

The Future of UK Resettlement: Reimagining Community Sponsorship

Summary

The Community Sponsorship Alliance, in conversation with the Principal Sponsors Alliance, presents the following suggestions for a resettlement model. This is in response to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities request for suggestions around how Community Sponsorship may be used to help resettle Afghan citizens currently in Pakistan. We look forward to further discussions in order to develop these ideas with others in the sector.

- Create a “Community Sponsorship Licence Agreement” (CSLA) for experienced Lead Sponsors (LS) and Principal Sponsors (PS).
- Open up the opportunity for other organisations (e.g. Universities/Churches/Mosques/businesses) to apply for a CSLA.
- Widen the criteria of who can be welcomed through CS.
- CSLA holders should have funding made available to them.
- CS groups should be able to name the people they would like to sponsor, where possible, or otherwise be much more involved in the matching process
- Provide top-up funding for rent payments for a minimum of 2 years, with the option to increase this for an extra year if necessary, and ultimately increase LHA rates
- LAs should work with groups to ensure moving on housing is available after the two year resettlement period.
- Provide incentives for Social Landlords.
- Develop VCS led Welcome Hubs, substantively supported by LAs through employed Regional Resettlement Officers, to support the integration of refugees, asylum seekers, and others undergoing resettlement, as part of a wider Resettlement and Integration Strategy.
- Develop local/regional networks of CS groups.

Introduction

The first Community Sponsorship (CS) scheme was launched in the UK in 2016. At time of writing, CS has allowed community groups to welcome over 1000 individuals to the UK. The current model of grass-roots, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) led CS produces excellent outcomes. Facilitating people to access safe homes through community sponsorship is not only compassionate and practical, it is welcomed by the public, as demonstrated by these recent studies:

- More In Common in their analysis of attitudes to Afghan resettlement found an increase in public support of 14 percentage points when Community Sponsorship is included as a resettlement route.
- The Office for National Statistics analysis of hosts from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme showed 50% of hosts would consider hosting people from other countries fleeing war or conflict in the future, with barriers to hosting identified as lack of support, lack of naming, and uncertain duration of hosting - three concerns for which Community Sponsorship provides the answer.

We also see a recognition of the need for more streamlined integration approaches, as supported by the recent Barnardos report ‘A Warm Welcome’, which we were delighted to contribute to. One of their 24 recommendations is “to develop a strategic plan for welcoming displaced children to the UK, which sits within a wider strategy for displaced people”. They recommend Community Sponsorship and community-led welcome efforts “as a blueprint for a national integration and support strategy”. This is echoed in the British Futures ‘Control and Compassion’ analysis which highlights the nature and impact of current community-led welcome, notes the current lack of Integration Strategies in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and calls for ambitious scaling up of community sponsorship and welcoming efforts in the UK.

The Community Sponsorship Alliance (CSA) is formed of people from organisations who are currently involved in the day-to-day work of resettlement through Community sponsorship, as well as people who have lived experience of the scheme and wider UK resettlement. We have a wealth of experience of the CS Scheme, as well as practical experience of the Hong Kong and Ukraine schemes, and supporting people seeking asylum in the UK.

Representatives from the CSA, with additional voices from the Principal Sponsors Alliance (PSA), met to discuss a response to the request from DLUHC and the Home Office for suggestions on how resettlement of 5500 Afghans, currently in hotels in Pakistan, may be facilitated using a CS based model. Taking the learnings from these schemes we apply them here to the need for Afghan resettlement, but we feel the model is flexible enough that it could form the basis for all UK resettlement into the future.

FRAMEWORK

- **Create a “Community Sponsorship Licence Agreement” (CSLA) for experienced Lead Sponsors (LS) and Principal Sponsors (PS).** This would be a single application which allows Licence holders to resettle X number of families without having to submit multiple applications for approval. This would reduce the administrative burden on CSLA holders and the Local Authority/Home Office/DLUHC. The need for this is clearly evidenced in the study, commissioned by the Home Office, that we undertook last Summer in conjunction with RESET. The CSLA would also allow for trusted partners to conduct their own due diligence for each group with regards to vetting capabilities, training (in partnership with RESET), oversight in troubleshooting, sharing best practice, monitoring and evaluation and more.
- **Open up the opportunity for other organisations (e.g. Universities/Churches/Mosques) to apply for a CSLA** and become Sponsor Licence holding organisations. With a good level of training, these new partners would mean an immediate expansion of capacity in the sector for welcome and resources available through networks. The need for this is evidenced in the low number of existing Principal Sponsors and the urgent current, and future need to establish a solid infrastructure of a welcome network across the UK.
- **Widen the criteria of who can be welcomed through CS.** We are asking for a change to be made in Community Sponsorship policy that mean there is a wider definition on who can be welcomed. Currently it is only families, but we would like to expand this to individuals and couples, and open up the possibility of renting a room/lodging in someone’s home for these people, as well as looking for a house with its ‘own front door’ for the families.

FUNDING

- **CSLA holders should have funding made available to them** based on the number of families in their Licence Agreement. This funding could be used by the CSLA holding organisation in the way they see fit (much like LAs) to build support capacity through hiring staff, directly support groups etc. This would allow CSLA holding organisations to plan into the medium term and provide more consistent and better coordinated support. The need for this is demonstrated again by the deep study with the sector last Summer and funding has been a consistent ask from all Principal Sponsors who have cited the lack of funding as a direct barrier to growth.

MATCHING

- **CS groups should be able to name the people they would like to sponsor, where possible, or otherwise be much more involved in the matching process.** This would include having a group member present at a matching meeting, and this group member should be supported by an experienced Lead or Principal Sponsor. Allowing naming encourages participation by new groups of sponsors who may otherwise not have considered this route. For example families and friends of people awaiting resettlement. We have seen resettlement of family members by a sponsoring family group work very well in North Devon and South Manchester. In addition, allowing naming would allow institutions such as Universities to more easily become sponsors to students or academics, as

demonstrated by KCLs Sanctuary Programme. Having an experienced sponsor at matching meetings would allow new groups to benefit from the voice of experience when they make their decisions. We have found new groups will often underestimate the challenges some specific needs can present. As such, this should mean there are more matches which result in a positive experience for both the group and the family, with the result that the family are resettled more effectively, and the group are more likely to attempt future sponsorships.

HOUSING

- **Provide top-up funding for rent payments for a minimum of 2 years, with the option to increase this for an extra year if necessary, and ultimately increase LHA rates.** It is amazing to see how many houses have been found, but this is getting harder and harder. According to the Institute for Fiscal studies, in the UK, we now only have 5% of properties affordable to rent on Local Housing Allowance. In addition, as the stigma around arriving refugees has grown so much, it is far less likely that anyone would rent to refugees, given the demand for these houses is so huge. As such, we are seeing many groups being forced to find houses at market rent, and often being unable to do so. Increasing the LHA rate would make more socially minded landlords consider renting at this level, and this should be considered as part of wider housing strategy. Top-up payments would unlock many more housing options for sponsors, and allow groups in the process and currently unable to secure a house to be able to do so. Extending these payments beyond the two year housing commitment from the group would allow families who are unable to afford market rent after two years to be able to stay in their housing until they are more able to support themselves. Many of our groups find that the two years of housing support is not long enough to reach the point of being able to afford market rent in the current climate.
- **LAs should work with groups to ensure moving on housing is available after the two year resettlement period.** This would unlock more potential housing from organisations who are unwilling to use housing stock for resettlement. As many families require longer than two years to access market rent, where CS groups are unable to provide long term accommodation at LHA rate, at the end of two years, some families are forced to relocate away from their new support networks, or risk homelessness. Some organisations who may otherwise support CS more by using available housing are therefore reluctant to do so, concerned about the possibility of having to make refugees homeless - a considerable reputational risk.
- **Provide incentives for Social Landlords.** Both through the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) network and also private individuals who want to 'do good' with their properties, to have increased incentives in order to enable this to happen. For example, in the form of tax breaks or welcome payments. The gap between commercial rent and LHA rent is so huge now, along with the rise in interest rates on buying properties, even socially minded landlords cannot make the maths work.

INTEGRATION

- **Develop VCS led Welcome Hubs, substantively supported by LAs through employed Regional Resettlement Officers, to support the integration of refugees, asylum seekers, and others undergoing resettlement, as part of a wider Resettlement and Integration Strategy.** We have seen welcome hubs develop across the country in response to the needs of people resettled through the Ukraine Scheme. These have often been supported by CS volunteers, using their wealth of resettlement and integration experience. As the needs of any resettled group tend to be very similar (ESOL, housing, employment, support accessing healthcare/benefits etc), these one stop shops could form a core of resettlement strategy. Where LAs are supportive and take an active interest, these can be especially effective. Such Welcome Hubs would provide a key resource for local CS groups.
- **Develop local/regional networks of CS groups.** One of the strengths of CS is the willingness of groups to mutually support one another, sharing knowledge and information. Developing networks of groups across a geographical area allows groups to pool resources, build on relationships with socially minded landlords and other housing organisations, increase volunteer wellbeing etc. In

addition, groups welcoming in especially expensive areas (Gateway Groups) should be linked, via the above networks, with other CS groups in cheaper areas who can provide ongoing integration support if families need to leave an area after initial resettlement due to high local house rental costs. This helps combat the breakdown in integration support that can be seen at the end of the two years and families are forced to move out of the area due to lack of affordable housing. We have seen this work well where three families had to move from their initial resettlement accommodation to Cardiff, where they have been receiving ongoing support from a local CS group. We have also seen successful relocations over longer distances via national networks such as the Catholic national parish network, and the Faizan-e-Islam community organisation.

Conclusion

We hope that the above model provides some helpful food for thought for decision makers. These ideas represent a starting point for further development and discussion, and it is our belief that with fuller engagement and workshopping with all stakeholders, these concepts could develop into a scalable, sustainable and effective model for all future UK resettlement needs. Not only that, we recognise that the existing model of CS brings people together in these polarising times, facilitating engagement on a grass roots level with neighbours who come together over this project in their community. As such, CS builds community, increases well being, and is a positive, hopeful and rich experience for all those involved.

We look forward to working with you in the future to develop an Integration and Resettlement Strategy with Community Sponsorship at its heart to ensure people seeking sanctuary find safe routes, to safe homes, in safe communities.