**Supporting newly arrived Afghan Refugees in Camden**

**Briefing session for VCS- in partnership with Voluntary Action Camden**

**12-1pm 7th September 2021**

**Current situation**

The emergency response is fast moving and regularly changing. There are hundreds of newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan in Camden, with numbers of people changing daily.

Our website is being updated regularly. For the latest public information please check [here](https://news.camden.gov.uk/camden-ready-to-welcome-refugees-from-afghanistan/)

1. **Phases of the journey of resettlement**

Here is a summary of the key 3 phases newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan will go through:

***Phase 1-*** *Quarantine hotels. There were hundreds of refugees in 1 Camden quarantine hotel. All residents due to complete quarantine on Tuesday 6th and Wednesday 7thSeptember. Will be offered accommodation at bridging hotels by the Home Office across the UK*

***Phase 2-*** *Bridging hotels. Provide temporary accommodation to refugees prior to longer term resettlement accommodation which could be anywhere in the country. The bridging hotels are all in South Camden. Hundreds of refugees, including lots of children, are currently in hotels arriving from quarantine hotels from across UK.*

***Phase 3-*** *resettlement (more permanent) accommodation. Refugees from phase 2 will be accommodated all across the UK- current commitment from Camden to resettle 5 families under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme*

*Alongside Afghan refugees, there are already several Home Office contingency hotels housing hundreds of refugees in Camden. These refugees come from a variety of countries and includes some Afghan nationals who arrived via unsafe route before the current crisis and evacuation- many of whom will have been in the UK for some time.*

*Addresses only being shared on need-to-know basis due to concerns about hate crime and the protection of hotel guests and staff.*

1. **Timeline**

Bridging hotels are thought to be in place for up to 3 months- maybe longer, depending on how quickly Home Office can establish resettlement places. Initial discussions with VCS partners suggested we should plan for 2 possibilities for phase 2- end of December 2021 and end of March 2022 and different scenarios- e.g., with half the numbers moved on.

1. **Summary of Support Provided So Far**

* Primary care team are on site- GP, nurse practitioner and health assistant.
* Emergency humanitarian support- assessing needs
* Volunteer interpreters onsite
* Initial support to access emergency supplies such as clothing, nappies, toys, and other essential supplies.
* Distribution of Holy Qur’ans and prayer mats.
* Money is likely to be available via cash cards Tuesday 7th September as the Government do not yet have a scheme to distribute cash, the local authority is looking into an emergency temporary solution

Officers have worked with the hotel liaison officer in hotels to identify needs of residents and provide appropriate support which includes:

Religious items- working in partnership with Hopscotch Women’s Centre 100 Holy Qur’ans, 56 headscarves and 32 foldable prayer mats have been delivered. Volunteers from Henna Asian Women’s Centre Bengali Women’s Forum, St Pancras TRA and Watan Camden have purchased and provided 63 new prayer mats and Holy Qur’ans as well as religious books as well as donated clothes, shoes, toys, board games and stationery.

Activity packs for children- working with our libraries team and VCS partners such as Hopscotch we have compiled and distributed 170 activity packs for children in quarantine hotels, which include colouring pens and papers, bean bags and card games, teddy bears and activity packs in Dari.

Electrical items have been sourced via our partnership with Care4Calais. Items for 0-5 years olds including toys and nappies have been provided via partnerships with Little Village and other community partners

Clothes, essentials, and other goods have been provided via the Lewisham Donation Hub and sorted and bagged by volunteers

A huge thanks to Hopscotch; Henna; Bengali Women’s Forum; St Pancras TRA; Watan Camden; Little Village; Camden Libraries; Care4Calais and Lewisham Donation Hub for assisting with this.

1. **Gaps in initial support**

All refugees in the bridging hotels have some kind of limited leave to remain- either for 5 years (if ARAP eligible) or 6 months (if not ARAP eligible). Usually, refugees in a contingency hotel have a wrap-around service with a Home Office provider. This is currently not the case for the Afghan bridging hotels so Camden as a local authority is stepping in to fill the gap temporarily and awaiting confirmation from the Home Office as to who will provide the support and wrap around service.

Home Office has a card system to pay those who are entitled to financial support and who have no recourse to public funds. As the Afghan refugees are have leave to remain, they have recourse, and are entitled to benefits, housing, and employment. But these entitlements have not been passed on by the Home Office to these newly arrived refugees yet.

1. **Immediate Needs (this week and next)**

* Requests for more of the same material needs (such as clothing, bags, toiletries) to last them for a longer period of time- plus other things such as handbags, sewing kits, etc.
* Support to assess needs in further 2 hotels- interpreters onsite throughout the day. For the rest of this week and next

1. **Emerging Needs**

* At least 50% of refugees in bridging hotels are children under 18.
* Whilst there are only a few older people their needs are also high.
* Orientation to local area
* Volunteer roles- welcoming and orientation. DBS checked; training needed.
* Access to data and digital
* Safe, welcoming community spaces to provide flexible support- for example play, cooking, gardening, and other interests
* Access to safe outdoor space and things to do at low/no cost
* May need to explore employment, nurseries, and schools (depending on length of stay)
* Benefits and legal advice and advocacy
* Medical and disability support
* Emotional and trauma support
* Activities for children

Some of these needs are specialist or require statutory services such as education and health. However, we know are local VCS and faith groups have a number of specialist skills and have the flexibility to respond to the general and specific needs.

Bear in mind that bridging hotel residents could be offered resettlement accommodation by the Home Office and be asked to move from the bridging hotel at very short notice.

1. **What resources are needed to make this happen?**

We know organisations are already stretched and facing challenging times, particularly as a result of the pandemic. We are working with a number of organisations in the local vicinity of hotels to understand what resources and capacity are available and have had offers of access to space, as well as staff.

We have also been working with partners to establish donation centres and hubs across the borough.

We will be seeking support from other organisations across the borough who can support the response through specialisms and services, providing staff and volunteers who can support with welcoming and orientating, as well as volunteers who can support donations and distribution.

As an initial response we are seeking information about what organisations are able to provide with existing services, resources and capacity. Please note that we have had an incredible response to offers of support and therefore we may not be able to act on all offers received.

We are also looking into how funds might be accessed to support the response, including S106 funding, contacting existing funders of organisations and developing proposals with organisations that can be submitted as and when emergency funds become available.

1. **Volunteers**

Volunteers have already been mobilised to **undertake specialist volunteering** as translators and cultural support in the initial needs’ assessment stage. There may also be a need for **general volunteers** with knowledge of local area to orientate and befriend individuals and families.

We will be organising workshops for volunteers to be delivered by local specialists on cultural awareness and sensitivities and we are also investigating additional training options including mental health first aid

At the moment, we are asking organisations that are able to mobilise a large number of volunteers to contact us. We will be circulating pro-forma following the briefing session. Please complete and return this to [CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk](mailto:CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk)

**Further information about how to support newly arrived Afghan refugees**

**Regular updates will be available on the council’s website:** [**https://news.camden.gov.uk/camden-ready-to-welcome-refugees-from-afghanistan/**](https://news.camden.gov.uk/camden-ready-to-welcome-refugees-from-afghanistan/)

**Donations of new items**

We currently have sufficient donations of food and clothes, but we need donations of new underwear and toiletries.

**Underwear- new items only**

* New packets of men’s underwear (all sizes)
* Women’s underwear (all sizes)
* Children’s underwear (all sizes)
* Unisex socks (all adult sizes)
* Children’s unisex socks (all sizes)

**Toiletries- new items only**

|  |
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| * Shampoo |
| * Adult Toothbrush |
| * Child Toothbrush |
| * Adult Toothpaste |
| * Child toothpaste |
| * Hairbrush/comb |
| * Women’s deodorant |
| * Men’s deodorant |
| * Sponge |
| * Shaving gel |
| * Soap |
| * Shower gel |
| * Sanitary towels |
| * Hair oil/gel |

**Donation centre and hub locations- more details coming soon**

We are working with partners to establish donation hubs across the borough. We will provide updates on locations and opening hours as soon as these are confirmed.

Donation centres will be accepting donations of new underwear and toiletries. At the moment we do not need any donations of clothes.

**Wish list**

We have set-up a wish list so we can update items that are needed in real time. Items listed above such as toiletries and underwear can be purchased via our wish list and will be delivered to Afghan refugees in hotels. If you are able to contribute, please visit the [Wish List](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/2RNABTQ72EWVK?ref_=wl_share)

**Volunteers**

We may need to mobilise volunteers at short notice to provide assistance with sorting and distributing donations. If you are an organisation that has a volunteer network that you can mobilise, we would love to hear from you. Please complete the pro-forma and return to [CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk](mailto:CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk):

If you are an individual who is interested in volunteering, please register via [Time to Spare](https://help.timetospare.com/afghan-response). We are creating a database of individuals that we can contact as we have a clearer idea of the volunteer tasks that will be needed. Please note that we may not be able to contact everybody who has offered support.

**Donate your voice- volunteer translators and interpreters**

We need translators and interpreters and people who speak Afghan languages- Dari (Farsi) and Pashto- to support us with written translations and face to face interpreting. If you are able to provide support, please send your name and contact details to [CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk](mailto:CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk). Please indicate whether you have a current DBS check.

**Establishing a welcome space/ centre or delivering services from a centre**

As people move out of quarantine hotels and into temporary accommodation, they will be able to access services and support across the borough. You could consider organising a ‘welcome to Camden’ space at set times that can be promoted to hotel guests. Ideas of activities/ services include stay-and-play/child friendly spaces, advice clinics, language support and internet access. Maybe your organisation can deliver a service or activity from a centre local to the hotels. Please complete the pro-forma and return to [CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk](mailto:CommunityResponse@Camden.gov.uk).

**Hopscotch fundraising appeal**

Hopscotch Women’s Centre is fundraising urgently for supplies and permanent help to Afghan refugees in Camden. Thanks to people’s generosity over £2,500 has been raised so far. Hopscotch Women’s Centre has been able to provide Afghan refugees with essential and religious items including over 100 Korans, 56 headscarves and 32 foldable prayer mats. Funds are being used to buy emergency items now, but the ultimate goal is for Hopscotch to fundraise for an essential Afghan Family Engagement Lead, to provide vital support and guidance for the wellbeing of those who have fled danger. If you are able to contribute to this appeal, please donate to the [Hopscotch Women’s Centre Fund](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/zoTICWLJ3U0P6NGS6G8Mi?domain=linkprotect.cudasvc.com)

**Little Village Crisis Fund for Afghan Children in London**

Help Little Village coordinate the London-wide response for 0-5s and distribute critical warm clothing and nappies to children in temporary accommodation. Little Village has supplied Afghan families in hotels in Camden with bundles of clothing, nappies, toiletries, toys, and activity packs, as well as other essentials such as bottles and formula. If you are able to contribute to this appeal, please donate to the [Little Village Crisis Fund](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/littlevillagecrisisfund)

**National campaigns**

We are also working with Care 4 Calais, The Lewisham Donation Hub and the British Red Cross who are running national campaigns which people can donate to. Other national organisations are providing vital support, such as work with unaccompanied minors, and running fundraising appeals.

* [Care 4 Calais drop off map](https://care4calais.org/thedropoffmap/) (closest donation points are East London Mosque and Southwark)
* [Lewisham Donation Hub](Lewisham%20Donation%20Hub)
* [British Red Cross - Afghanistan Crisis Appeal](https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/afghanistan-crisis-appeal)
* [Refugee Action](Refugee%20Action)
* [Refugee Council](Refugee%20Council)
* [Afghan Central Asian Association Appeal](https://acaa.org.uk/blog/afghanistan-crisis/)