



**Open Report on behalf of Glen Garrod,
Executive Director - Adult Care & Community Wellbeing**

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	31 January 2023
Subject:	Resettlement Schemes and Asylum Dispersal in Lincolnshire

Summary:

This report provides an overview of refugee resettlement schemes and asylum dispersal, the national position, and the response by Lincolnshire organisations to national policy decisions. It sets out the latest available figures, operational arrangements, organisational responsibilities, and funding arrangements.

Actions Required:

That the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee reviews and comments on the contents of this report and endorse the activities undertaken to-date.

1. Background & Context

1.1 Definitions

Refugees are designated by the United Nations, prior to travel for resettlement, usually due to war and political upheaval posing significant risk to those individuals. Refugees are transferred to a host country. This includes the United Kingdom (UK), with the agreement of the Home Office. On arrival, individuals receive refugee status. It is not possible to apply for refugee resettlement if the person is already present in the country.

Asylum is the protection granted by a nation-state to a person who has fled their country to escape serious threat to their life or liberty. An asylum seeker (or asylum applicant) is a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee under the Refugee Convention, to which over 140 nations are signatories, including the United Kingdom.

To claim asylum in the UK, a person must be present in the UK. It is not possible to apply from outside the country, and there is no asylum visa to enable people to travel to the UK legally to apply for asylum. Therefore, for people who do not have visa-free travel to the UK, to claim asylum in the UK, they must enter either irregularly, such as by small boat, lorry, or by using false documents, or on a visa for some other purpose, such as tourism or study.

1.2 Lincolnshire's Governance and Operational Arrangements

The varying schemes agreed nationally and internationally make for a complex landscape in local areas. Lincolnshire's county and district councils, health colleagues, Police, voluntary and community groups and other agencies have worked together on all migration activity for several years. This collaborative working is formalised through a countywide Resettlement Partnership, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of North Kesteven District Council. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by all partners identifies roles and responsibilities of Partnership members. The Partnership routinely meets quarterly but an agile approach is taken, for example over the past 12 months with additional meetings set up to plan and monitor delivery of the Ukraine response.

Lincolnshire's county and district councils are also actively engaged with the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (EMSMP). SMPs act as regional hubs for co-ordination and co-operation. East Midlands Councils is the lead organisation for the EMSMP providing support to local authorities to help to deliver resettlement schemes, including coordinating offers of housing, planning for the arrival of refugees and sharing best practice. The SMP reports to the Home Office and coordinates activities regarding asylum seeker dispersal at a regional level.

Different responsibilities are devolved to upper and lower tier local authorities by The Home Office depending on the individual scheme or cohort requirements. For example, leadership and coordination of activity related to asylum seeker accommodation sits with the district council in which the accommodation is located, whilst co-ordination and funding for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is provided to the county council, with an expectation of co-operation with district councils.

2 National Refugee Resettlement Schemes

Prior to 2021, the UK operated four refugee resettlement schemes. These were suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and recommenced in December 2020.

The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was the largest scheme and began in 2014 to resettle Syrian refugees. This scheme was later expanded to people of any nationality fleeing the Syrian conflict.

The Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) aimed to resettle children from the Middle East and North Africa.

The Mandate Scheme and the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) are for refugees from anywhere in the world.

The government has now combined the VPRS, VCRS, and GPP into the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), which opened in early 2021, along with the Community Sponsorship Scheme.

In early 2021, the UK opened a new route for Hong Kong British National (Overseas) citizens (BNOs) and their close family members to migrate to the UK to live, work, or study, with a clear pathway to settlement and citizenship.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched in April 2021 to provide relocation and assistance to Locally Employed Staff (LES – individuals working for, or on behalf of, the UK government in Afghanistan).

The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) was launched January 2022 to offer relocation to Afghan nationals who supported the UK and/or international community during the occupation of Afghanistan.

In March 2022, the government opened priority visa routes for displaced Ukrainians, principally comprising the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) and the Homes for Ukraine (HfU) programmes.

3 Lincolnshire overview by scheme / cohort

3.1 United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

40 individuals have been resettled under UKRS (or its predecessor schemes) in Lincolnshire. The relevant District Council can claim funding for up to 5 years to source and fit out accommodation to a basic standard and provide wrap around (casework) support to assist with cultural integration and signposting to services. The County Council has worked closely with the district councils in relation to its statutory services e.g. access to school places. Additional funding is claimed by the County Council for education. All the resettled families are now in their third year in County and have settled well to life in the UK.

3.2 Afghan Resettlement (ARAP/ACRS)

36 individuals have been resettled under ARAP/ACRS in Lincolnshire. The relevant District Council can claim funding for up to 3 years and as with UKRS, sources accommodation and provides wrap-around support, with the County Council again sourcing school places and any other statutory services as required.

Refugees entering the UK under either scheme have the right to work in the UK and have full recourse to public funds (e.g., access to benefits), plus indefinite leave to remain.

Government has urged all district councils (as housing authorities) to source further accommodation as some of those evacuated from Afghanistan remain in bridging hotels (see 3.3 below). A small number of properties within South and North Kesteven have been identified and are ready for use, subject to identifying suitable beneficiaries via EMSMP / Home Office.

Lincolnshire local authorities have recently been approached by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to discuss the possible use of unused service accommodation to support these refugees. Discussions are continuing regarding a small number of properties which may be

suitable. All discussions take account of local education and health provision, access to services, etc.

3.3 Afghan Bridging Accommodation

In September 2021, families evacuated from Afghanistan by the Home Office under ARAP/ACRS were housed in bridging hotels across the country, including two hotels in South Kesteven. The Home Office aim was for this to be temporary, transit accommodation whilst families awaited settled accommodation around the country (not just in Lincolnshire). Nationally, many evacuees, including approximately 180 individuals in Lincolnshire, are still living in bridging hotels 16 months later.

Coordinated by North Kesteven District Council and initially with support from the Local Resilience Forum, Lincolnshire councils worked with the Home Office and the regional Home Office accommodation contractor (Serco) to ensure wellbeing and wrap-around support to families placed in these hotels. Colleagues from Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, Public Health, Education, Early Years, Early Help Teams, Health colleagues, Police colleagues and District Council colleagues have delivered services to these families over the past 15 months. All school age children resident at the bridging hotel(s) have been offered school places. Coordination of services for the bridging hotel sits with South Kesteven District Council, having transferred from North Kesteven District Council in 2022.

Funding has been claimed by the district council and shared with the County Council to cover costs associated with the wrap around support provision.

3.4 Community Sponsorship Schemes

These are schemes to support ARAP/ACRS/UKRS by enabling Community Sponsors (charities, faith groups, civil society groups, etc, rather than LAs) to provide resettlement accommodation and wrap around support for 2 years after arrival. Community Sponsors are not funded by central government, but local authorities may claim funds to support education provision, and if sponsorships fail, the local authority may be able to claim per capita funding (£8,520 in year 1, £5,000 in year 2) to ensure continuity of support.

We are aware of 1 successful Community Sponsorship resettlement in East Lindsey, in relation to the VPRS referenced above.

3.5 Ukraine Crisis Resettlement Schemes

A report on Lincolnshire's Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme was shared with the committee in November 2022. As an update, nearly 1200 Ukrainian guests have arrived in Lincolnshire as at 30 December 2022. Of these, 971 individuals (of which a third are children) are still living in the County, 815 of whom are still with a host.

In contrast to the UKRS and Afghan schemes, the County Council receives information on arrivals and can claim funding to deliver several important functions including undertaking

DBS checks and property inspections and providing essential support services. As duties sit across different council functions in two-tier areas, a coordinated approach is required, along with a locally agreed plan to make payments to the district councils.

On 14 December 2022, the government announced measures to update the scheme. The £350 sponsor 'thank you' payment will be extended from 12 months to a maximum of two years and will also be increased to £500 per month for hosts who accommodate a guest who has been in the UK for 12 months. This additional financial support is aimed at helping existing hosts to continue with their sponsorship, as well as encouraging new hosts who come forward to offer a home to a Ukrainian individual or family already in the UK.

Most guests being hosted in Lincolnshire arrived between April and June 2022. Following the national changes and in recognition of the important contribution being made by Lincolnshire hosts who continue to accommodate their Ukrainian guests, Lincolnshire County Council will be utilising the grant to offer an additional £150 for hosts between January and March 2023, bringing the payments up to £500 per month. This additional payment will be made to all hosts in Lincolnshire accommodating guests on the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in January, February, and March 2023, regardless of how long their guests have been in the UK.

The government will reduce the £10.5k per capita funding to the council by half for any new Ukrainians arriving from 1 January 2023. That said, £150 million will be available in 2023/24 financial year to local authorities to help support Ukrainian guests move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness. This funding can also be used to support other people at risk of homelessness. The government's ambition is to provide this funding at the start of 2023 /24, and it will be allocated to different parts of the UK relative to their proportion of Ukrainian guests. It is not yet clear whether this will be allocated to upper or lower tier authorities. It is also not clear whether those arriving through the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) will be considered when apportioning the funding. Local authorities have no information about and no specific duties to this cohort of arrivals although statutory responsibilities still apply, such as provision of education, and homelessness assistance if required. Lincolnshire's local authorities continue to ask the Home Office to share this data to better inform future planning.

Locally, the partnership continues to support Ukrainian guests (and hosts) with their wellbeing, community integration, access to services, rematching, and homelessness. Ukrainian guests have 3 years leave to remain, a right to work in the UK and full recourse to public funds. The County Council is working with relevant partners to broaden our understanding of what skills, qualifications and experience Ukrainian guests of working age possess and how, as a partnership, we might break down barriers and maximise employment opportunities. National insight to understand the experiences and intentions of Ukrainian arrivals is shared in the background papers of this report.

3.6 Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Resettlement Visa

Hong Kong BNO visa holders can work or study freely in the UK. They can use the NHS but will not generally be entitled to claim benefits. They must pay a charge for their visa, are liable for the Immigration Health Surcharge, and must evidence their ability to support themselves financially for at least 6 months post-arrival.

There is scant information on arrival numbers and identification of BNO arrivals is dependent on community intelligence. In the East Midlands, the majority are in Nottingham and Derby, but we are aware of two families (10 people) residing in North Kesteven.

Upper Tier local authorities may claim £800 per BNO to support access to English language training, and up to £2,720 per household can be claimed where local authorities have provided destitution support. Arrangements are in place to enable the County Council to claim funds if / when required.

4 Full Asylum Dispersal

In April 2022, the Home Office announced that all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales would be expected to participate in a new system of full asylum dispersal to allow the Home Office to move from primary use of hotels to more settled, less expensive, and more evenly dispersed accommodation. This may include ex MOD accommodation, ex care homes or ex-student accommodation, as well as domestic properties.

Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation in the East Midlands is sourced and managed by Serco on behalf of the Home Office. Serco hold the Asylum, Accommodation and Support Services contract (AASC). Migrant Help lead on the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) contract directly supporting asylum seekers.

Serco, as well as procuring hotels, are actively looking to lease properties from a wide network of landlords, investors, and agents. Serco acts as landlord and manages the property, with permission to sub-let to their Service Users. This offers an attractive and competitive proposition to landlords in the private rented sector, including:

- 5+ years lease with no void periods.
- No rental arrears with rent paid in full, on time every month.
- Full repair and maintenance Lease
- 30-day property inspections and periodic safety inspections.
- No letting or management costs.
- Council Tax and Utilities paid by Serco.

Local authorities will not be expected to accommodate asylum seekers beyond 0.5% of their total population, which equates to one asylum seeker per 200 residents. Government tasked local authorities, supported by their SMP, with developing a regional allocation model. If approved, the East Midlands model would see Lincolnshire expect to

receive approx. 525 individuals by December 23 (N.B. instead of and not in addition to those already housed in hotels in the County). The various regional models are yet to be agreed by the Home Office so these numbers could change.

Once mobilised, District Councils will receive £3,500 grant funding for each new dispersal bed occupied in their area to provide wrap around support.

5 Asylum Contingency Accommodation (hotels)

Whilst Lincolnshire County Council does not have a direct role in asylum dispersal, all resettlement partnership organisations are liaising with Serco and the Home Office to assure ourselves of the safety and coordination of services for new arrivals to hotels in the county. This is led by the District Council in which the hotel is located and has included arrangements to ensure access to healthcare, provision of education and transport for school age children, and other statutory functions such as prevention and control of infectious disease outbreaks (including immunisations), environmental health, fire safety, early years provision and social care services.

Until the regional dispersal model is agreed, there is no government funding to support local authorities in delivering these functions. In Lincolnshire there are currently:

- 5 hotels in East Lindsey housing single, adult males; 2 of these are on a very temporary basis known as 'spot booking'.
- 1 hotel in South Kesteven housing women, children, and family groups.
- 1 hotel in Boston Borough housing single, adult males.

The total number of service users housed fluctuates but the total maximum occupancy is approx. 500 individuals. Numbers have been close to this at various points in the last 12 months, particularly at times when the number of boats crossing The Channel had been high.

Asylum seekers are not permitted to work in the UK while their claim is being considered. If they are destitute, they are provided with free accommodation, as well as asylum support, which is set at £40.85 a week, equivalent to £5.84 per day. There are currently nationally over 100,000 Asylum claims in backlog awaiting a Home Office decision.

6 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Where a child arrives 'spontaneously' in a local area, unaccompanied by an adult, they are eligible for care from the local authority in which they arrive, as part of its duties. The child comes into the care of the local authority under Section 20 of the Children's Act, so we have statutory duty to accommodate and care for them as a looked after child until they are 18. They are then awarded former relevant care leaver status and supported to the age of 25

In addition to spontaneous arrivals, the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), launched in 2016, encouraged all local authorities to volunteer to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking

children (UASC) to achieve a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. In November 2021, NTS participation became mandatory for most UK local authorities. No local authority supporting UASC at or above 0.1% of the general child population will be required to accept UASC via the NTS while they remain above this threshold. In the East Midlands region presently, only Rutland County Council is in this position.

The NTS does not include children arriving 'spontaneously' nor those dispersed via the adult asylum system and subsequently taken into care as UASC following revised age assessment. However, these young people will still count to the 0.1% in our population,

Referrals to local authorities for age assessments are accelerating due to increased numbers of arrivals to the south coast. Children's Services in Lincolnshire have had 5 children come into care from the asylum contingency hotels out of the 85 age assessments that have been undertaken since April 2022. Age assessment have taken up hundreds of hours of social worker time.

As at 05/01/2023, 67 young people were in the care of Lincolnshire County Council under UASC responsibilities, with 104 UASC care leavers also supported from 18 to 25 years old.

UASC placements are funded by central government at £114 per person per night. Anyone moved in via the NTS are supported at a higher rate of £143 per day. The funding for former UASC (care leavers) is at a rate of £270 per week.

2. Conclusion

Refuge and asylum policy is determined at national and indeed international level in response to complex political situations and world events. New situations arise at short notice (e.g., Afghan evacuation, invasion of Ukraine) or build over a period of time (e.g., increase in small boat arrivals).

Local authorities and their partners apply their statutory duties (e.g., sourcing school places), and depending on the terms of each scheme, may have additional duties required of them, some of which are funded, and others are not. Roles vary with each scheme for county and district councils, requiring ongoing liaising and effective working relationships.

In the last 18 months, there have been significant new developments nationally and internationally. Lincolnshire did not have a long history of resettlement unlike other parts of the region, and organisations have been on a steep learning curve. That said, Lincolnshire has robust governance and operational arrangements in place to respond to national policy requirements as these emerge.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

A risk register is being maintained by the Resettlement Partnership

4. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Homes for Ukraine - Guidance for councils	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils
Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes – Follow-up ONS survey: 17 October to 7 November 2022	To be obtained by Democratic Services

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