

**Committee:** Annual Council  
**Title:** Update on Sudan Evacuation  
  
**Report Author:** Peter Holt, Chief Executive  
pholt@uttlesford.gov.uk  
  
**Portfolio Holder:** Leader of the Council

---

**Date:** Tuesday,  
23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023

## Summary

1. This 'for information' report updates Members on the operation of a Humanitarian Assistance Centre in the district to receive evacuees from Sudan in late April/early May 2023. This is a responsibility that fell to Uttlesford District Council, supported by a wide range of other agencies.

## Recommendations

2. None – no vote is required; this report is for information only.

## Financial Implications

3. The issue of costs and financial exposure is addressed in the body of the report itself. Any residual cost pressures will be reported up to Members in due course in a subsequent separate report as necessary.

## Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Nil.

## Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	-
Community Safety	There were minor security issues, as indicated in the body of the report.
Equalities	-
Health and Safety	The emotional and physical health needs of evacuees are addressed in the body of the report.

Human Rights/Legal Implications	The issue of responsibilities – financial and housing duties – are addressed in the body of the report.
Sustainability	-
Ward-specific impacts	-
Workforce/Workplace	The strain of such a major operation on an organisation of Uttlesford District Council's size is addressed in the body of the report.

## Situation

6. His Majesty's Government responded to the worsening security situation in Sudan first by evacuating Embassy personnel, and thereafter by supporting the evacuation of British Nationals, both by air and ship. The initial staging post for evacuees being Cyprus, before arranging onward transit by chartered aircraft, predominantly to Stansted Airport.
7. Widespread news reports indicated the number of British Nationals eligible for evacuation at some 4,000.
8. By dint of geography, Uttlesford District Council assumed responsibility for receiving those evacuees arriving at Stansted, and operating a Humanitarian Assistance Centre, once arrivals had been cleared by Border Force, an Agency of the Home Office. The role of this Humanitarian Assistance Centre was to consider and respond to the evacuees' immediate needs, whether related to their health, onwards travel support, or where they were going to stay.
9. The Humanitarian Assistance Centre was quickly established at the Radisson Blu hotel adjacent to the airport terminal – though evacuees had to be bussed in, having landed and been processed by Border Force at a chartered terminal the other side of the airport.
10. The Humanitarian Assistance Centre was operated on Uttlesford District Council's behalf by Uttlesford Community Action Network [UCAN], building on their track record of success staffing the welcome function at Stansted previously for Ukraine Refugees (where the small Ukraine Welcome stand operates daily in the terminal).
11. UCAN staff and volunteers quickly levered in substantial volunteer support from their own network as well as from other agencies, including RE:ACT Disaster Response, Red Cross, St John's and others.
12. Uttlesford District Council, as the lead statutory agency, was quickly supported by the operation of the standing Local Resilience Forum arrangements bringing together all the statutory agencies. This LRF stood up its Strategic Coordination Group and Tactical Coordination Groups, chaired initially by

Essex Police, before passing on the chair to Essex County Council, and these TCGs/SCGs met daily/twice daily through the long weekend. The Essex Chief Constable is convening an organised formal debrief from this whole exercise, so it is important that this report gives just a general update rather than seeking to pre-empt any valuable learning that emerges from that exercise.

13. Working seamlessly alongside the volunteers, first other Essex local authorities offered staff in mutual aid at all hours of the day and right through the Bank Holiday weekend, soon followed by authorities in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. When on the Thursday, the hotel room availability at the airport hotels became exhausted, 80 hotel rooms were booked outside Cambridge and 50 in Stevenage, and the staff of Stevenage District and Hertfordshire County Councils, and South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridgeshire County Councils were given the heads up, they instantly engaged with every bit as much passion, leveraging in NHS and voluntary sector support to aid those placed in hotels in their districts. This was a model of cross-border cooperation at its finest.
14. The first flight arrived on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April, and the last on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup>, with 2-3 flights a day, including landing in the early hours of the morning, with evacuees coming off the four-hour flights exhausted, and with no onward trains operating for several hours. Although some flights were routed to Gatwick or Birmingham Airports, I believe that Stansted received the majority.
15. There was considerable uncertainty in estimating ahead of their arrival the extent of evacuees' various needs – how many would simply need to be pointed at waiting friends/relatives or directed to the train station, as opposed to how many would have immediate physical or mental health needs, be financially destitute, or have no UK address to travel on to. Some arrivals had nothing other than the clothes they were standing up in; some had been separated before departure from immediate family members who didn't have British passports; many were traumatised; some needed medical attention or support; and some in their time with us received news that those they had left behind had been killed.
16. Ahead of the first flight arriving, 27 hotel rooms were booked, based on what sparse advance intelligence was available. That proved wholly inadequate, and regrettably some evacuees slept their first hours on UK soil on the floor at the airport where extra hotel rooms could not be immediately located in the middle of the night. Capacity was duly stepped up immediately, but without confidence in future numbers (any further ahead than once a plane had taken off from Cyprus with confirmed numbers on board), it is inevitable that bookings and provision erred on the side of better to have too much than too little.
17. Whitehall civil servants confirmed in these early days through the LRF that reasonable costs incurred in this national response to the international crisis would be reimbursed. By the time the long weekend arrived, Uttlesford District Council's requests for written confirmation of this financial reimbursement generated a contradictory response from civil servants that responsibilities and costs were duties of the local authorities, and would not be reimbursed.

Uttlesford District Council's chief executive was duly asked by the chair of the Strategic Coordination Group to make direct contact with local MP Kemi Badenoch to ask for her personal intervention on this and other key priorities. Ms Badenoch engaged instantly and promptly secured a reversal of this position, with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities personally phoning Uttlesford's chief executive on a daily basis over the long weekend to offer first his personal support and intervention, and latterly to pass on his personal thanks to all involved. The total costs of this whole operation are currently being collated, but are likely to prove in the region of £750,000-£1million, which would of course have proved utterly unsustainable for Uttlesford District Council, whose whole annual net revenue expenditure is less than £18 million.

18. When ongoing space at the airport or airport hotels was no longer available in the run-up to the Coronation, the Council stood up a new Humanitarian Assistance Centre at the authority's Little Canfield Depot, and this transfer caused more work for even more Council staff over the long weekend.
19. The second Humanitarian Assistance Centre was stood down on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May.
20. Subsequent conversations with local partners, with Government, and with local authorities in Crawley and Solihull containing Gatwick and Birmingham Airports, have started a process at Uttlesford District Council's request to develop future arrangements at Ports of Entry more systematically. On this occasion instead of being a local component of a national response to an international crisis, it felt more like Uttlesford actually ran the national response.
21. In summary, 1,030 evacuees were welcomed off planes at Stansted and supported in the two successive Humanitarian Assistance Centres, of whom the vast majority needed emergency hotel accommodation provided by us – some 207 family units. The dispersal arrangements around the country were successful – after some initial boomeranging back of people – with only two family units remaining temporarily housed by Uttlesford as homeless.
22. The quality of the immediate support offered to evacuees and over subsequent days in aiding them in moving on around the UK, was high. The risk to both the authority's business as usual functions and its finances, as well as to the support offered to evacuees nearly exhausted capacity, and had demand been at the 4,000 initial estimate level rather than the 1,000 ultimately experienced, the it is eminently possible that the outcomes reported herein would have been less positive. Inter-agency relationships generally (but not universally) have been strengthened through this shared experience.

## Risk Analysis

23.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
------	------------	--------	--------------------

Risk that lessons are not learned to be applied in the future, putting core UDC services/finances and/or response to future crises at risk	3 significant	3 substantial	A light-touch in-house review is underway, and a more formal, multi-agency LRF review is being commissioned to draw out this learning – which can be reported back to Members in due course.
--	---------------	---------------	--

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.