

From: Roger Gough – Leader

To: County Council - 15 September 2022

Subject: Ukraine / Refugee Update report

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

There are a number of active Refugee Resettlement Programmes in operation across the UK by Government, including the Syrian, Afghan and Ukraine schemes. All of these have been designed by the UK Government to support individuals who are fleeing conflict in their own countries. Alongside the formal programmes in operation, other policies, such as Asylum Dispersal add to the need for accommodation in Kent.

The most recent scheme to be launched by the UK Government in March 2022 relates to support Ukraine following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Government launched two key programmes for Ukrainian refugees to enter into the UK, the 'Ukraine Family' scheme and the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. The 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme requires Local Authorities to undertake an active role in the scheme. This report seeks to summarise key activities in respect of the 'Home for Ukraine' scheme since it was launched in March 2022 by the UK Government and the most significant challenges we now face within the context of a number of other refugee/ immigration programmes which were already in operation across the County.

Recommendation(s):

County Council is asked to comment on and note the Report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent conflict has seen the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the aftermath of the second world war with approximately 3 million Ukrainian refugees leaving Ukraine to neighbouring countries to flee the conflict. The UK Government has responded positively with the development of two key pathways to enable refugees to enter the UK which has seen over 100,000 people arrive in the UK.
- 1.2 The two key schemes which are operating are the extended Family Scheme, under which Ukrainians can come to the UK where they have existing family which has seen approximately 31,000 arrivals, and the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme which is where Ukrainian Refugees are sponsored to come to the UK by a host family or individual which to date has seen 72,000 people arrive.

Individual members of the public can sponsor a guest from Ukraine who meet the eligibility criteria for this scheme which involves District or Borough Councils doing a home inspection and County undertaking DBS checks on all adults in the household.

- 1.3 Under the scheme, the sponsor receives a £350 per month 'Thank You' payment provided that they meet the scheme requirements; numbers are uncapped and restricted only by the number of eligible sponsors that come forward. Those accessing the scheme will be able to live and work in the UK for up to three years and access benefits, healthcare, employment, and other support.
- 1.4 The challenges of the schemes for supporting Ukrainian refugees need to be seen in the context of the ongoing wider resettlement environment. This includes the schemes for supporting Afghans evacuated last summer and continuing to be brought to the UK and the global UK Resettlement Scheme. A brief update on these schemes is given below in section 6.

2. Homes for Ukraine and activities over the past 6 months

- 2.1 The response from Kent sponsors has been overwhelming, with 1,642 host families offering their homes and providing support to 3,871 Ukrainian people under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme since it started. A total of 2,927 people have already arrived with 944 people still expected. Figures are up until the end of August 2022. The scheme is an open scheme with the numbers continuing to increase and change on a daily basis. Kent has one of the largest numbers of sponsors, guests and visas issued across the Country.
- 2.2 Kent County Council (KCC), District Councils and key public sector organisations have been working together to deliver the 'Home for Ukraine' scheme in line with the UK Government guidance. This has required all partners to operate at speed and in an agile way as national guidance, policy and processes have developed.
- 2.3 Host families have been working alongside the newly formed KCC Homes for Ukraine support team which has successfully mobilised since the scheme started to support the checks which are undertaken at County level and the ongoing support across all districts except for Ashford, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells, who provide the ongoing wrap around support in collaboration with partners themselves. The teams work closely with KCC Adults and Children's services to ensure that the most vulnerable coming into Kent via the scheme have access to the services that they need.
- 2.4 KCC's Contact Centre was mobilised at the beginning of the scheme with a dedicated team to provide support and advice for both guests and sponsors. Extensive support has been developed as part of the KCC website as the programme has evolved. KCC's Adult Education services have quickly developed its service offer to support in the delivery of ESOL training courses with over 200 Ukrainian Nationals having already completed or in the process of benefiting from ESOL classes with more planned in the new academic year. The KCC teams have also been working closely with KCC Early Years and Education teams to support the 1439 children and young people who have been welcomed under the scheme to access education and care settings.

- 2.5 It has taken time for the required systems to be developed, bed down and adapt as Government guidance has evolved. This at times has been frustrating for both sponsors and guests as it has been necessary to adapt and develop guidance and local processes in an iterative way. Established systems are however in place, working with District and Borough Council housing colleagues to undertake property inspections at the earliest opportunity to ensure the suitability and safety of sponsor homes along with the required DBS checks, welfare checks and payments that are required under the scheme. The KCC Homes for Ukraine team includes area based coordinators and support workers who undertake face to face and telephone welfare visits in the areas covered by KCC. The team, which also includes Ukrainian and Russian speaking workers, continues to deliver ongoing signposting and resettlement support to 697 people across the County.
- 2.6 The majority of Ukrainian guests have also now applied for and received three year biometric residency permits and are making longer term resettlement plans accessing employment or training and settling children into local schools.

3. Key challenges

3.1 End of Sponsorship

- 3.1.1 Based on recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey data and its application at a Kent level, it could mean as many as 1,000 placements may need rematching or alternative accommodation options within the next 6-12 months. The South East is already experiencing ongoing challenges with regards to homelessness and accommodation, with District and Borough Councils having very limited substantive and emergency accommodation supply available as well as the private rented sector being under significant pressure with affordable options.
- 3.1.2 To date, 56 households have already been rematched with alternative families since arriving and there are currently a further 34 guests in need of alternative arrangements with these numbers expected to increase substantially. Unfortunately, many people who originally expressed an interest to host when the scheme started are now no longer able to do so as circumstances have changed. The increasing cost of living challenges are also having an impact on sponsors' ability to continue in the scheme.
- 3.1.3 Therefore, except for exceptional circumstances as a County, we have been unable to accept rematching requests from other Local Authorities, Scotland or the Welsh sponsorship schemes, into Kent, due to existing pressures on services and availability of hosts and accommodation across the county.
- 3.1.4 It is anticipated that the end of sponsorship arrangements will see a significant influx of guests seeking alternative accommodation; discussions are ongoing with DLUHC and Districts to develop options for both hosts and guests as the current arrangements come to an end

with further National guidance expected shortly. Data flows between the DLUHC Sponsorship scheme and the Home Office schemes which continue to be challenging with poor data quality also presenting a challenge.

3.2 Education and Early Years Pressures

3.2.1 There are already pressures on both Primary and Secondary School placements, with more pressure being felt in the Secondary sector particularly in the North and West of the County. This is in addition to some schools wanting to place pupils below their age year with cultural differences in the education system being a key issue, e.g. the entry point into school in the Ukraine is 7. A number of Ukrainian families wish for their children to continue online Ukrainian schooling alongside the UK education curriculum and the KCC team is working alongside the Education team and schools where this is requested. Early years provision is also reaching capacity and we anticipate further pressures on nursery spaces over the coming months. We are working with Education colleagues to understand trends and identify what additional education provision may be useful.

3.3 Unaccompanied minors

3.3.1 Following the announcement of sponsorship pathways for unaccompanied Ukrainian minors in June 2022, Kent has so far only seen 10 individuals who have been issued visas with others arriving to stay with existing family members. In light of the amended conscription regulations coming into force from January 2023, allowing women over the age of 18 to be conscripted, it is possible we may begin to see an increase over the coming months of applications from 16 and 17 year old females or those with additional health care needs exempt from subscription.

3.4 The Winter Period

3.4.1 The UK Visa scheme continues to be active, unlike the Scottish and Welsh sponsorship schemes which are currently suspended for new applications, therefore we anticipate a continued steady increase in new applicants arriving into the county particularly as we move into the winter month and the war continues. Unfortunately, DLUHC are unable to provide any forward projections making volumes and the impact on KCC services hard to predict.

4. Legal implications

4.1 KCC, along with District Councils undertake a number of important functions in supporting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in Kent. Notwithstanding the specific functions associated with facilitating the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, KCC retains, and is required to fulfil its duties and powers as set out in relevant legislation such as the Children's Act 1989 and the Care Act 2014.

4.2 Therefore, carrying out activities in relation to the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme does not displace or affect our responsibilities regarding our statutory duty to promote the welfare of children and adults who may be at risk. For example, where there are concerns for the safety or welfare of a child, as a result of

checks that are carried out, we follow our usual safeguarding procedures in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children. Similarly, if it is suspected that an adult guest may have care and support needs, we are required to carry out needs assessment in line with the requirements of the Care Act 2014 and related care and support statutory guidance.

- 4.3 In a similar vein, although children under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme have no specific additional priority for admission, KCC is under a duty to offer advice to parents on the school application process (including the application of the in-year fair-access protocol) and to advise them about vacancies, how to apply and supporting parents in choosing schools.

5. Finance

- 5.1 The Government has provided grants to local authorities to support local communities to offer people from Ukraine the warmest possible welcome to the UK. So far 3 grants have been announced; the main Homes for Ukraine (HfU) Grant from DLUHC which is available to Councils to support Ukraine guests and families to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities. This includes safety and welfare checks, an immediate cash payment to guests on arrival, on-going support for guests and management/ administration of the scheme; a separate DLUHC grant for "Thank You" payments to sponsors; and a grant from DfE for Education and Childcare. Initial guidance on the main HfU and thank you grants was issued on 18th March with periodic updates. The guidance for Education and Childcare grant was published on 23rd August.
- 5.2 The HfU grant is the same value as the grants for other refugee schemes i.e. a notional £10,500 per arrival. The grant is un-ringfenced although it does contain conditions such as it can only be used to support those arriving under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme and cannot be used for those arriving under 'Ukraine Families' scheme or those arriving under visitor visas. The grant will be paid in quarterly instalments based on the number of confirmed arrivals. Unlike other refugee schemes, the grant does not have to pay to source initial accommodation. Where the amount of grant exceeds the authority's actual costs, the difference will have to be repaid following a reconciliation process at the end of the financial year. DLUHC can recover grant where it has been used in breach of the grant conditions.
- 5.3 The "Thank You" grant is paid at the rate of £350 per sponsoring household per month. The grant is ring-fenced solely for the "Thank You" payments and Councils are expected to cover administration and fraud prevention costs within the tariff. Councils have flexibility to determine payment arrangements to suit local circumstances, but the grant can only be paid to sponsors once all the necessary checks have been passed, the sponsor has confirmed they wish to receive the grant and has confirmed that guests are not being charged rent.
- 5.4 Established systems and processes are also now in place to ensure £200 "Welcome Payments" are issued to all new arrivals via Post Office redeemable mobile phone text codes and hosts are receiving timely "Thank you" payments of £350 per month with suitable flexibility to administer additional emergency payments if needed.
- 5.5 Whilst there has been suggestion that Central Government are looking to increase £350 a month "Thank you" payments both in terms of an increased

amount and duration beyond 12 months, nothing has yet been confirmed. This remains a key risk in the retention of sponsors.

- 5.6 Allocations have been agreed and swiftly administered to Districts in order to mitigate any local area costs and pressures such as homelessness, gas safety checks and housing inspections. Amounts remain under review alongside the potential for alternative expenditure as required to resettle people.
- 5.7 The DfE grant to provide Education and Childcare services for children from families arriving from Ukraine under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme will be paid on a pro-rata on a per pupil basis:
- Early years (ages 2 to 4) - £3,000
 - Primary (ages 5 -11) - £6,580
 - Secondary (ages 11-18) - £8,755
- 5.8 These tariffs include support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The grant can be used to fund the entitlement to early years for 2, 3 and 4 year olds, provision of school places, travel arrangements to schools and early years, specialist and bespoke services, free school meals, uniform and extra-curricular activities.
- 5.9 An urgent decision number 22/00037 (Implementation of the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in Kent) was agreed on 5th April 2022 allowing delegated authority to the Corporate Director of Finance in consultation with the Leader to agree spending from the grants. This decision can be found at <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2584>. The Corporate Director of Finance has established a monitoring group to oversee spending from the grants.
- 5.10 The initial funding was for 1 year and any ongoing funding has yet to be confirmed by the UK Government. This presents a key financial risk to the current programme.

6. Wider resettlement context

- 6.1 The schemes for resettling other refugees that operate within Kent are the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) which has subsumed the earlier Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and the various schemes for resettling Afghans displaced following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban last year.
- 6.2 To date, in Kent as a whole, there are 115 families, approximately 600 individuals resettled under the VPRS and UKRS. The overwhelming majority are Syrian but we are now receiving other nationalities under the scheme. In addition, there are 35 Afghan families (about 200 individuals) that are resettled in Kent under one of the schemes for resettling Afghans (including that for people who have previously worked with British forces).
- 6.3 All of the cohorts referred to above have full access to public funds, eligibility to work, study and either have (or are about to be granted) Indefinite Leave to Remain or Refugee status.

- 6.4 Resettlement in Kent involves the families being found private sector rentals. It is extremely difficult to find suitable and affordable properties which is also now compounded by the need to potentially source self-contained accommodation for Ukrainians once their sponsorship arrangement ends. Nevertheless, Local Authorities are being requested to increase the number of families they can resettle, particularly from the Afghan cohort. There is some funding from Government available to incentivise Landlords and this is used where appropriate, bearing in mind the need for tenancies to be sustainable in the long-term.
- 6.5 In addition to those refugees that have been found long-term accommodation in Kent, there are currently three Afghan Bridging Hotels within Kent, part of the wider UK bridging estate of about 75 hotels. Families in these hotels are provided with access to all the main services (including schools, GPs etc) but the intention is that their stay will be temporary, pending accommodation being found anywhere in the UK. Families have resided in the hotels (including the three in Kent) since last August/ September with a steady flow of new arrivals, either from other hotels that have closed or new arrivals brought to the UK from countries adjacent to Afghanistan (mainly Pakistan). All families in the hotels are well supported by KCC, the local Councils and various other agencies. All children are in education, all families registered with GP's and accessing appropriate healthcare, benefits are in place, English lessons provided, cultural orientation sessions put on and activities in the hotel and community are being accessed.
- 6.6 The Home Office are currently trying to source additional bridging hotels (including in Kent) and it is possible further sites will be used. At the time of writing, there are no further hotels under discussion but the situation is being closely monitored. The various schemes already in operation place additional pressures on the housing system in Kent.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Government has established the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme to support the humanitarian impact of the large number of Ukrainians who are leaving Ukraine to flee the conflict. KCC and its services are playing a key role in providing support for those that come into the County and in understanding the longer term impacts on education, safeguarding, community and public health services. KCC has worked collaboratively with multi agency partners to mobilise a County team and reactive response to Ukrainian Refugee Resettlement and are now moving towards a business as usual approach to stabilise longer term services.
- 7.2 The next phase of resettlement support for all programmes aims to see more collaborative working with District and Borough colleagues, local communities and the voluntary sector and host families in order to provide more sustainable longer term resettlement relief and successful community integration across the County.

8. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

County Council is asked to comment on and note the Report.

9. Background Documents

9.1 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Ukrainian sponsor survey – 10 August 2022

Accessible here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys/homesforukrainsponsorsurvey>

10. Contact details

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