



Ministry of Defence

Dear all,

I thought it worthwhile to provide an update at this juncture on the existing Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), including both Op LAZURITE's Transitional Service Family Accommodation (TSFA) and the Vale of the White Horse District Council's Settled Service Family Accommodation (SSFA). Between the two cadres, we have just under 300 Afghan Entitled Persons (EPs) in the SFA 'patch', and it was recently confirmed a 2-star level in the LAZURITE hierarchy that there is no expectation to reduce this number in the next 18 months. We will continue to work with local authorities to develop this relationship and ensure that relevant information is passed on to the local community.

A meeting held with the local community on 23 April 2024 brought together representatives from Shrivenham Station, Oxfordshire County Council, VoWH District Council, local Parish Councils, the NHS, and local schools. As topics important to the local community, healthcare and schooling were key elements of the agenda.

Until recently, the arrival of funding to support both areas with increased demand had not fully materialised, though in both cases it was reported that in April, funding had been received on both counts. It was also pointed out that the provision of healthcare for TSFA families at the surgery in No.5 Short Street was entirely additional resource, while extra funding was being provided centrally for SSFA families. On the education side, it was reported that only families settling in the immediate area are being schooled locally - those being settled further afield are being educated outside the immediate area.

There was a real appetite across the local parish councils to have great local engagement with our new Afghan neighbours, and this will be achieved in a number of ways. An open invitation to the local 'Party at the Rec' will be offered, with the intention to support an Eid event in July 2024. Sport was also seen as an opportunity for improved engagement, with cricket and football games with local teams as options to be pursued. There was also a drive for better cultural awareness provision to ensure a richer, mutual cultural understanding in the community: this will be considered by the local councils. It was widely acknowledged that current local support had been excellent, key to the smooth integration of the Afghan families.

We will continue to provide support to the Vale of White Horse and Op LAZURITE teams, and I will aim to keep you informed as the operation continues. Thank you again for all your support.

Kind regards,

Wing Commander Gavin Thomas

Shrivenham Station Commander
Greenhill House, Shrivenham Station, SN6 8LA



Ministry
of Defence



Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom

Defence Academy

Headquarters

Op LAZURITE

in Shrivenham and Watchfield

Situation report May 2024



Dear Shrivenham and Watchfield residents,

I am grateful for the support shown by our community to those living here under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). On behalf of everyone here at Shrivenham Station, I would like to thank you for the kindness you have shown to our new neighbours, as well as your understanding throughout this process.

As you know, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the brave Afghans who supported us in Afghanistan. And now, when it is our turn to support them, the Op LAZURITE team, the team here, and you, our wonderful community, have been fantastic.

The information contained here is a summary of the Op LAZURITE presence on 'the patch' and the support of those in Transitional Service Family Accommodation. I will keep you updated as things develop and thank you for your engagement.

Best wishes,

Wing Commander Gavin Thomas

Shrivenham Station Commander
Greenhill House, Shrivenham Station, SN6 8LA

The process

To help eligible people settle here in the UK, the MOD has set out a process to support them in starting their new lives.

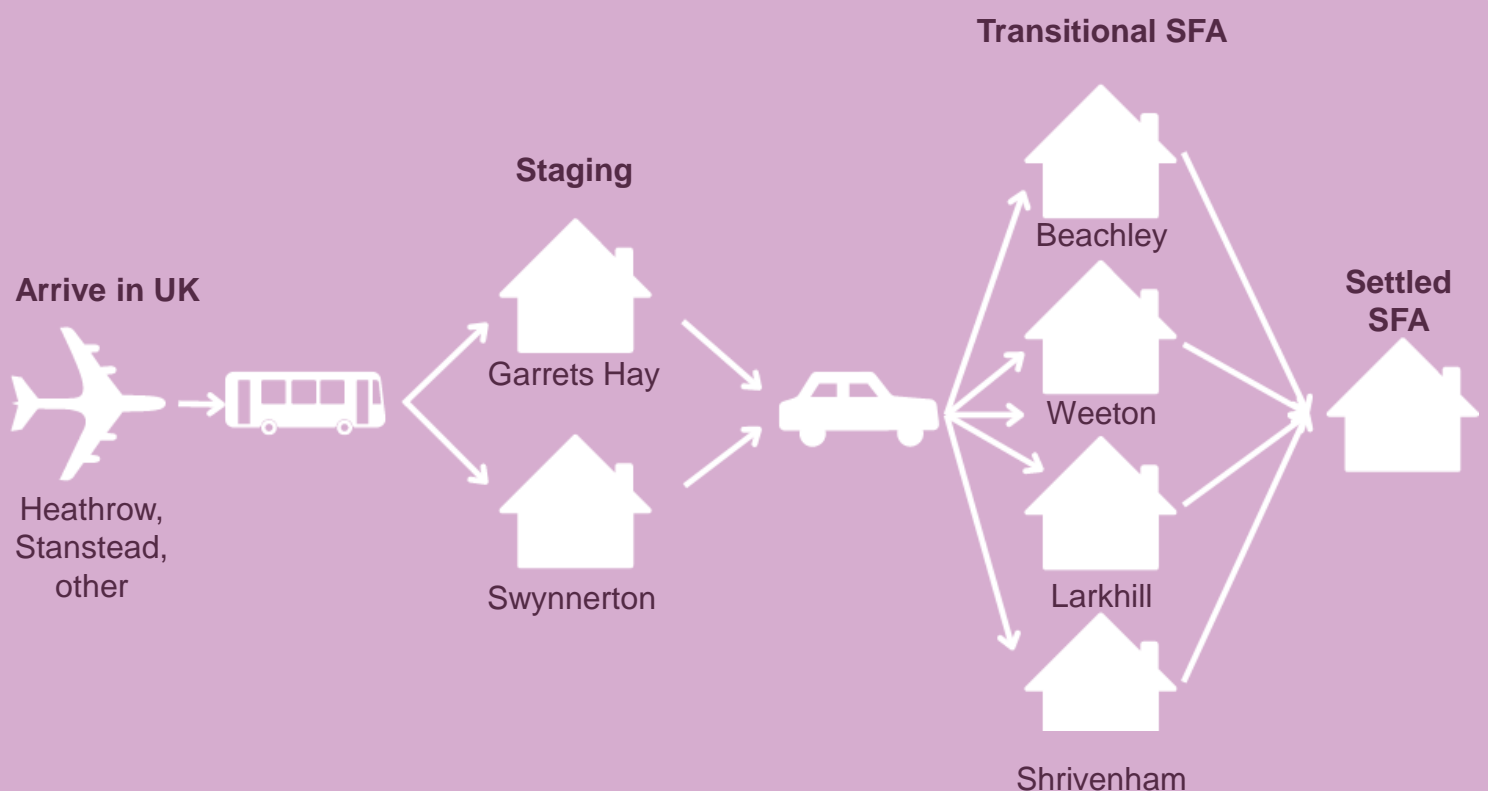
Shrivenham Station and its surrounding communities are playing a key part in this process.

Below is an illustration of the journey eligible Afghans ('Entitled Persons', 'EPs') are taking. Alongside MOD stations of Weeton, Beachley, and Larkhill, Shrivenham Station is a 'staging area' and some unused Service Families Accommodation (SFA) will temporarily be home to a number of Afghan families – this is known as 'Transitional SFA', or 'TSFA'.

This means that Afghans will live here in Shrivenham and Watchfield for a period of around six weeks each, before moving on to more permanent accommodation managed by local authorities – this is known as 'Settled SFA' or 'SSFA'.

Some of Shrivenham Station's SFA will be used as SSFA, meaning it will be home to Afghan families for three years following their arrival in the UK. These families will be supported by the local authority.

This process is managed centrally by the Op LAZURITE HQ, and they are working closely with the team at Shrivenham Station and the local authorities to ensure the impact on local communities is minimised.



‘Transitional’ and ‘Settled’

For Op LAZURITE, SFA will be split into two categories: ‘Transitional’ for accommodation housing Afghans temporarily, and ‘Settled’ for accommodation housing them long-term.

‘Transitional’ families are supported by Op LAZURITE, while ‘Settled’ families are supported by the Vale of the White Horse District Council.

Transitional

After arriving in the UK and being welcomed at one of Op LAZURITE’s reception centres, some Afghan families will be housed in Shrivenham Station’s SFA for a period of around six weeks each. Having only just arrived in the UK, they will likely need a lot of practical support. This support will be provided in the form of ‘Real Life Support’ (RLS, see page four), and so their housing will be directly leased from the MOD.

Settled

Afghan families already in the UK are less reliant on RLS and so are able to live more independently. For these people, the MOD has leased SFA houses to the Vale of the White Horse District Council, who will be responsible for these families.



Real Life Support

Starting from scratch is daunting, and for many Afghan families arriving in the UK as part of Op LAZURITE, they are doing just that.

So, the MOD is working hard to make sure they have the tools they need to integrate and flourish in the UK.

Real Life Support (RLS) is being provided by the 22 Engineer Regiment team to all those living in Transitional SFA, including those here in Shrivenham and Watchfield. As the name would suggest, RLS provides wrap-around support with everything from British culture to getting food on the table.

Food

Arriving families do not have British bank accounts, so need initial support in providing for themselves in the UK. A 'meals on wheels' service has been set up to support the families during this Transitional phase.

British law and culture

Arriving Afghans will be briefed on British law and culture to help them better understand and integrate with the communities they have joined.

Administration

Support will be provided to arriving Afghans to help them apply for the necessary documents they need to live in the UK long-term. A 24/7 Admin Hub is available to support them with any questions.

Language support

Interpreters are available to the arriving families to help communicate information and advice. They will remain available to families in Transitional SFA throughout their stay.

Medical care

Medical provision is part of the MOD's duty of care to arriving Afghan families. A medical centre has been set up at Five Short Street, Watchfield to provide families with this care.

Emergency support

Shrivenham Station has created an emergency phone line for urgent issues the Afghan families encounter. This phone line will be staffed 24/7.

Frequently asked questions

Shrivenham Station is immensely grateful for your support of the incoming Afghan families, to whom we also owe a debt of gratitude.

Our community is important to us, so here are some of the FAQs we have had from you.

What will the impact be on school places in Shrivenham and Watchfield?

It is the UK's duty to provide the children arriving under the ARAP scheme with opportunities for education. Not only will this prepare them for adult life, but it will also help to integrate them into UK society as they journey to become a UK citizen. We are pleased to report that a number of Afghan children have already joined local schools and have settled in well. In the short term, we are also exploring a separate, contracted solution to provide additional schooling to those who require it. Further updates on this will follow.

Will this affect my ability to get a GP appointment?

It is the MOD's statutory duty to provide medical care to incoming Afghan families, and each person will have a medical check within 48 hours of arriving in the UK. The Op LAZURITE team have set up a dedicated medical centre for incoming Afghan families at 5 Short Street, Watchfield. There, they will be registered with the NHS and given an initial consultation. From then on, they may attend a local GP for any further appointments they need. This system is designed to avoid disruption to local healthcare services.



What is the long-term plan for the Afghan families?

Following a stay in 'Transitional' SFA, Afghan families will move to 'Settled' SFA for a period of three years. The Government are currently looking into providing employment support as part of their longer-term strategy, so we hope to be able to update you soon.

Why have Afghan families been given these houses?

We are honouring our commitment to those brave Afghans who supported the UK mission in Afghanistan. So far, the MOD has brought around 4400 people to safety in the UK, including thousands of deserving Afghans eligible for the Afghan resettlement schemes.

The houses that the eligible Afghan families live in or will live in were all empty prior to them being used for Op LAZURITE, and were identified by the Op LAZURITE team as being appropriate to house those arriving in the UK.

What will happen to the SFA once the Afghan families have left?

When the ARAP scheme is concluded, Shrivenham Station's SFA that is being used for the scheme will be returned for use by service personnel and their families, should it be needed. Before it is handed back, the Op LAZURITE team will re-generate the homes and ensure they are in good condition for their next occupants.

Will this impact the timeline for repairs to my SFA?

All issues reported to SFA management will be treated impartially and fairly. No preferential treatment will be given on the basis of nationality or reason for occupation.

How can I help?

Aside from welcoming our new neighbours and integrating them into our community, there are a number of practical things you can do to support Afghan families arriving in the UK. For more information on this, visit: www.gov.uk/help-afghanistan

Where can I get more information?

For general information on the ARAP scheme, visit: www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance

For information about Op LAZURITE specific to Shrivenham Station and its surrounding communities, information and updates are available via:

- DAIS (Defence Academy only)
- Comms Buzz (Defence Academy only)
- DefNet (UKStratCom only)
- Defence Academy Website (www.da.mod.uk) (public-facing/'Official' information only)
- RAF Brize Norton's internal communications channels

The Defence Academy's Families and Welfare Specialist Coordinator will also disseminate updates via local social media groups and pages.



A message from Op LAZURITE HQ

Dear Shrivenham and Watchfield residents,

As you know, the UK government made an ambitious and generous commitment to help those who helped us in Afghanistan. So far, we have brought around 24,600 people to safety, including thousands of people eligible for our Afghan schemes.

The numbers, though, are not what I want to focus on here, as there is a much more important story to be told: that of the people we are supporting.

The world of every single person who arrives here is going to change. I have seen first-hand the sense of gratitude and relief on the faces of the men, women, and children who arrive, and each time I am reminded of the importance of what we are doing. To all those involved, I would like to thank you. And to those arriving: welcome home.

Although reaching safety may appear like the end of the journey, our new neighbours still have a long road ahead of them. Starting afresh halfway across the globe is a daunting challenge, which is why the MOD is dedicated to running and supporting initiatives to help them integrate and flourish. Our initiatives are only part of the story, though.

Our new neighbours will need to be embraced by our communities, and the welcome I have seen them receive so far has been wonderful. I would encourage you to keep up this show of support – to have a friend while facing the intimidating task of starting from scratch in a new world can make a profound difference.

Once again, thank you for supporting those who supported us and welcoming them into our community.

Best wishes,

**Lieutenant Colonel
Lee Beales**

Deputy Commander
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