

ANNEX 2

Local authority Q&A:

Afghan resettlement enhanced matching process (including the pathway for families/ individuals in bridging hotels that refuse both 'appropriate' property offers)

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Context and summary of the new process

Q: How will the new process work?

- An enhanced end-to-end process for matching families/ individuals to settled accommodation and reduce the growing number of refusals of accommodation is being implemented on 9 May 2022.
- Afghan families/individuals will be offered a maximum of two 'appropriate offers', with the expectation being that they will accept the first accommodation offer made to them, unless they have a 'good reason' to refuse it.
- If a family/individual rejects an 'appropriate accommodation offer', the Home Office will review the offer, consider their reasons, and if it was a 'good reason' to refuse, the offer will be discounted. If this is not the case and the review finds that the offer was 'appropriate', the household will be informed of their final second 'appropriate accommodation offer' and that they must either accept it or they will be given a minimum of 56 days' notice to leave the bridging hotel.
- The family/individual should seek to make their own accommodation arrangements during this period as, at the end of the notice period bridging accommodation will be withdrawn, and the family/ individual will need to leave the bridging hotel.
- Support and clear communication will be provided to families/ individuals throughout the process, including on how to source accommodation and the homelessness process once the period of notice has been issued. There is also an accompanying set of materials that have been developed to address entrenched myths e.g. "if I wait I'll receive a council house" which we have trialled in a small number of hotels and are refining as a result to be most effective.

Q: Why has this process been put in place?

- There are a growing number of households refusing accommodation offers for a range of reasons. These are often complex, but generally include preferences for living in a specific location, limited knowledge of the accommodation and location offered, or the accommodation offer not meeting the household's perceived needs.
- This frustrates efforts to match families to settled accommodation, putting pressure on the bridging hotels and councils expecting a family/ individual to resettle and delays the start of the integration journey.
- Implementing this end-to-end process will help to reduce the increasing number of refusals of 'appropriate accommodation offers'. The process will not penalise families and individuals that refuse to move to accommodation that does not meet their needs (rather than their preferences).

Q: Why isn't the matching process improved instead?

- Work is already being implemented to improve the quality and speed of the matching process. This refusals policy is the backstop to an improved matching system – not a change in isolation.
- We are doing this through a number of routes, including:
 - Improving the information available to families/ individuals.
 - Increasing the communications with families/ individuals regarding offers of 'appropriate accommodation' made to them.
 - Improving data available to matchers.
 - Rolling out an approach whereby people are able to find their own accommodation whilst continuing to receive the support currently provided by the council.
 - Trialling 'localised matching' – working with regions to match families living in bridging accommodation in their region to accommodation in their region.

The end-to-end process / journey

Q: How will families/individuals receive accommodation offers?

First accommodation offer:

- The family/ individual will be sent a formal offer letter from the Home Office by email with details of the accommodation being offered and information about the area in which it is located. The Home Office Liaison Officer (HOLO) will discuss the offer and provide the family/ individual with more information about the accommodation and the area, as required.
- The receiving council may also call the family/ individual to provide more information about the property / area / support and encourage them to accept the offer.
- The family/ individual will be asked to reply to the formal offer within five working days, advising of acceptance or rejection of the offer via the HOLO in their hotel. The family/ individual will need to sign their acceptance or rejection reply. The HOLO will then scan and send this reply back to the Home Office.
- If the family/ individual accept the offer, transport will be arranged within five working days of receiving confirmation of acceptance, with a minimum of five working days' notice of the move date.
- If the family/ individual refuse the offer Home Office will consider whether the reasons for refusal are reasonable and meet the criteria. If Home Office accept the reasons for refusal, the next accommodation offer will count as the 'first accommodation offer', and the original offer will no longer be counted towards the total number of offers.
- If Home Office do not accept the grounds for refusal, or the first accommodation offer is ignored, this will result in a move to the second accommodation offer stage.

Second (final) accommodation offer:

- The second offer will be made by the Home Office in writing and will be final (unless the family/ individual has 'good reasons' for refusal). The HOLO will discuss the offer and provide the family/ individual with more information about the accommodation and the area, as required.
- As with the first offer, the family/ individual will be asked to reply to the formal offer within five working days, advising of acceptance or refusal of the offer.
- If the family/ individual accept the offer transport will be arranged within five working days of receiving confirmation of acceptance, with a minimum of five working days' notice of the move date.
- If the family/ individual refuse the offer Home Office will consider whether the reasons for refusal are reasonable and meet the criteria. If the Home Office accept the reasons for refusal, another accommodation offer will be made, which will count as the second accommodation offer.

Q: What processes are in place so that the first property offer meets the needs of the family/ individual as best as possible?

- The Home Office will meet with a family/ individual, face to face, before consideration is given to matching a household to accommodation. The purpose of this meeting is to capture all the information available about a household's circumstances which is relevant to identifying an 'appropriate accommodation offer' for that household, making sure families/ individuals understand how the matching process will work, the offer being made, resolving any questions or concerns they may have and ensuring they understand the consequences should they choose not to accept an offer.

Q: What happens if an Afghan family/ individual refuses or ignores both offers of accommodation?

- If both offers are refused or ignored without 'good reasons' for doing so, the family/ individual will be given notice to leave the bridging hotel and find their own accommodation, which will be communicated formally in writing.

Notice to leave bridging accommodation

- If a family reject the second, 'appropriate accommodation offer' they will be given a minimum of 56 days' notice to leave the bridging accommodation. Ongoing contact and support will take place once the period of notice has been issued. Information will be provided on how to source their own accommodation and the homelessness referral process.

Referral for homelessness assessment

- If a family has not sourced their own accommodation upon leaving bridging accommodation, they will be referred on to council homelessness services and assisted to make an application.
- If a family independently submits a homelessness application, the relevant council should notify DLUHC and HO.
- If the household is not likely to have secured accommodation before they are required to leave the hotel, with their consent, caseworkers will make a referral to council homelessness services.

Q: Will this not mean everyone will now present as homeless?

- There are check points factored into the process to encourage families/individuals to accept settled accommodation and that property offers are 'appropriate'. If a family/ individual refuses an offer, this will be independently reviewed. Further communication with families will take place before a family/ individual is asked to accept or refuse the second offer to ensure the implications of the decision are fully understood. The aim of the process is to encourage families to accept the housing offers and minimise the

number of those who present as homeless. DLUHC are working with HO and DWP to increase Afghan families/individuals understanding of their housing options and to tackle the myths enable people to make informed choices. In relation to homelessness, we will cover myths which inform families that homelessness applications will not ensure house is in exact location.

Q: Can a family/ individual change their mind and take up the first property offered, after they saw the second property or when they fully understood the implications of refusal?

- If the first property offer was still available this may be possible, but will depend on a number of factors, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis. We encourage all families/ individuals to accept the first offer of 'appropriate accommodation' made to them as the second offer is likely to not be more preferable to them.

Q: Why is the notice period after the second refusal set at 56 days?

- The minimum of a 56-day notice period to leave bridging accommodation has parity with homelessness relief duty in England and will mitigate the risk of people entering temporary accommodation.

Q: What will government put in place to limit the impact on homelessness services?

- There are a number of ways we are aiming to limit the impact on homelessness services, including:
 - Intensive work with families by HOLOs to encourage families/ individuals to accept 'appropriate accommodation offers'.
 - Ensuring the Home Office 'appropriate offer' criteria is more generous than the homelessness route to encourage acceptance during the matching process and avoid homelessness.
 - The minimum of a 56-day notice period to leave bridging accommodation has parity with homelessness relief duty in England and will mitigate the risk of families entering temporary accommodation.

Q: How will government ensure a fair dispersal process is applied in relation to homelessness referrals, taking into consideration the different legislative contexts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

- We are working with councils across all parts of the UK to develop a referrals process that seeks to distribute homelessness referrals across council areas and that takes account of the different homelessness legislation for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Q: How will large families be supported through this process?

- For larger households, where it is not possible to identify one accommodation option which is affordable and large enough to accommodate all household members together, the Home Office will consult with the household to consider whether, with their consent, the family can be accommodated across two separate properties.
- Any suggested division of the family will take into account the ages of household members, any caring or vulnerability needs and the personal preferences of the family.
- Properties offered will be in reasonable proximity to each other so that all household members can maintain close contact with each other.

Q: Is there an appeal process for families/ individuals to challenge final decisions made by Home Office?

- If a family refuses an 'appropriate accommodation offer', a senior Home Office official will review the circumstances of the case and make a decision based on the evidence provided, which will be communicated in writing to the family/ individual.

Q: Can a family return to bridging accommodation if they don't like their temporary accommodation?

- It will not be possible for a family to return to bridging accommodation once they have left it.
- If a homeless household has been provided with temporary accommodation by a council, the council must ensure it is suitable.
- Households may ask for a review on request of the housing authority's decision that the accommodation offered to them is suitable.

Q: What is the role of the HOLOs and support services providing support in bridging accommodation when it comes to actively encouraging residents to accept properties?

- HOLOs are responsible for initiating conversations regarding accommodation offers and potential moves. They will promote the benefits of moving into settled accommodation and manage any concerns or expectations a family/ individual may have. The HOLO also works with the council staff working in the hotel as well as in the receiving area to make sure families/ individuals are aware of the support and resources available in the area of the proposed accommodation.

Key principles and definitions

Q: How is an 'appropriate offer' defined?

- The Home Office will offer accommodation which has been put forward for the scheme by a council or Community Sponsorship group. This may be accommodation from the private rented sector or from social housing stock.

An 'appropriate accommodation offer' will:

- Meet all relevant health and safety requirements, be in a good state of repair and will be furnished.
- Where necessary, adaptations to the property will be made before the household move in to ensure that it is accessible for any residents with a known disability.
- be available for a minimum of 12 months however the council where the household is placed is responsible for ensuring that accommodation is available, if needed, for the three years that it has committed to providing integration support to the household.
- be affordable for the household, considering the financial resource available to them, including any government support for which they are eligible.
- be of suitable size to accommodate all household members. The accommodation will meet the standards outlined in the 'Technical Housing Standards': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-housing-standards-nationally-described-space-standard>, Department for Work and Pensions 'housing benefit rules': <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/what-youll-get> and the 'statutory overcrowding and space standards': <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/68/part/X/crossheading/definition-of-overcrowding> (Section 326).
- For larger households, where it is not possible to identify one affordable accommodation option large enough to accommodate all household members together, the Home Office will consult with the household to consider whether, with their consent, the family can be accommodated across two separate properties. The division of the family will take into account the ages of household members, any caring or vulnerability needs and the personal preferences of the family. Properties offered will be in reasonable proximity to each other so that all household members can maintain close contact with each other.

Q: What is the priority system that underpins the order that families/ individuals are matched and how will that be communicated?

- Prior to matching families/ individuals to accommodation, the Home Office will talk to them to make sure they have all the necessary information about the household's circumstances to enable them to make an 'appropriate' offer of accommodation, which meets their needs. The matching process will take the following criteria into consideration:

Education

- For households including children, accommodation will be sought within a reasonable distance of age-appropriate education facilities.
- Where the Home Office is aware of the special educational needs of a child, this will be taken into consideration when allocating accommodation.

Health

- The Home Office will consider any known medical treatment needs, and accommodation provided will be within a reasonable distance of any necessary services.
- For specialist or ongoing medical treatment where continuity of care is important and has already begun, the Home Office will accommodate the household as close to that provision as possible. For more complex, specialist treatment, this may require significant travel out of the area.

Faith

- The Home Office will consider any faith practice needs and all households will be able to practice their faith if they wish to do so. In towns and cities, access to faith facilities may be in the form of a mosque, church or temple, however in more rural areas it may be via facilities such as Islamic centres, visiting imams, church groups or community gatherings.

Employment

- When matching accommodation, the Home Office will take into consideration the location of any paid employment that has already begun, or where there is a signed contract of paid employment in place. Where one of the adults is in employment which requires them to attend a specific location to perform that role, and where the role cannot move to another location the Home Office will consider the impact of the proposed move and journey time on that employment and seek to provide accommodation which is within a reasonable travel distance of it. Households will be expected to meet the costs of any necessary travel to and from employment from their own funds.
- Speculative or unconfirmed offers of employment will not be taken into consideration for the purposes of matching accommodation.

Family links

- The Home Office will take close family connections into consideration when matching accommodation as far as reasonably possible and will seek to provide accommodation within the same local area, or close by, where there are existing caring and support arrangements in place for family members.

Q: What is a 'good reason' for refusal?

- In exceptional circumstances, there may be 'good reasons' for refusal of an 'appropriate accommodation offer'.
- 'Good reasons' will be assessed on a case-by-case basis but could include:
 - Where the accommodation is later deemed not to be an 'appropriate accommodation offer' as set out above - for example due to needs around education, health, faith, employment, close family or caring responsibilities.
 - Where the family/ individual has specific needs to be in a different area to access specialist medical or education support that is not available in or within a reasonable travelling distance to the offer area.
 - Where a member of the family has care or support needs that are being met by close family members accommodated in a different area.
 - Where a member of the family has the offer of paid employment as defined in the definition of an acceptable offer.
 - Where there is a short-term barrier to the family moving, for example a medical procedure, and the accommodation offer cannot wait for that to be completed.

Q: Will the Afghan family /individual's opinion on what parts of the country they would like to live in be a 'good reason' for refusal?

- No. Unless it falls within a 'good reason', such as where the family has specific needs to be in a different area to access specialist medical or education support that is not available in or within a reasonable travelling distance to the offer area, or where a member of the family has care or support needs that are being met by close family members accommodated in a different area.
- 'Good reasons' for refusals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Q: How will government ensure a fair dispersal process is applied in relation to homelessness referrals?

- We are working with councils to develop a referrals process that seeks to distribute homelessness referrals across council areas.

Q: Can councils use properties already offered to families as part of their homelessness offer?

- Properties previously offered to families/ individuals will be re-allocated to other families/ individuals as soon as a suitable match is identified. Requests from councils to use accommodation previously offered by the Home Office will be subject to availability.

Q: How can a council support if they do not have a bridging hotel?

- We need a significant number of properties to accommodate all the Afghan families/ individuals currently in bridging hotels. Councils can help by pledging properties to support the scheme.

Timelines

Q: When will the enhanced matching process start?

- We will implement this process from 9 May 2022.
- Only properties offered on or after 9 May 2022 will count towards the two accommodation offers.

Q: Will the process be retrospective and apply to those who have already been offered housing?

- No. The process will not be retrospective and will only apply from 9 May 2022.
- Families/ individuals that have refused properties before the implementation of this policy will not be penalised for previously refusing a housing offer.

Q: Will the process apply to those already in settled accommodation?

- Families/individuals already in settled accommodation will not be able to use this process to move back to bridging accommodation to source alternative properties.

Communication to families/individuals on the enhanced end-to-end process

Q: How will you make those in bridging accommodation aware of the process for enhanced matching, offers and refusals?

- A joint letter from HO/DLUHC, written in English, Pashto and Dari, was sent on 9 May 2022 to all those in bridging accommodation, via the Home Office. The letter includes a Q&A.
- The Hotel Liaison Officer (HOLO) based in the hotels will also be talking to families/ individuals about the changes and answering any questions. Home Office have recruited significantly more HOLOs to improve the matching process and better support people in hotels.

Q: How will Afghan families/ individuals be told what an 'appropriate offer' is and what are 'good reasons' for refusing an offer?

- The definition of an 'appropriate offer' and what is a 'good reason' for refusal will be included in the joint letter (HO/DLUHC) sent to all those in bridging accommodation by Home Office.
- When the family/ individual receives their accommodation offer a HOLO will talk through the offer to make sure they understand the process and the next steps they need to take.

Q: How will new arrivals be made aware of this process?

- New arrivals will be made aware of the process for finding them settled accommodation as part of their arrival induction.

Q: Will families be made aware of how long they could spend in temporary accommodation?

- HOLOs will provide ongoing contact and support to families/ individuals once the period of notice has been issued, this will include conversations on the realities of temporary accommodation.

Q: Will individuals be made aware of the risks of presenting as homeless?

- The HOLO in the hotel will have a conversation with the family/ individual at the point of each 'appropriate accommodation offer' to make sure the family/ individual understand the offer being made, to reassure and answer any question the family/ individual may have and also to make sure the family/ individual understand the consequences of refusing the offer.

Q: Will the Afghan family /individual's opinion on what parts of the country they would like to live in be a 'good reason' for refusal?

- No. Unless it falls within a 'good reason', such as where the family has specific needs to be in a different area to access specialist medical or education support that is not available in or within a reasonable travelling distance to the offer area, or where a member of the family has care or support needs that are being met by close family members accommodated in a different area.
- 'Good reasons' for refusals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Funding for councils

Q: Is government providing financial support for councils where a family presents themselves as homeless via this new matching process?

- Yes, government will be providing time-limited funding for homelessness pressures arising from this policy.
- Councils providing temporary accommodation as part of homelessness duties will be funded for up to six months; and integration support similar to that received in bridging accommodation will be funded for three months. (Breakdown of funding shown below.)
- These time-limited temporary accommodation funding arrangements are intended to reduce new pressures on already stretched homelessness services, reduce prolonged use of temporary accommodation where possible, and support integration outcomes.
- This funding will be kept under review to ensure it is effective and proportionate.
- In addition, councils who provide settled accommodation after a household has stayed in temporary accommodation as part of the refusals process will be able to access the local authority tariff (£20,520 over three years) and Housing Costs Fund in the normal way.

Q: How is the temporary accommodation funding broken down?

- Where Temporary Accommodation is necessary, councils can receive funding to cover costs of additional temporary accommodation, staff and administering costs for applications. This will consist of a **fixed sum of £2,000** per household to cover 2 months additional temporary accommodation and the cost of administering an application.
- After 2 months, if required, this will be followed by £80 per week per household to cover additional temporary accommodation and staff costs only. This will be capped at 16 weeks (4 months).
- The total a council could receive for a household is therefore £3,280 over six months.
- This will be paid in two payments:
 - **Fixed Costs** - will be claimed by the council when a household move into temporary accommodation
 - **Additional temporary accommodation weekly funding** – this second payment should be claimed at the end of the period of temporary accommodation or for a maximum of 16 weeks (whichever sooner) for temporary accommodation support
- Further details will be included in the 2022/23 revised hotel wraparound support Financial Instructions.

Q: Can a council claim funding for integration support for families in temporary accommodation?

- Yes, a council providing temporary accommodation may access integration support funding consisting of £28pppd for up to three months.
- Councils will need to seek reimbursement for integration costs incurred by days rather than as a block three-month sum (given that some may resettle people before the end of this period).
- Specific funding for healthcare and education services is not needed as existing healthcare and education infrastructure is expected to be sufficient to absorb these impacts and costs. This policy is being kept under review to ensure impacts are manageable.

Q: What is the integration support expected to cover?

- As with integration support in bridging hotels, which is shifting from welcome/orientation to an emphasis on supporting people to successfully move into settled accommodation, we expect this temporary accommodation integration support to include:
 - support (and set-up in new areas) to access mainstream services (inc. health, education, employment) and safeguarding;
 - move-on casework support;
 - formal and/or informal ESOL support (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

Q: Is there any further integration funding available if a family remains in temporary accommodation after three months?

- No, there is no additional funding available for integration if a family remains in temporary accommodation after 3 months. We will keep this under review.

Q: Is there any further temporary accommodation funding available if a family remains in temporary accommodation after six months?

- No, funding is not available if a family remains in temporary accommodation after six months.

Q: Why does temporary accommodation support stop after six months, and integration support stop after three months?

- It is crucial for the policy to be effective, and for families/individuals to move swiftly onto settled accommodation, that the temporary accommodation and the parallel integration support is a 'backstop' – rather than a like-for-like replacement for bridging accommodation.
- The government's provision of six months temporary accommodation funding and three months integration funding for councils aims to ensure that councils are given the resource to enable people leaving bridging accommodation to

have access to temporary accommodation where necessary and can be provided with continuity of integration support around this, whilst balancing this against the overall aim of encouraging rapid move on into settled housing with integration support.

Q: How can this funding be claimed?

- Full details of the claims process will be provided in the forthcoming funding instructions (covering Hotel Wraparound Support FY 2022/23), which are currently being updated to reflect these changes.

Q: When can the funding be claimed?

- The **fixed sum costs** may be claimed following the placement of a family into temporary accommodation. If a council provides settled accommodation to a household within the first 8 weeks (2 months) of accepting a homelessness duty, they will be able to keep the fixed sum, to cover their costs of administering the homeless application.
- The additional **£80 per week per household** may be claimed in arrears at the end of the (maximum) 16 weeks period or when the household leave the temporary accommodation.

Q: Can multiple councils claim for different parts of the temporary accommodation funding applicable to the same household (e.g. if they move during the 6 month period)?

- No, claims for up to 6 months of temporary accommodation should be made by one council only, even if people need to be placed in temporary accommodation in an area outside the council that accepted the homelessness duty.
- In this scenario, the council where the duty is accepted should make the claims and would agree to any necessary reimbursement bilaterally with the other council if that council were providing integration support, rather than temporary accommodation claims being made by multiple councils for the same household. (This is similar to the way councils have transferred education funding between themselves in instances where families have moved areas during the school year).
- If possible, no household should move from one temporary accommodation location to another for the stability of the family.

Q: What funding is available to councils who accept a homelessness duty to a homeless household and want to offer settled housing and integration support to that household?

- Councils can access integration funding (£20,520 per person over three years) and the housing costs fund to provide integration support and to secure accommodation for homeless Afghan households eligible for that funding.

- The £20,520 per person tariff and housing costs fund are only available to households in settled accommodation.
- If the settled housing is found within the council's own area all eligible funding can be claimed as with other households supported through ACRS and ARAP.

Q. Is the integration and housing costs funding available where settled housing is found in a different council area from the council that accepted the homelessness duty?

- If the settled housing is secured in another council area, the placing council should contact the receiving area to seek agreement that they are prepared to provide integration support to that family. If the receiving council is prepared to provide integration support they will be able to claim funding for that support.
- If the receiving council is not prepared to provide that integration support then the housing costs funds will not be available for that accommodation placement; as the housing costs are only available as part of an integration package.
- Where there is agreement between placing and receiving councils about a placement with integration support, either council can claim the housing costs funds required to secure the accommodation.

Monitoring impacts

Q: How will you check whether the process is working?

- We are putting in place a monitoring process to monitor outcomes for families/ individuals, homelessness applications and the effectiveness of the policy. We will regularly review and adjust the policy if needed.

Q: Can councils use properties already offered to families as part of their homelessness offer?

- Properties previously offered to families/ individuals will be re-allocated to other families/ individuals as soon as a suitable match is identified. Requests from councils to use accommodation previously offered by the Home Office will be subject to availability.

Q: How can a council support if they do not have a bridging hotel?

- We need a significant number of properties to accommodate all the Afghan families/ individuals currently in bridging hotels. Councils can help by pledging property to support the scheme.

Q: What happens if the process does not work?

- We are putting in place a process to monitor outcomes and the effectiveness of the policy. We will review progress regularly and adjust process as needed.