

Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group - Afghanistan

Dear all

I've had a few inquiries about what people can do to help following the awful scenes in Afghanistan. So, firstly, some context and then a couple of suggestions.

Context

People from Afghanistan have been arriving in the UK over the past couple of months – those associated with British forces, as the forces have withdrawn. There is a resettlement scheme in place for these refugees and up to 20,000 will be accommodated in the UK over five years, in a similar way to those who came to the UK on the Syrian scheme. North Yorkshire had already agreed to resettle Afghan refugees on a 'pro-rata' basis prior to this immediate crisis. This is likely to be between 6-8 families and none in Craven. This thinking may change.

It looks as though the scheme will be too narrowly drawn to protect many of those who supported the UK military (for example the security staff employed by contractors to protect military bases); may be too late in its implementation (getting to and into the airport is now very difficult); and may be impossible after the US withdraws from the airport (expected to be 31 August).

Most of those fleeing Afghanistan will, therefore, go overland to neighbouring countries and the UK government is considering how to respond to asylum applications made from outside Afghanistan. It has indicated that this will be facilitated but not yet indicated it will increase numbers beyond 20,000. We can expect a flow of people over the coming months.

There are already about 4,000 Afghan people in the UK who are either seeking asylum and awaiting a decision or have been refused asylum. It is likely that all of these will be given leave to remain, if not full refugee status.

How to help

Write to Julian Smith julian.smith.mp@parliament.uk asking him to urge the government to enable as many potential refugees to come to the UK as can make it and to remove the current cap of 20,000 over five years. You can also write to North Yorkshire County Council urging them to accept more refugees. Politicians will only press for change if there is sufficient pressure on them to do so. It is important they understand that people want to see the government do more and want to help.

People have asked my if they can do more for example offering a home or beginning to collect clothing and household goods for arriving refugees. In 2015 when the last refugee crisis peaked voluntary organisations were overwhelmed with offers of help and clothing etc. They could not respond to everyone, and *managing people's generosity was a task in itself*. So, we need to take some care in what we do.

While county and district councils may not be able to use accommodation offers, it is worth making them if you have spare accommodation as it ensures councils can draw on a wide range of options as the need arises. [Refugees at Home](#) are usually looking for people to accommodate and support refugees but I have already clarified with them, that this needs to be in the cities, preferably amongst or close to their own community. They always welcome donations though to support others providing accommodation.

Some cities are looking for clothing and baby equipment but it looks as though these are quickly (over) subscribed by local people. The UK government has set up a portal for local authorities where

you can provide a range of resources. <https://www.help-refugees-uk.service.gov.uk/>. At present, only York is seeking help, but keep an eye on the list.

At the moment, the best way for Upper Wharfedale folk to help those fleeing Afghanistan is to provide or raise money for refugees. Pakistan and Iran currently care for 90% of Afghanistan's refugees. The UN Refugee Agency will be providing most of the support on the ground <https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/where-help-is-needed/afghanistan-situation/>.

In the UK the [Refugee Council](#) and [Refugee Action](#) will be providing support and, closer to home, other refugee group such as BIASAN, with whom we work closely are also active. BIASAN does not have a website (so no Hyperlink).

Many people in Upper Wharfedale give food and other goods to the Skipton Foodbank directly or through their supermarket shop. The food bank has given (via our local Upper Wharfedale collections) spare food for refugees in Bradford, so, if that is your route to helping – do continue, it is really helpful.

Skipton refugee group will be hosting a tea party on Monday to raise funds.

A garden party for Afghan refugees

We will be holding a garden party from **2 to 4 pm next Monday, 30 August** at the Friends' Meeting House, Airton BD23 4AE. If you can, please bring a cake/scones/biscuits to share or sell - but if not please come anyway! There is a suggestion donation of £5-10 and all funds raised will be sent to one of the charities supporting Afghan refugees (see below).

We have been asked to point out that parking in Airton is very limited - "We suggest parking on the Hellifield Road above and below the junction with the Gargrave to Malham road. Please note that this road is at its narrowest opposite the tree on the green so we strongly discourage parking at that point. There is also a small amount of space at the bridge on the road to Calton and one space outside the Meeting House. Please avoid occupying the cobbles immediately outside the houses opposite the Meeting House as these are privately owned. Finally, please also avoid parking on verges or the village green itself."

So please consider car sharing if you possibly can. For further details on how to get to the Airton Meeting, please see their website at <https://airtonbarn.org.uk/finding-us/>

I am speaking with some others in the craven area on Thursday about what we might and what is sensible to do. If you have any thoughts or would like to help locally, please let me know.

I hope to send an update later, perhaps at the weekend. There will be much to do over the coming weeks.

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