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Title of meeting: Cabinet

Subject: Portsmouth City Council Support to Asylum Seekers and Resettlement Programmes

Date of meeting: 11th January 2022

Report by: Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by

- 1.1 The report has been prepared following a request for information on the different schemes Portsmouth City Council is involved with, to support asylum seekers and people resettling into the UK via government schemes.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 To provide an overview of the different schemes the Council is involved with that support asylum seekers and people resettling into the UK via government schemes and also to show how the different directorates of the Council are working together to support people coming to the UK.

3. Information Requested

- 3.1 There are a number of different schemes that the Council is involved with covering a number of different countries as well as more general asylum seekers. The details of these schemes are shown below.

3.2 The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) & the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

- 3.2.1 In December 2020 the Government (HMG) announced the ARAP. This was a new scheme that offered relocation or other assistance to current and former Locally Employed Staff (LES) in Afghanistan to reflect the situation in Afghanistan and the risks that they were facing. The scheme launched in April 2021 and remains open and, we are advised, will operate indefinitely. The withdrawal of military and other support and subsequent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan meant that the scheme had to deal with a large number of people in a short period of time. This has been well documented through parliamentary committees and the media. LES who meet

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the eligibility criteria for relocation under the ARAP scheme have the opportunity to apply for indefinite leave to enter the UK. LES already in the UK with temporary status under ARAP can apply, free of charge, to convert their status to indefinite leave to remain.

3.2.2 Alongside the ARAP scheme the Government also announced the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) in August 2021. It is envisaged that this scheme will allow up to 20,000 at risk people to settle in the UK. Under 'Operation Pitting', approximately 15,000 Afghans were evacuated during the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. This was to allow other Afghans who were deemed at risk to leave the country alongside people that qualified under the ARAP scheme. These additional people formed part of the ACRS and included female politicians, members of the LGBT community, women's rights activists, and judges. Outside of the emergency evacuation this scheme is not yet more widely open although HMG have said details will follow shortly.

3.2.3 At the end of August, HMG announced Operation Warm Welcome. This was to ensure that Afghans arriving in the UK received the support they needed to rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate into their local communities. To date, Portsmouth has housed nine Afghans families through the ARAP by leasing MOD properties within the City. Because the Council is using MOD properties it is only the ARAP scheme that we are currently able to support. A 10th family have already moved on and a new family will replace them. Generally, the people arriving through the ARAP scheme will not have language difficulties but many will require support from Council services and any families will need school places etc.

3.2.4 DLUHC and the Home Office are in contact with Portsmouth City Council about the arrangements that need to be made to support individuals from these schemes that settle in Portsmouth. All people that settle in the UK through these schemes will have the right to work, access to education and to healthcare and will have recourse to public funds. There is a core local authority tariff of £20,520 per person to support people to become integrated into UK society. This is covering the costs of the Council to support these families. HMG have also created a portal where people, businesses and organisations can make offers to support the people resettling under these schemes. This could include volunteering, offers of employment or providing practical assistance to people.

3.3 Hong Kong British National Overseas (HKBNO)

3.3.1 In January 2021 a new immigration route was opened which provided British National (Overseas) status holders from Hong Kong, and their dependents, a chance to come to the UK to live, study and work and ultimately to gain UK citizenship. Up to 5 million Hong Kong residents (there is no definitive view on the number) hold this status and therefore would be eligible to come to the UK. It is not

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clear how many people will take up this opportunity. However the HMG impact assessment suggested nationally that between 123k-150k status holders and their dependents will arrive in the first year and that between 258k-322k may arrive over the first 5 years. HMG acknowledge that with current restrictions in Hong Kong it is difficult to be certain what the future intentions of BNO status holders will be. However the Migration Observatory have published a briefing which includes results from a survey undertaken in Hong Kong in Spring 2021. This suggests:

- In early 2021, 6% of BN(O)s were planning to come to the UK via the BN(O) visa scheme and a further 32% were considering coming.
- Many potential BN(O) movers do not plan to move immediately or are uncertain about when they might move
- Factors making the BN(O) visa attractive included flexibility to work, bring family members, and the lack of an English language requirement.
- Potential UK movers are younger and more educated than people who plan to stay in Hong Kong.
- The UK is the most popular choice of destination countries among BN(O)s leaving or considering leaving Hong Kong, with a third choosing it as their first-choice country.
- Over 40% of potential UK movers said they planned to move to London.
- Dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and social environment in Hong Kong are push factors for BN(O) migration.
- Potential BN(O) movers cited a wide range of political, social, personal and economic factors informing their interest in moving to the UK.

3.3.2 BNO status individuals from Hong Kong must show that they can adequately maintain and accommodate themselves in the UK for 6 months without recourse to public funds. BNO status holders that settle in the UK have a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition attached to their leave to remain in the UK. They will have permission to work and study and their children can access a state funded school. In cases of destitution (e.g. lack of adequate accommodation or means of achieving it) they can apply to have the NRPF removed.

3.3.3 People that settle in the UK through this route can choose to settle wherever they wish and they are not asked where they are intending to settle. It is therefore not clear how many people have settled in Portsmouth through this scheme. Soft intelligence suggests that people will settle where there are existing support networks and communities with Hong Kong heritage. HKBRITS.COM are providing support for BNO status holders looking to settle in the South East (primarily Surrey and Kent). In November they suggested that there was a facebook group which had approximately 2,600 people interested in, or who had already arrived, in the Hampshire geographical area. They also said that Portsmouth was one of the more

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popular places in HIOW for people that had already settled in the area. Their view was that many BNO status holders were still deciding where they wished to settle long term and that issues such as school places would be a key factor. The Learning Place is already providing English language support to BNO status holders whom now reside in Portsmouth.

3.3.4 HMG have set up the Hong Kong BN(O) Welcome Programme to provide support to local area to manage new arrivals through the scheme. Funding is also available to support Local Authorities, with £800 per adult to support access to English language classes and up to £2,720 per BNO household for destitution support. In addition, the South-East region has received area weighted funding. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight geographical area have received just under £77k of which Portsmouth is due to receive nearly £15.5k. This funding is to be used to help support:

- enabling all new arrivals to fully contribute to life in the UK, both economically and socially, enriching our society.
- providing support to both resident communities and BN(O) status holders to feel safe and welcome, including providing advice and guidance on tackling hate crime in a timely manner, with follow-up support offered.
- allowing BN(O) status holders and their dependents to feel fully part of British society, able to mix confidently with people of all backgrounds and provide a positive contribution to the UK and the areas in which they settle – including through speaking English well. Signpost effectively to ensure that any instances of destitution and underemployment in the BN(O) status holder cohort is minimised and addressed through effective support services.

Clearly other funding will also help achieve these aims and many people with BNO status are likely to be entirely self-supporting.

3.4 Support to Asylum Seekers and unaccompanied children

3.4.1 In terms of support to asylum seekers more generally, Portsmouth has always accommodated a large number of asylum seekers through the national dispersal scheme. Whilst there are not many people generally supported by Councils in the South-East (the SE represents about 17% of the population, yet currently hosts under 3% of the national asylum population - the lowest proportion of any region except N Ireland), this number has been increasing under a national drive towards equalisation. There are now 20 dispersal areas in the South-East whilst 2 years ago there were only 3. Nationally there is a 10-year programme to rebalance dispersal across the country and so it is likely that more asylum seekers will be dispersed to the South-East although there are many other areas in the South-East that will need to engage with this programme as part of this rebalancing. With the lack of dispersal areas HMG are using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers. This approach is being used in the 20 UK cities with the highest population. This does not include

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Portsmouth but does include Southampton. It is also worth noting that Portsmouth is not part of the UK Resettlement Scheme which in March 2020 was a widened from a Syrian scheme to a global resettlement scheme.

- 3.4.2 For all of these schemes, and support, there is obviously a wider system that is in place. Within the South-East the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) provides a leadership, co-ordination, and an advisory function for migration in the South-East. It is one of 12 Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships covering the UK (one in each English region and one in each devolved administration). It is worth noting that for the different schemes there are now 8 hotels in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight area that are being used to support asylum seekers and people being resettled.
- 3.4.3 In terms of unaccompanied children, Portsmouth, again, historically has always had a relatively high number of children that it is supporting. This reflects the fact that Portsmouth has the International Port with ferry links to France and Spain. Kent and East Sussex have historically had even high numbers of unaccompanied children due to the number making the short crossing across the channel in small boats. Unaccompanied children have historically placed a financial burden on a local authority although this was usually covered through grant payments. Then and now the much greater financial burden is when unaccompanied children become care leavers.
- 3.4.4 The Central Government target rate for accommodating unaccompanied children is based on 0.07 of an areas child population. This is likely to form the basis of the implementation of a mandated scheme. Portsmouth currently has 37 unaccompanied children (6 over our 0.07 rate) in our care. As Portsmouth is currently 23% over the expected rate, Portsmouth will not be required to take children through the National Transfer Scheme until such time as the number falls below 31. At that time Portsmouth will be allocated an agreed number of children to bring Portsmouth back to a rate of 0.07 or 31 children. However, Portsmouth may get more children presenting at the port or landside - especially as the weather deteriorates and this impacts on the number of small boat crossings to Kent and East Sussex. A number of local authorities have made representation to be exempt from the scheme and if the Home Office/DfE review of these LA's puts them outside of the mandated scheme this would have an impact on other local authorities.

3.5 Community Sponsorship

- 3.5.1 Community Sponsorship is a scheme that sits alongside the UK Resettlement Scheme. Instead of the local authority, it is local community groups that offer refugees / asylum seekers support throughout their 1-2 years in the country. Such support includes securing accommodation and helping to access education, healthcare, language lessons, benefits, and employment. Local community groups

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require approval from the Home Office, and individual families require approval of the local authority.

- 3.5.2 The Community Sponsorship model ensures it is local, community sponsorship groups who take the primary role of supporting newly arriving households. The local group would be responsible for demonstrating to the Home Office that they have sufficient funds, training, an adequate complaints policy, and that they can provide housing for the family for 24 months. They would also be responsible for providing post-arrival support for up to 24 months.
- 3.5.3 The local authority's role is to review the local group's safeguarding policy and give written consent to the family arriving. The Council could inspect the housing if it wished, and would be able to request funding for the impact on education and English language training. The local authority can also make the local CCG aware of some funding available for any impacts on health.
- 3.5.4 In a small number of cases, where the relationship between the new family and the local group breaks down, or the group is no longer able to perform its function as expected, the local authority would be required to provide the support in its place. There are some safeguards in place to minimise this risk, including a 'backup fund' for groups facing financial challenges. In the event it did happen, the local authority would be entitled to 'an appropriate level of funding'; the intention is that the local authority would not suffer financially. However, the overwhelming majority (more than 99%) of cases do not require local authority intervention in this way, and the impact could more likely be expected to be as burden on local services.
- 3.5.5 The Council has agreed to be a part of this scheme and Pompey Reset, as the local Community Group, are looking to house a single family through this scheme early in 2022. The Council has endorsed their application which will now be presented to the Home Office. The Home Office's national partner for the scheme, 'Reset' offer practical support to the local authorities and community organisations that take part.

3.6 Coordination within the Council

- 3.6.1 With central government operating so many splintered schemes, it is important that there is strong co-ordination throughout the Council. With so many direct and indirect implications of supporting asylum seekers, or people resetting through Government programmes, the Council needs to make sure that there is strong communication between the different directorates. To support this approach a co-ordinating officer will be identified to make sure that there is a whole council approach to responding to the different schemes and the implications of people settling in Portsmouth. This officer will report to some form of board with cross authority representation that will build on the existing informal meetings that take place. This approach can also make sure that the Council is appropriately represented on the various national and regional forums.

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3.6.2 Whilst there is often variable Government support for these schemes, the Council will need to make sure that the funding covers the additional burdens that are placed upon it and if necessary support any lobbying that needs to be made for additional funding. The council has recently made representations about the funding of care leavers (see paragraph 3.4.3) and, in conjunction with other councils across the region, has been stressing the need for better central government co-ordination and better and earlier communication with local authorities. The Home Office are trying to respond to this. It will continue to be important to share information and data throughout the Council to support planning by different directorates.

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Signed by Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager

Appendices: None

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report: NONE