Government calls on landlords to help national effort to house Afghan families

Landlords are being urged to offer homes for families evacuated from Afghanistan to help the national effort to get them settled in the UK.

The government is calling on landlords with suitable properties to submit offers through a relaunched housing portal.

The portal allows private landlords to put forward offers of accommodation so councils can match them to families.

More offers are urgently needed to help move families from temporary bridging accommodation and into their own homes – so they have the stability they need to rebuild their lives in the UK.

Landlords will be supporting the more than 300 councils who have already pledged places. This is backed by £5 million in government funding.

Minister for Afghan Resettlement Victoria Atkins said:

> I’ve seen first-hand the incredible support available and am so proud of the way communities across the country have thrown their arms around these families, many of whom put themselves at risk to help the UK and our allies in Afghanistan.
>
> We know these families need a place of their own so they can truly build a life in the UK, but we recognise that finding settled accommodation for so many people is a challenge.
>
> That is why today I am urging landlords to join our efforts and come forward with offers of housing so we can help these people settle and thrive.

Ensuring people have a home to call their own is a vital part of our programme of support to help those who worked closely with UK forces in Afghanistan, risking their lives in the process, so that they are able to begin rebuilding their lives here.

Homes have been provided to more than 4,000 evacuees but more offers are required to ensure that no family is left without an appropriate housing match.

Accommodation must be self-contained with no shared facilities, available for at least 12 months, and meet safety regulations and landlord responsibilities. To support as many families as possible, properties should be as close to the Local Housing Allowance Rate as possible. There is a particular need for larger properties and properties that are in a close proximity to one another.

The government is working alongside councils and other partners to ensure those currently accommodated in bridging accommodation are receiving vital support to help them rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education, and integrate into their local communities.

Almost 100,000 customers spread the cost of their tax bill

Almost 100,000 Self Assessment customers have used online payment plans to spread the cost of their tax bill into manageable monthly instalments since April 2021, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has revealed.

Once a customer has filed their 2020 to 2021 Self Assessment tax return, they can set up a Time to Pay arrangement for up to 12 months on debts up to £30,000, that they're unable to pay in full. This can be done online at GOV.UK without speaking to HMRC.

Since April 2021, Self Assessment customers have used the online Time to Pay service to pay more than £310 million worth of tax in instalments. If a customer owes more than £30,000, or needs longer to pay, they should contact HMRC to discuss payment options.

The deadline for filing tax returns, paying any tax owed or setting up a payment plan was 31 January but, this year, HMRC has given customers extra time to meet their obligations without facing penalties. This means:

- anyone who did not file their return by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late filing penalty if they file by 28 February
- anyone who did not pay their tax liabilities by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late payment penalty if they pay their tax in full, or set up a time to pay arrangement, by 1 April

From 1 February, all outstanding amounts were subject to interest.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

> We understand some customers might be worrying about paying their Self Assessment bill this year, and we want to support them. To see if you're eligible to set up a payment plan, go to GOV.UK and search 'pay my Self Assessment'.

The 2020 to 2021 tax return covers earnings and payments during the pandemic. Customers will need to declare if they received any grants or payments from the COVID-19 support schemes up to 5 April 2021 on their Self Assessment, as these are taxable, including:

- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- other COVID-19 grants and support payments such as self-isolation payments, local authority grants and those for the Eat Out to Help Out scheme

The £500 one-off payment for working households receiving tax credits should not be reported in Self Assessment.

It is important that customers check and make any changes to their tax return to make sure any Self-Employment Income Support Scheme or other COVID-19 support payments have been reported correctly in their Self Assessment.

HMRC urges everyone to be alert if they are contacted out of the blue by someone asking for money or personal information. Customers should always type in the full online address www.gov.uk/hmrc to get the correct link for filing their Self Assessment return online securely and free of charge. HMRC sees high numbers of fraudsters emailing, calling or texting people claiming to be from the department. If customers are in doubt, do not to reply directly to anything suspicious, but contact HMRC straight away and search GOV.UK for 'HMRC scams'.

If customers owe more than £30,000, or need longer to pay, they should call the Self Assessment Payment Helpline on 0300 200 3822.

Latest self-serve Time to Pay figures are for arrangements set up in the 2021 to 2022 tax year and are up to 6 February 2022.

A full list of the payment methods customers can use to pay their Self Assessment tax bill is available on GOV.UK.

There is no change to the filing or payment deadline and other obligations are not affected. This means that:

- interest will be charged on late payment. The late payment interest rate is 2.75%
- a return received online in February will be treated as a return received late, with a valid reasonable excuse for the lateness. This means that:

1. there will be an extended enquiry window
2. for returns filed after 28 February the other late filing penalties (daily penalties from 3 months, 6 and 12 month penalties) will operate as usual;
3. a 5% late payment penalty will be charged if tax remains outstanding, and a payment plan has not been set up, by midnight on 1 April 2022. Further late payment penalties will be charged at the usual 6 and 12 month points (August 2022 and February 2023 respectively) on tax

outstanding where a payment plan has not been set up.

- we will not charge late filing penalties for SA700s and SA970s received in February. These returns can only be filed on paper
- for SA800s and SA900s we will not charge a late filing penalty if customers file online by the end of February. The deadline for filing SA800s and SA900s on paper was 31 October. Customers who file late on paper will be charged a late filing penalty in the normal way. They can appeal against this penalty if they have a reasonable excuse for filing their paper return late

Customers who are required to make Payments on Account, and know their bill is going to be lower than the previous tax year, for example due to loss of earnings because of COVID-19, can reduce their Payments on Account. Visit GOV.UK to find out more about Payments on Account and how to reduce them.

UK to co-host summit to address Afghanistan humanitarian crisis: 15 February 2022

- UK to co-host an upcoming United Nations virtual pledging summit
- it will aim to raise the $4.4bn the UN needs to address the growing humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan
- UK has committed £286m to support Afghans in the last year and FCDO officials including the UK’s humanitarian envoy visited Kabul last week

The UK will co-host a high-level pledging summit with the UN next month to support the response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Donor countries, UN agencies and Afghan civil society are expected to take part in the virtual event. Pledges made at the summit will go towards the UN’s biggest-ever appeal for a single country, launched last month.

The UN is seeking to raise $4.4 billion to help over 24.4 million Afghans needing urgent humanitarian help to survive. Half the country’s population are facing acute hunger.

The summit will also aim to garner international support to help Afghans access basic services, particularly health and education. Funding is channelled through trusted UN agencies and charities on the ground.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

> The conference is a critical moment for the international community

> to step up support in an effort to stop the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The scale of need is unparalleled, and consequences of inaction will be devastating.
>
> The UK is determined to lead the global effort. We will bring international allies together to raise vital aid to deliver food, shelter and health services, protect women and girls and support stability in the region.

Martin Griffiths, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said:

> We are very grateful to the UK for co-hosting this important event to mobilize international support for the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan. We welcome donors from around the globe to join together to save the lives and futures of Afghans.
>
> Every day of delay means more misery for the Afghan people. They need a lifeline.

The other co-hosts of the summit will be announced in due course.

UK officials, including Nick Dyer, the UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, visited Kabul last week (10 February) for talks with the Taliban on how to respond to the country's deepening humanitarian crisis.

Last month, the UK pledged £97 million of emergency aid to provide over 2.7 million people with food, health services, and water. It brought the total pledged by the UK in the financial year to £286 million.

UK aid allocated since October will support over 60 hospitals, provide health services for over 300,000 people; ensure 4.47 million people get emergency food assistance through the World Food Programme; and provide 6.1 million people with emergency health, water, protection, shelter, food, and education support through the UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

ENDS

Farmers take ownership of nitrogen targets in Dorset's Poole Harbour

Poole Harbour is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar site. But an increase in nutrients entering the harbour waters over the last 50 years has led to a deterioration in water quality and affected wildlife.

The amount of nitrogen entering the harbour has more than doubled, from around 1,000 tonnes/year in the 1960s to around 2,300 tonnes/year now. As a result, the harbour's mudflats have become covered in green algae, which has smothered sea grass and saltmarsh, impacting on wetland birds and other ecosystems and wildlife.

Now local farmers in the Poole Harbour catchment are aiming to become some of the most nitrogen efficient in the UK. They are taking on the responsibility of reducing their nitrogen losses from their soils to a point that will not harm the environment and are developing a nutrient management scheme to meet their ambition.

This new approach follows the publication of the Environment Agency and Natural England's Poole Harbour Consent Order Technical Recommendations (PHCOTR), which sets new interim nitrogen and phosphorus targets for the catchment. PHCOTR states that nitrogen loads which reach the harbour should be reduced from around 2,300 to 1,500 tonnes/year, and ortho-phosphate (OP) loads should be reduced from around 51 to 22 tonnes/year.

It is not just farmers we are working with to ensure targets are met. Wessex Water, local authorities, local industries and the general public all play a role in reducing nutrients entering the harbour.

However, it is agriculture that contributes the largest source of nitrogen to the catchment, and a significant amount of phosphorus.

We have set new emission limits and measures that farmers should follow to ensure their activities do not cause harm to the water environment. Farmers now need to start to plan and implement the measures to achieve these objectives, and from 2023 farmers need to ensure their nutrient losses across their farm holding (or group of farm holdings) do not exceed 18.1 kilogram/hectare/year nitrogen.

Or where the farmer joins an Environment Agency approved scheme*[1] they need to meet alternative glide path targets which will achieve the emission target by 2030. In such a scheme, all farmers are incentivised to maximise efficiency (and no farmer can apply above crop need), but farmers that have reduced their losses below the glide path can trade nitrogen credits to farmers looking to offset some of their nutrient losses. These timescales align with water company improvements delivered through their capital investment programme.

We are providing new tools, including the Nitrate Leaching tool (NLT) and Agricultural Compliance Tool (ACT), which farmers can use to calculate the amount of nutrients they are losing to the environment and to ensure they are compliant with existing regulations. Farmers will need to use these tools (or other agreed tools) each year to ensure their nutrient plan and farm practices meet these new emission limits and requirements.

Starting this year, farmers must report to us, or the independent body overseeing any approved scheme, on their compliance and nutrient loss. Those farmers not returning information are likely to be prioritised for inspection by our newly-appointed Agricultural Officers.

Wessex Area is applying the same principles across their highest risk groundwater safeguard zones at risk from high and rising nitrogen concentrations.

Giles Bryan, Senior Technical Specialist in Wessex Area, said:

> We have been working very closely with Natural England to set these water quality targets, and with the farming community and water company to agree how they will meet these new water quality objectives.
>
> By working together we will enable sustainable food production, water supplies and waste water treatment, whilst protecting the environment and securing the future of this fantastic place for wildlife and people.
>
> This plan will ensure all sectors that have contributed to rising nutrient concentrations in the catchment will proportionally deliver the improvements and solutions this unique environment needs.

Nikki Hiorns, Manager for Natural England said:

> Poole Harbour is a unique and special place for wildlife and people. Everyone wants to keep it that way so setting these new tighter water quality targets is an important start to restoring water quality in the harbour and improving the catchment.
>
> Reducing the nutrients entering the catchment and restoring the harbour is achievable, but only by continuing to work with farmers and other stakeholders.

*[1] An approved scheme is one which the Environment Agency is satisfied will result in appropriate and robust nitrate reductions within an agreed timescale across its membership, so as to meet the annual glide path target and wider requirements of PHCOTR.

Over the last few years, the Environment Agency and Natural England have reviewed the water quality targets and measures outlined in the publication "Strategy for managing nitrogen across the Poole Harbour catchment to 2035" to understand if these would achieve Special Protection Area objectives.

The findings of this work are summarised in the EA and NE Poole Harbour Consent Order Technical Recommendations (PHCOTR) published on 11 February

2021. This work identified the need to tighten the water quality target to achieve the ecological objectives across the harbour. The new interim target was set in this report and identifies the need to reduce nitrogen discharges to the catchment to 1,500 tonnes/year N and phosphorus to 22 tonnes/year OP by 2030.

Government Property Agency appoints Martin Keeler as new HR Head

News story

The Government Property Agency continues to recruit specialist expertise to transform its employee value proposition.

Martin Keeler, Head of HR at the GPA

Martin Keeler joins the Government Property Agency as its new HR Head. Martin brings more than 25 years of HR experience gained from working in both the private and public sectors.

As the GPA's Head of HR for its people function and strategy, Martin will ensure it continues to operate in collaboration with the wider Civil Service. He will also oversee the design and implementation of its Core Skills Framework which allows the organisation to identify the skills required for each role. Martin will help build the GPA's attraction strategy to ensure the organisation acquires and retains the best talent and skills needed to support its growth agenda.

Martin's success in delivering HR transformation programmes, comes from working with private and public sector organisations including Network Rail, Skanska, British Airport Authority, the Ministry of Justice and Hitachi Rail.

When speaking about his new role, Martin said; "The GPA is growing fast, and

I am proud to be at the forefront of leading our strategy to attract, retain and develop the best talent in a wide range of property and people-related functions."

"My strongest aspiration is that our people are recognised as some of the leading talent in the UK's property industry. And the GPA is seen as a place where the skills and abilities of our people are creating great places to work for the UK's civil servants."

Martin Keeler
Head of HR
Government Property Agency
Talk with Martin on email: martin.keeler@gpa.gov.uk

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