



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Afghan Resettlement
Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our Ref: SO17016

3 September 2021

Dear Victoria,

Re: Operation Warm Welcome

I am writing to seek urgent clarification on Operation Warm Welcome, given that Afghan refugees are now beginning to leave the quarantine hotels in which they have stayed for 10 days upon arrival in the UK.

I understand that work is underway across the whole of Government to ensure that Afghan refugees are supported as they rebuild their lives in the UK. I am particularly pleased that a new Minister for Afghan Resettlement has been created to oversee this process. However, as time is now running out to prepare for the arrival of Afghan refugees, I would be grateful if you could address the issues I have outlined below.

First, several Afghan refugees who are hoping to join relatives in Richmond Park have written to me to express their confusion about next steps, as they have received very little information from central Government about where they will now stay. Afghan refugees are understandably vulnerable and being holed up in a quarantine hotel without any clear information about what to do next is causing them a great deal of stress and anxiety. I would be extremely grateful if, in your role as Minister for Afghan Resettlement, you could work on increasing tailored communications with those who will soon be leaving quarantine.

Evacuees left Afghanistan under high-pressure contexts characterised by an extraordinary amount of anxiety, fear and desperation. The residual trauma experienced by Afghan refugees means that they will need support including, but not limited to, forms of therapy and counselling. Can you confirm that services will be put in place to support the mental and physical health of Afghan refugees upon and beyond arrival in their new homes?

Moreover, many Afghan refugees arriving may not have relatives with whom they can stay and, if they do, they may not be able to host them for a long period of time. As such, it is essential that Afghan refugees are provided with safe, secure and suitable housing. I am proud to say that both Richmond Council and Kingston Council have expressed an interest in housing new arrivals from Afghanistan. However, identifying suitable housing is a process that can often take a long time. To allow councils across the country to prepare in advance, will you commit to providing details about resettlement guidelines as soon as possible?

Finally, it is my understanding that £5 million will be made available for local authorities to

provide housing support and an offer of a vaccine for Afghan refugees upon arrival. Resettling Afghan refugees in a safe and holistic manner will be a long-term task rather than a short-term one. Housing, schooling and jobs are all challenges to be addressed. My concern, therefore, is that £5 million will not be enough in the long-term, and that the allotted funds may not reach the necessary bodies in time. In light of this, will further funds be assigned to local authorities if necessary, and will local authorities have jurisdiction over how they choose to spend the funds assigned to them?

I hope you will agree that as Afghan refugees begin to join our communities from the confines of quarantine hotels, it is of paramount importance that we do everything possible to ensure that they are embraced with open arms and provided with the resources necessary to allow them to rebuild their lives.

I look forward to a swift response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Olney".

Sarah Olney
Member of Parliament for Richmond Park