTA tutors, who will be able to work on delivering additional ESOL and English classes.
43. A number of VCS organisations in Middlesbrough also provide ESOL learning, which could be further supported through the ESOL tariff. Creative methods of delivery have been developed for other resettlement schemes, including Homes for Ukraine, and this could be developed further.
44. The Home Office outline that they expect adult refugees under UKRS to have started ESOL classes within one month of arrival. They also outline that they expect all adult refugees to be attending at least eight hours of ESOL a week, this can be a combination of formal and informal learning.
45. Informal learning would be created for the families and funded from the tariff. Informal settings would include conversation clubs, sessions that incorporate ESOL with preventing social isolation such as cooking or sewing sessions to encourage adults to develop their English skills and integrate with their local community as these would be open to all residents.

Health

46. There is funding available to Clinical Commissioning Groups in the first year, part of which they can pass on to the GP to fund interpreters at an initial appointment for example, and part they are able to retain for secondary medical care.
47. Early engagement with the ICB (Integrated Care Board) and Public Health would be needed to agree a practical and beneficial use of the tariff. The funds could be used to support the wellbeing of the wider refugee population in the town through a mental health and wellbeing scheme, similar schemes have been created by LAs in the North East.
48. There is a need for most, if not all, refugees under this scheme to have some dental treatment once they have settled into their homes in the UK. Refugees, if they have not found employment, will be entitled to dental treatment under the NHS. There is a national shortage of dentists that have space for adult patients entitled to treatment under the NHS. However to ensure there are spaces secured there is a regional working protocol which allows the regional NHS dental lead to source available places.

Education

49. Middlesbrough Council delivers educational support to new and emerging communities through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT). EMAT has used educational elements of tariffs associated with other resettlement schemes in creative ways to provide language and teaching assistant support to relevant schools and families.
50. By ensuring Admissions and EMAT are part of the governance structure of the program, it can be ensured that the children in the family are considered prior to acceptance to

ensure appropriate school places are available. Consideration will also be given to availability of school places. Efforts will be made to avoid resettlement in TS1 areas and/or consideration can be given to support current efforts to develop a school bus system.

Social Care

51. Middlesbrough has taken part in Afghan resettlement since July 2021. 13 families have already been resettled in Middlesbrough. None of those families have had children's social care support in the past six months.
52. Out of the families that have arrived, only one has required adult social care support in the past six months.

Housing

53. As part of the statement of outcomes, the Council would have to secure properties in advance of the families arriving. As part of ARAP/ARCS, the team have been able to build excellent working relationships with private landlords, including those signed up to the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme.
54. An empty property strategy is currently being developed by Financial Governance and Revenues, which will include members of staff looking specifically at long term empty properties and identifying appropriate solutions for these. Consideration could be given to these properties, thereby reducing the number of empty properties, increasing Council Tax revenue, and improving local wards.
55. Some of the tariff can be used to fund refurbishment of properties for families in wards where there have been long term empty properties. As of October 2022, the top 5 wards with the highest numbers of (6 months+) empty properties include Newport, Centre, Brambles & Thorntree, North Ormesby, and Park. As a percentage of total properties, the top 5 wards are North Ormesby, Brambles & Thorntree, Newport, Central, and Park. And the top 5 wards for outstanding council tax are Newport, North Ormesby, Central, Park, and Brambles & Thorntree. Efforts could be made to address the empty properties in those wards in particular, while being mindful of the pressures associated with community cohesion and resilience. Increasing diversity in other wards of Middlesbrough could, if properly managed, bring forward various positive benefits, including economic diversity and regeneration.

Risks

56. There are some potential risks associated with participating in UKRS. However, many of these risks have been appropriately addressed by Middlesbrough as part of ARAP/ACRS, or by other LAs, which allows for learning and sharing of best practice.
57. Key risks that have been identified include:
 - a. Accommodation not being available or ready for a family's arrival. However, we would not accept a family to come to Middlesbrough unless we had secured a suitable property in advance.

- b. Social care costs emerge after Year 1, so are not eligible for exceptional cases or adaptations to funding. The Home Office expects issues like these to be picked up by mainstream funding.
- c. SEND costs beyond Year 1.
- d. Two-tier system. However, the funding from ARAP/ACRS/UKRS can be utilised to develop services that benefit both populations, something several Home Office directors have indicated as well.
- e. Community cohesion – consultation with key community reps and briefing of frontline staff is required. However, the resettlement team will sit under the Strategic Cohesion and Migration Manager, and staff who focus specifically on cohesion and resilience are in place, as well as this report recommending that this team is expanded.
- f. Difficulties in integration – the aim of ARAP/ACRS/UKRS is to make refugees self-sufficient, integrated, and resilient. Some resistance towards this from ARAP/ACRS families has been identified. However, mechanisms are in place and being further developed to mitigate this. This includes the development of a Resettlement Welcome Pack together with newly arrived communities, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 2.

Complex Cases

58. There is an exceptional cases fund, which can be used to fund social care needs, special educational needs, medical needs, property adaptations (up to £30,000), and are considered on a case by case basis. Some examples of how this has been used include:
- a. Electric wheelchairs
 - b. Specialist beds and chairs
 - c. Equipment to support children into mainstream school
 - d. Specialist education provision for deaf/mute children
 - e. Respite care
 - f. Full time carers for disabled refugees

Funding and Total Income

59. The total grant income could potentially be £2,757,950.
60. The funding package for UKRS available under the new scheme will mirror that currently paid under VPRS and VCRS; a local authority will receive a five-year tariff of £20,520 for each refugee with an additional education tariff, in year one only, for children aged 3-18 years. Additional funding will continue to be made available, on a case by case basis, for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including, but not limited to; property adaptations, void costs for larger (4 bed) properties, special educational needs, and adult social care. The first year of resettlement has been confirmed with the 5 years of funding, however future years of resettlement are dependent on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Middlesbrough Council are clear that any future years of resettlement will only go ahead if the funding remains at the same consistent level, i.e. five years of funding including for arrivals in future years. Full funding instruction is available under point 74.
61. The funding provided is outcome led, and unringfenced in years 2-5 of support, allowing LAs to determine how best to utilise the funding, so long as they show commitment in supporting refugees and achieving delivery of the scheme's outcomes. LAs often use the funding to provide a team to get properties ready for refugee's arrival (furniture and initial

supplies), support the families with social, welfare and integration outcomes such as education support, ESOL, and employability.

62. Under the funding packed for ARAP/ACRS available under the new scheme, the tariff is the same, but support is delivered over three years rather than 5. Full funding instruction is available under point 73.

63. In addition to the LA tariff there is funding for adult ESOL, children's education, and healthcare funding for CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups) to claim. Adult ESOL and Employability funding could be used to fund informal and formal ESOL, or it could be used more creatively such as an employability mentoring service, family learning, or courses to improve English skills and employability. Children's education funding can be given directly to schools for them to spend as they deem suitable, or LAs could use some of this funding to develop children's services such as EAL support.

What decision(s) are being recommended?

That the Executive:

- Agrees for Middlesbrough Council to sign up to UKRS
- Agrees for the pledge of supporting 15 families to be changed to 5 per year. These families will be a mixture of ARAP/ACRS and UKRS, with an expectation of 2 families through ARAP/ACRS and 3 families through UKRS per year. This level of resettlement has proven to be manageable through the work already done on ARAP/ACRS since 2021.
- Agrees to extend the contracts of the current team to cover the period of this grant. Funding will cover any redundancy costs if the grant funding ends.
- Agrees to the recruitment of a team leader ensure consistency and specialist support to the team.
- Agrees to the recruitment of a Project Support Officer.

Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

64. Agreeing to the proposal would have numerous potential benefits, including:

- a. Increasing funding available within the local authority.
- b. Building on the expertise of a highly experienced team of professionals already employed by the Council, thereby retaining their skills and knowledge.
- c. Increasing the team, thereby providing employment opportunities.
- d. Diversifying Middlesbrough as a whole by looking at resettling families in more traditionally White-British wards.
- e. Improving overall community cohesion and resilience.
- f. Decreasing the number of empty properties in Middlesbrough.

Other potential decision(s) and why these have not been recommended

65. Agreeing to resettle a smaller number of ARAP and UKRS families. This is not recommended as the funding associated with larger families will allow for greater diversification, community cohesion, and resilience.

66. Not to agree to take part in UKRS.

Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Legal

67. There are no legal implications.

Strategic priorities and risks

Strategic Priorities

68. Children and young people – We will show Middlesbrough’s children that they matter by ensuring they have a place of safety in this town. In addition, we will ensure Middlesbrough is a safe and welcoming town for all children and young people.

69. Vulnerability – Those who arrived under resettlement schemes are particularly vulnerable. Pledging towards resettlement schemes ensures vulnerable people are safeguarded and supported.

70. Physical environment – By pledging towards resettling an increased number of families, we will work towards reducing the number of empty properties, thereby improving the physical environment. In addition to this, community integration work includes such things as Amazing Alleys and taking part in community activities such as litter picks, all of which further improves the local environment.

Risks

71. Content – no specific action required.

Human Rights, Equality and Data Protection

72. No impact on protected characteristics.

73. A Level 1 Initial Screening Assessment is attached as Appendix 3.

74. A Level 2 Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 4.

Financial

75. The funding instructions for ARAP/ACRS have been released on the gov.uk website - [Afghan relocation and assistance: funding instruction - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocation-and-assistance-funding-instruction)

76. The funding instructions for UKRS for 2022-2023 have been released on the gov.uk website - [UK resettlement programmes: funding instruction 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-resettlement-programmes-funding-instruction-2022-to-2023)

77. The instructions for ARAP/ACRS healthcare funding is available on the gov.uk website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocation-and-assistance-funding-instruction/funding-healthcare-in-england-in-support-of-the-afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme-and-afghan-relocation-and-assistance-policy-and-eligible-british->

78. The instructions for UKRS healthcare funding is available on the gov.uk website - [Healthcare funding instruction 22-23 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
79. The government has announced that funding for local authorities engaging with the UKRS will be provided, on a tapering basis, for the five years refugees are accommodated and supported under this scheme. This will allow the Council to deliver UKRS and consider how it can also minimise the impact of other migration pressures.
80. The UKRS provides funding to LAs of £20,520 per person resettled to provide the outcome detailed at paragraph 26 to 30. This does not include the additional funding for ESOL, Education, and Health. Based on an average family of four with two school aged children this will provide £82,080 in year one and a total of approx. £410,400 per family over the five year period of funded resettlement.
81. ARAP/ACRS provides funding to LAs of £20,520 per person resettled. This does not include the additional funding for ESOL, Education, and Health. Based on an average family of six, with four school aged children, this will provide £123,120 in year one and a total of approx. £369,360 per family over the three year period of funded resettlement.
- 82.** A full costing structure is attached in Appendix 1, showing potential grant funding totalling £2,757,950 by 2032, if no further families are received from 2028 onwards.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Pledge to resettle 5 families per year	Jolande Mace	November 2023
Extend contracts of existing team by three years	Jolande Mace	March 2026
Submit Locality Team Leader JD/PS to vacancy control	Marion Walker	December 2023
Recruit team leader	Jolande Mace	January 2024

Appendices

1	Costing
2	Draft Resettlement Welcome Pack
3	L1 Initial Screening Assessment
4	L2 Impact Assessment

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date

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