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Dear colleagues,

We wrote to you on 29 March 2022 with an update from the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on Afghan resettlement. This letter provided information on the ongoing improvements to the matching process and the work being undertaken across Government to address the number of refusals, while seeking to minimise new pressures elsewhere in the system, such as homelessness and funding.

DLUHC provided advance notice of the planned implementation and key components of the enhanced matching process to operational leads in English councils and Strategic Migration Partnerships on 4 May 2022, and to the Scottish and Welsh Governments on 5 and 6 May respectively.

We are writing to confirm that, from today, we will be implementing the new end-to-end process for those households that refuse both appropriate offers of settled accommodation. A comprehensive Q&A document, covering context and key principles, full detail of the process, communications to families/individuals, roles for national and local government, funding provision and monitoring, is included as an annex.

## **The enhanced matching process**

These enhancements build on work already begun to improve the rate at which families accept offers of accommodation. We have increased resources in the Home Office Liaison Officer (HOLO) Team to provide greater support within the bridging hotels for the evacuees and to increase capacity for in-depth conversations with families about accommodation offers, making sure families understand the offer being made, resolving any questions or concerns the family may have and ensuring families understand the consequences should they choose not to accept an offer.

We have improved our family triage process, putting in place a face to face meeting with the family before accommodation matching starts, to make sure that we are capturing all the information available about a family's circumstances which is relevant to identifying an appropriate accommodation offer for that family.

Under the enhanced matching process, households in bridging accommodation will be given two offers of 'appropriate' accommodation, with the expectation being that they will accept the first accommodation offer made to them, unless they have a 'good reason' to refuse it. (See Q&A annex for definitions of 'appropriate' and 'good reason'.)

If a household 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 this and then given their second appropriate accommodation offer. If the household reject the offer (and it is still deemed appropriate upon review) then they will be given a minimum of 56 days' notice to leave the bridging hotel and find their own accommodation. We hope that given the improvements to the matching process there will be increased uptake of housing offers, and few circumstances in which the Home Office need to give notice to leave bridging accommodation.

We are aware of the need to minimise any homelessness pressures that may arise as a result of the matching process. As part of this process, we will establish a homelessness referral pathway to ensure that households who have been given notice to leave bridging accommodation will be supported with their move-on plan, including identifying whether they have alternative accommodation available to them or may become homeless at the point of eviction. We are developing a process to determine which council should receive a homelessness referral, in the event that a household is at risk of homelessness, and we will test this with councils over the coming weeks. Our primary aim will be to achieve a fair distribution of homelessness impacts and responsibilities across council areas.

We will ensure that councils providing temporary accommodation as part of homelessness duties, and integration support (similar to that provided in bridging accommodation), will be funded for a set period of time to do this. Funding for temporary accommodation (including staff and administration costs) will be available

for 6 months per household, whilst wrap-around integration funding will be available for 3 months. (See Q&A annex for further detail and rationale on funding arrangements.)

### **Co-design with councils**

We have worked with councils in recent months to develop the policy, including through a series of workshops, and this will continue to be an iterative process. We will be putting in place a process to monitor outcomes and the effectiveness of the policy and are committed to working collaboratively with councils to review progress and adjust the process as required. We will be establishing a Task and Finish Group to co-design and further refine the homelessness referral aspect of the policy with a small group of councils, and will be working with the Local Government Association (LGA), Welsh LGA (WLGA), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and Devolved Administrations to develop the policy detail further. We will write to councils again in the coming months to update on policy outcomes and the progress of the enhanced matching process.

We continue to work closely with the Devolved Administrations, WLGA and COSLA to ensure that enhanced matching and the end-to-end process for households that refuse both appropriate offers of settled accommodation are implemented as successfully as possible for councils and Afghan families and individuals in the Devolved Nations.

### **Communication with Afghans in hotels**

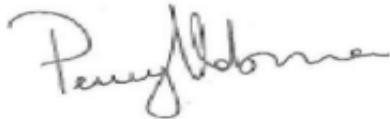
Letters, translated into Pashto and Dari, have also been sent today by the Home Office to families/individuals currently residing in bridging accommodation to set out the changes being made. A copy of the letter to families is attached for information. New arrivals to the UK will be made aware of the process for finding them settled accommodation as part of their arrival induction.

We are also developing engagement products to help tackle the high level of myths and misconceptions which are circulating through cohorts in hotels. We are engaging with Local Authorities, Home Office Liaison officers and Afghans to design communication and engagement products to help families better understand their options and take more informed decisions (for example accepting a matched property or finding their own private rental sector property). We have had a positive response when user-testing products to support group presentations in two hotels and are now developing the products for rollout across hotels.

If you have any questions, please contact your local engagement lead from the Home Office or the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Hobman



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Sean Palmer



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