

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2023

Report Title	Safe and Legal Routes to the UK			
Purpose of Report	The Government is asking Local Authorities to pledge how many migrant households, arriving in the UK via safe and legal routes, can be housed by each Local Authority in 2025. The aggregate figure will then be used by Government to cap the number of migrants allowed to enter the UK.			
Decision(s)	Council RESOLVES that a pledge of 2 housing units for migrants arriving via safe and legal routes in 2025 is made to Government with the pledge to be reviewed by the Housing committee during 2024/25 to determine whether it should be increased.			
Consultation and Feedback	Consultation is being carried out with statutory and voluntary groups involved with refugee and migrant resettlement.			
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Options	A pledge of zero properties could be made, and then revised upwards in due course. However, once made a pledge cannot be revised downwards at a later date.			
Background Papers	None.			
Appendices	Appendix A: Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration Appendix B: Cap on Safe and Legal Routes – Consultation Appendix C: Cap on Safe and Legal Routes FAQs Appendix D: Background data			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	No	No

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1 The UK currently operates seven safe and legal routes for migrants to enter the UK. These include resettlement schemes such as the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and Community Sponsorship, as well as bespoke routes for individuals from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Hong Kong and the close family members of refugees. Under the UK's safe and legal routes, eligible individuals access them through an application or referral process made overseas. This means when they arrive in the UK their status is already determined.
- 1.2 The government is continuing to deliver on the Illegal Migrant Act and is giving local authorities an opportunity to influence the cap on safe and legal routes. The Home Office is officially launching consultation to inform the level at which a cap on safe and legal routes is set. Local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Executive Office in Northern Ireland are being consulted.

1.3 The consultation is an opportunity for authorities to assess their capacity to house and support vulnerable people and inform decision making at Government level. “The cap will ensure the UK is able to welcome, accommodate, integrate and support those arriving via these routes in an orderly and appropriate way. This will ensure we do not take more refugees than our public services and communities can cope with.”

2. Main Points

2.1 The objective of the cap is to ensure the UK can accommodate and support those arriving through safe and legal routes effectively. The introduction of the cap provides an opportunity for a more sustainable and managed approach to migration through humanitarian safe and legal routes. Recognising the pressures placed on local authority capacity to accommodate and effectively integrate those arriving, the cap will place a realistic annual limit on the number of people who can come to the UK each year through safe and legal routes.

2.2 As part of the pledge process, councils are being asked to:

- Engage and consult with other organisations.
- Evidence reasons for the pledge.
- State what household types will be accommodated, and whether they will be accommodated under the community sponsorship scheme.
- State what impact the available Resettlement Tariff and Community Sponsorship Funding has on our ability to resettle refugees.
- State how existing funding could be maximised to increase delivery of resettlement services locally.
- State what other public services (such as education and children and adult social care) are impacting on our ability to resettle refugees in the area.

2.3 Timescales are tight, and the deadline for response is 15th December.

2.4 With this in mind, the Gloucestershire Local Authorities are working together to review data & trends and consult with partners.

3. Research and consultation data was not available at the time of writing and as such officers are currently unable to set out a recommendation. It is anticipated that the required data will be received on 30 November, after which it will be considered and evaluated, and a recommendation formulated. The recommendation will then be tabled at the meeting.

3.1 There is some uncertainty as to these proposals pending the outcome of the next General Election, however, it is our understanding that if we make a pledge to accommodate, we could be held to this. There is however an option to increase our pledge in future if we wish to.

3.2 For example, if a district pledges 10 properties in 2025, they will be expected to deliver that. However, if we were to pledge 2 properties in 2025 and were happy to welcome more than 2 households to the district that year, we could increase the pledge for that year. There does not appear to be an option to revise a pledge downwards.

3.3 Given the shortage of housing options in the district, the increasing number of homeless applications and related financial pressures, as well as the risks associated with the ending of host arrangements under Homes for Ukraine and the likelihood of positive asylum

decisions being received as the Prince of Wales Hotel is decommissioned by Home Office, any decision on a pledge needs to be made within this context.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Given the demand for housing services and pressures on the team, it may be that the recommendation is to pledge a low number initially and review this when/if it progresses through Parliament.

4.2 Draft Response to Consultation:

5. What organisations (including VCS organisations, and community sponsorship groups) in your area have you engaged with while compiling your response and have you included the responses received from these organisations in your local authority consolidated response?

5.1 The consultation was held in partnership with Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership, Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (service provider), Gloucestershire ICB, resettlement leads from across refugee and asylum seeker routes in Gloucestershire, Housing Leads, and the County Council. Stroud does not currently have any Community Sponsorship Groups in the district.

6. What is your capacity to house and support those coming through safe and legal routes under the cap in calendar year 2025?

6.1 Stroud District Council is part of the Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership, a multi-agency partnership across the County, which works to ensure that refugees are resettled, supported, and integrated into our community. Gloucestershire has welcomed refugees to the county through routes such as Homes for Ukraine, UK Resettlement Scheme, British Nationals (Overseas) and the Afghan Resettlement Schemes. Having analysed data by district however, it is clear to see that the shortage of rented housing in both the private and social sectors has had a direct effect on the numbers of refugees that we are able to support. In addition to this, the current Streamlined Asylum Process policy has increased demand on housing from asylum seekers who have been given leave to remain but insufficient time to find alternative accommodation.

7. What evidence can you provide to support this (for example, number of properties that you have available or can procure)?

7.1 We have provided data to demonstrate the current demand vs availability for social housing in Stroud district. In addition to this, we have also provided data demonstrating the high level of support we have given to resettlement routes since 2015.

8. Of the above number, in 2025, how many of the following groups do you anticipate being able to accommodate, and ensure appropriate support is in place for: (Complex cases, single people, large families)

8.1 Due to the rurality of Stroud District, we would not anticipate being able to support complex cases or very large families.

9. Of the above number, how many of these do you expect to come through the community sponsorship scheme in your area?

9.1 We do not expect arrivals through Community Sponsorship Schemes.

10. The Resettlement Tariff and Community Sponsorship Funding provide the local authority with access to central funding for the purpose of supporting refugee integration. What impact has this funding had on your ability to resettle refugees in your area?

10.1 The resettlement tariff has enabled the County to commission GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) to provide wraparound support to all our arrivals through resettlement schemes. GARAS provide a thorough wrap-around support package that includes integration, access to English language training, employment, and benefits support. GARAS enable resettlement arrivals to become independent and to integrate well into their communities in the UK.

11. There is no additional funding being introduced with the cap. How could the funding instructions be changed to maximise the existing funding, enabling innovation and increased delivery of services in your area?

11.1 We suggest that the ring-fencing of Afghan and UKRS funding is removed. This causes a significant barrier to the provision of services that we could otherwise develop, as we are unable to use funding collectively in a way that would benefit all refugees.

12. What impact do you assess the local provision of public services such as education, social care (adult and children) and healthcare has on your ability to resettle refugees in your area? Why do you assess this to be the case?

12.1 Whilst we support the resettlement of refugees, this does place a burden upon services such as education, social care, and healthcare. Stroud has thirteen GP practices to cater to a population of 121,529 and the opening of an Asylum Seeker hotel in 2022, increased pressure on all services. Stroud currently has a Home Seeker registration list of 3966 applications, and we were able to offer lets to 525 households in 22-23. There is an additional demand from HFU arrivals needing to leave their host accommodation and the housing demand resulting from this. Where HFU guests decide to remain in the district, this again increases the demand on services.

13. Implications

13.1 Financial Implications

The shortage of housing in the district alongside the increasing number of homelessness applications mean that a pledge of housing may put some pressure on existing housing advice and homelessness services. It can be expected that at the pledge level being proposed it would be possible to manage this within existing resources.

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13.2 Legal Implications

The Illegal Migration Act places a duty on the Home Office to consult councils on the development of a Cap on the number of entrants to the UK arriving via safe and legal routes for humanitarian purposes. The Government then will lay a Statutory Instrument in Parliament to set the cap in Summer 2024, including both the number and the routes subject to that cap, with the cap expected to be in operation in 2025. The cap will be annual but exemptions can be made in humanitarian emergencies. Responding to the consultation is voluntary but if a response is not received, a 'zero capacity' commitment from that area could form the basis of the total national figure.

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13.3 Equality Implications

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

13.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.