

Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	4 March 2021
Subject:	Afghan MOD Scheme		
Report of:	Head of Communities	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member – Communities & Housing		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary

To outline the Afghan MOD Scheme and the options for Sefton’s participation including agreeing a pledge of numbers of people to be assisted (25 people is recommended). In addition to seek approval to appoint the South Sefton Housing Group (Lead organisation Bosco) to deliver the scheme on a 1 year +1+1 arrangement, and to seek delegated authority to the Head of Communities to approve the waiver and any subsequent extension periods.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet be requested to:

- (1) approve Sefton’s participation in the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MOD) Scheme from April 2021;
- (2) agree a “pledge” of up to 25 people to be assisted in 2021/22;
- (3) approve the appointment of the South Sefton Housing Group (lead organisation Bosco) from April 2021 to deliver the scheme on a 1 year +1+1 arrangement;
- (4) approve the Head of Communities to seek a waiver from an Executive Director to the Contract Procedure Rules to make a direct award of the contract to South Sefton Housing Group; and
- (5) approve any extension to the contract following the initial first year be delegated to the Head of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To participate in a scheme that supports former MOD Afghan personnel that have suffered persecution since the British military withdrawal from Afghanistan. To agree a

pledge of 25 people per year which is consistent with the similar Syrian resettlement scheme. To appoint South Sefton Housing Group (lead organisation Bosco) to deliver the scheme given their track record in the Syrian Resettlement scheme and their local knowledge and delivery partnerships. The scheme expenditure will be below the light touch threshold in relation to the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and is for a 1 year +1+1 arrangements. Delegated authority to the Head of Service to approve the waiver and to approve future extensions in consultation with the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing will provide a seamless approval process.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

The following options was considered and rejected;

1. **Not to be involved in the scheme** – this option was rejected as there is a moral responsibility to support the scheme which will further enrich Seftons diverse communities.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There are no costs to the Council. The scheme is funded by the way of funding instructions administered by the Home Office and funded by the Ministry of Defence. The Council will receive the funding for each household and pass this onto South Sefton Housing Group.

The funding is relevant to the type of household supported and the number and age of the people involved. It is estimated for a pledge of 25 people made up of family households the annual funding provided to South Sefton Housing Group by the MOD would be between £123,055 & £178,353

(B) Capital Costs

None

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):
None
Legal Implications:
None
Equality Implications:
The equality Implications have been identified and mitigated.

Contribution to the Council’s Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable:

By participating in the scheme we are supporting vulnerable former MOD personnel.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: By improving the diverse richness of our communities, and the short term support that is given as part of this scheme we are increasing the resilience.
Commission, broker and provide core services: By commissioning South Sefton Housing Group we are appointing local providers that support community and voluntary services. South Sefton Housing Group have a proven local track record in this specialist area of work.
Place – leadership and influencer:
Drivers of change and reform:
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:
Greater income for social investment:
Cleaner Greener:

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director Corporate Resources & Customer Services (FD 6292/21) and the Chief Legal & Democratic Officer (LD.4493/21....) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

The Councils Procurement Team have also been consulted.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Cabinet decision.

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Appendices:

None.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Local Authorities have been invited by the Home Office, to participate in the Afghan MOD Scheme which is due to start in April 2021.
- 1.2. The scheme is aimed at Locally Employed Staff (LES) from Afghanistan that were made redundant following the UK's military withdrawal. Typically these LES acted as interpreters for the British army and now are viewed as traitors and are being persecuted.
- 2.1 This is not a refugee resettlement programme. The families coming through the scheme are not refugees and do not arrive with refugee status. They have 5 year leave to remain with the option of applying for indefinite leave to remain at the end of this period. This is a redundancy package for their service in Afghanistan with the UK Armed Forces. It is a 4 month support package to help the families settle in to life in the UK.

2. Key Deliverables

- 2.1. The key deliverables for this scheme are:

Integration support

Reception arrangements for Clients and, where appropriate their Dependants, at the airport, including handover from flight escorts and welcome briefing.

- a. A package of advice and assistance to cover employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply. Specifically, this package should ensure that new arrivals are registered with GPs, registered with their local Job Centre Plus, receive a National Insurance Number and assistance to secure school places for school aged children.
- b. Orientations to the local area.

Accommodation

- c. Four (4) months accommodation from the date of arrival. The accommodation will be in accordance with Local Authority housing standards and should be modestly furnished.

Cash Support

- d. Cash payments pending access to and receipt of mainstream welfare benefits or securing employment, whichever occurs first. These payments will be equivalent to –
 - Job Seekers Allowance rates for adults, and
 - asylum support rates for children
- e. Payments will be made on the basis of need and only up to the point at which mainstream welfare benefits are received or employment is secured, whichever occurs first. The Recipient should ensure every effort is made to keep the period

of payment to as short a time as possible by assisting Clients to make a claim for welfare benefits, and it should not exceed four (4) months.

Transport

- f. Transport from the arrival airport to the accommodation.

In addition to the package of advice and assistance outlined in paragraph 3.1 below the Recipient may use the integration element of the funding to provide other support that they judge will assist the Client to integrate in the UK.

3 The Funding Package available for the Scheme

- 3.1 The Funding package for delivering the scheme is provided by the Ministry of Defence
- 3.2 The scheme is very similar to the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme that Sefton has been part of since 2015. Based on this experience we know that we would be looking to assist family units as these matches the Housing availability we have in South Sefton. Assuming we accommodate 5 x families of 5 each with a child under 2 then the annual cost to the MOD would be between £123,055 - £178,353 This is dependent on how quickly both Job Seekers allowance / Universal Credit and Local Housing Allowance / Housing Benefit comes into payment. £123,055 assumes these come into payment from the first day of residence (likely given the support mechanism and systems already in place from the Syrian Resettlement Scheme). £178,353 assumes these benefits do not come into payment at all during the 4 month support period.
- 3.3 Procurement advice is that these levels allow for light touch procurement and fall under OJEU requirements. Furthermore a 1 year +1, +1 arrangement is recommended. Legal advice is that a new agreement specifically for this scheme be drawn up to protect the Council.

4. South Sefton Housing Group & Procurement

- 4.1 South Sefton Housing Group (SSHG) are an alliance of several organisations in the South Sefton area. They include
- Bosco Society Ltd
 - Venus
 - Excell Housing
 - New Start

As mentioned throughout this report SSHG have since 2015, delivered the Syrian Refugee Resettlement programme that has seen over 100 Syrian refugees successfully resettled in Sefton. This scheme, whilst not a refugee resettlement scheme is incredibly similar and therefore it makes sense given SSHGs local knowledge and delivery to appoint them to deliver the Afghan MOD Scheme.

- 4.2 SSHG could be commissioned by the use of a waiver which Cabinet are asked to provide delegated authority to the Head of Communities to authorise. Cabinet are

also asked to provide delegated authority to the Head of Communities to approve subsequent annual extensions to the agreement.