



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities



Home Office

Catherine Doherty

Deputy Director, Afghan Resettlement
Local Government, Resilience and Communities
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Mandy Ivey

Deputy Director, Resettlement, Relocation and Reunion Services
Asylum & Protection
Home Office
1st Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

04 August 2022

Afghan Resettlement – Enhanced Matching and Homelessness Referrals Process

Dear all,

We recognise that councils, Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) and partner organisations share our ambition to support Afghan households to move on from bridging hotels into settled accommodation. Thank you again for all you are doing to support the Afghan Resettlement programme, which we appreciate is in addition to wider pressures that you are continuing to manage.

We wrote to you on 29 June with an update on the programme, including details of ‘move-on’ initiatives such as the ‘Find Your Own Accommodation’ pathway, a myth busting handout and a proposed approach to homelessness referrals (where this is needed as part of the enhanced matching process). The letter also provided detail to clarify the role split between councils and the Home Office teams supporting people in hotels. We are grateful for the helpful feedback that we have received from colleagues on the documents that were circulated with the ‘move-on’ letter.

We committed to share additional detail on the refusals backstop and the approach to homelessness referrals agreed by a Task and Finish group representing each of the English regions and convened with the help of the Local Government Association (LGA). This letter confirms the approach that has been developed to support a ‘fair share’ of homelessness referrals across the UK for bridging hotel guests that have rejected two appropriate offers of accommodation and have been asked to leave the hotel.

To recap, from 9 May Afghan households in bridging accommodation are given a maximum of two appropriate offers of accommodation. If both offers are rejected without good reason, the Home Office will give a minimum of 56 days’ notice for the household to leave the bridging hotel. Households should either seek to make their own accommodation arrangements or

consent to a referral to a local authority (on behalf of the Home Office) for assessment of duties owed to them if homeless. Annex A outlines the agreed procedure for managing homelessness referrals.

Councils will receive funding as part of the £28 per person per day hotel wraparound support funding to assist people to 'move-on' from hotels. This includes facilitating homelessness referrals on behalf of the Home Office for those that have consented to a referral. The revised Hotel Wraparound Support and Integration Support Funding Instructions were issued to councils on 28 July 2022. Further details on the funding that councils are entitled to can be found in Annex A.

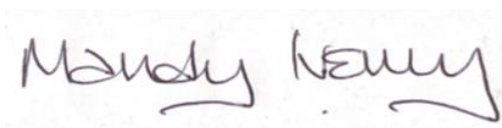
If you have any questions in relation to the enhanced matching and homelessness referral process, please do not hesitate to contact your DLUHC Local Engagement Lead who will be able to support or direct your questions onto the relevant policy team.

This letter will be shared with all councils and SMPs within England, and with the Governments and SMPs of the Devolved Nations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Doherty', written in a cursive style.

Catherine Doherty
Deputy Director, Afghan Resettlement
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mandy Ivey', written in a cursive style.

Mandy Ivey
Deputy Director, Resettlement, Relocation and Reunion Services
Home Office

Annex A - Procedure for managing homelessness referrals

The homelessness referrals process aims to achieve a fair distribution of homelessness responsibilities across council areas, in particular minimising the over-concentration of families in certain areas, which would reduce the ability of those councils to provide settled housing and result in longer waits in temporary accommodation. Crucially, it is also important to challenge any misconception that a homelessness application will result in more choice about the location and type of settled accommodation.

Where the Home Office have issued notice on a household to end their placement in bridging accommodation due to refusal of two appropriate offers, the council hotel wraparound staff (in a caseworker capacity) should determine if the household have alternative accommodation available to them or may become homeless at the point of eviction. Where appropriate, households who have refused appropriate property offers should be encouraged to consider using the 'Find Your Own Accommodation' pathway as one method of minimising moves to temporary accommodation through homelessness referrals.

If households are likely to be made homeless, they should be strongly encouraged to consent to a referral being made to a council for assessment of duties owed to them if homeless. In England, the following order is to be applied in determining which council should receive the referral:

1. Local connection
2. Council where the second property offer was made (if said property is still available)
3. According to a regional homelessness referral plan

1. Local connection

In the first instance, a referral should be made to a council where the family/individual has a local connection, as defined in homelessness legislation and guidance. We expect this will only apply in a small number of circumstances where the enhanced matching and triage process has not identified a local connection, whether that be education, health or faith needs, employment or close family links and caring responsibilities. To note, bridging accommodation is not 'of their own choice' and therefore we do not consider it normal residence for the purposes of deciding local connection.

2. Council where the second property offer was made

If local connection does not apply, consideration should be given to the council where the second property offer was made. Where the second property offer is still available, and the council agrees to accept the referral and re-offer the property to discharge their homelessness duties, the referral should be made immediately to this council.

3. According to a regional homelessness referral plan

If the above two stages of the hierarchy do not apply, wraparound staff should refer to a regional homelessness referral plan which advises on the regions that have been deemed appropriate for referrals from the region in which the bridging hotel is located.

The referral plan for English regions has been developed in recognition of the uneven distribution of bridging accommodation across England and higher numbers of people residing in particular regions which are also areas of high homelessness and housing need.

Population share has been used to determine a ‘fair share’ of homelessness referrals for each region. Referrals are based on a 20% refusal rate, which is a cautious assumption given that this aligns closely to the refusals rate prior to improvements in the matching process being implemented.

Given that the objective is not to make families homeless but to encourage them to accept the offers of settled homes already being made by councils, we expect the number of homelessness applications to be relatively small. Therefore, a simplistic approach to regional distribution which does not factor in homelessness pressures, competing resettlement demands, housing markets or other relevant local conditions, was deemed to be proportionate by SMPs and councils during the Task and Finish group sessions.

There is collective agreement amongst Government, councils and SMPs that the below approach (Table 1) should be applied when making regional referrals.

Table 1: Agreed approach to regional referrals in England

Region	Agreed approach to referrals
East Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within the East Midlands only. Accept a proportion of referrals from London and the South East.
East of England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within the East of England only. Accept a proportion of referrals from London and the South East.
West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within the West Midlands only. Accept a proportion of referrals from London and the South East.
South West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within the South West only. Accept a proportion of referrals from London and the South East.
North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within the North West and a proportion of referrals to the North East.
Yorkshire and Humber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within Yorkshire and Humber and a proportion of referrals to the North East. Accept a proportion of referrals from London and the South East.
North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept a proportion of referrals from the North West, Yorkshire and Humber, London and the South East.
South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils in the South East and a proportion of referrals to the East Midlands, the East of England, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, the North East and the South West (ie. all regions except London and the North West).
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to councils within London and a proportion of referrals to the East Midlands, the East of England, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, the North East and the South West (ie. all regions except the South East and the North West).

The referral plan enables dispersal from London and the South East regions into other parts of England where the number of people in bridging hotels are proportionately much lower. It takes account of the North East region not having any bridging accommodation and aims to achieve referrals into the North East that are practical. It also recognises the higher concentration of people in bridging hotels in the North West, compared to other regions outside of London and the South East.

Homelessness referrals in the Devolved Nations

Whilst resettlement policy is reserved, homelessness is devolved and homelessness legislation varies across the four nations of the UK. Wales and Scotland have therefore agreed to take responsibility for the homelessness response for any households given notice by the Home Office to leave bridging hotels within Wales and Scotland respectively. This means homelessness referrals would be in respect of households in Welsh bridging hotels to Welsh local authorities, and in respect of households in Scottish bridging hotels to Scottish local authorities. There will be no cross-border referrals, and Afghan households will be supported to find their own accommodation or access homelessness assistance within Wales and Scotland.

The approach being taken by the Devolved Governments applies to homelessness referrals being made only and does not prevent cross-border movement in the matching process, for example, where a household accommodated in an English bridging hotel is matched to and accepts a property in Scotland.

We are continuing to engage closely with Scotland and Wales as both nations refine and agree their processes for homelessness referrals, as appropriate.

Operationalising the model

We would like to thank SMP colleagues for gaining agreement from their councils to a model by which to refer homelessness applications in a fair way. Detailed models have been developed for each region to determine how homelessness applications are allocated to councils both within each region and across regions, following the approach set out above (see Table 1).

The expectation is that SMPs will manage the allocation process, but it is also important that councils engage fully in the process. Councils will be expected to carry out an assessment of duties owed to the household and support them into settled accommodation or temporary accommodation where necessary. Annex B (attached separately) contains a process map setting out the end-to-end operational process for homelessness referrals. An online teach-in on the homelessness referral process is being arranged for 17 August for wraparound staff in bridging hotels, Home Office Liaison Officers and SMPs.

SMPs and council wraparound staff will have responsibility for monitoring referrals made and duties accepted. This information will be used to adjust the process if it shows there is not fair distribution. Bridging hotel population data will be shared with SMPs on a quarterly basis to assess whether the agreed model for each region is still appropriate.

Funding

As confirmed above, the revised Hotel Wraparound Support and Integration Support Funding Instructions were issued to councils on 28 July 2022 and will be published on gov.uk shortly. The Funding Instructions set out full details of the funding available to councils for the homelessness referral process.

To summarise, councils providing temporary accommodation to households as part of homelessness duties will be funded for up to six months; and integration support the same as that received in bridging accommodation will be funded up to three months.

These time-limited temporary accommodation funding arrangements are intended to incentivise reduced prolonged use of temporary accommodation where possible, and support integration outcomes. This funding will be kept under regular review to ensure it is effective and proportionate.