

Update - Homes for Ukraine

Housing Committee Thursday, 16 March 2023

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

Purpose: For information

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the government announced the Ukraine Family Scheme on 4 March 2022 and Homes for Ukraine Scheme on 14 March 2022 to support those fleeing Ukraine.

The Ukraine Family Scheme focuses on Ukrainian nationals living in the UK supporting family members in Ukraine by assisting them to travel to and reside with them in the UK. This scheme has been government led and local authorities have had little input to the administration of the scheme, neither do they receive any grant funding for the scheme.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme is a sponsorship scheme whereby UK residents can sponsor Ukrainian guests fleeing the war in their country. It is this scheme that local authorities have been administering on behalf of the government since March 2022 and is the main focus of this report.

This report supports the Council's priority of: Building a better Council

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Recommendation to Committee:

That the Committee note the updates provided within this report

Reason for recommendation:

The Council continues to administer the Homes for Ukraine scheme on behalf of the government. This report sets out the work which has been undertaken by the Council, in partnership with Surrey County Council, neighbouring authorities, community and voluntary groups to support Ukrainian guests as they arrive in the District.

Introduction and background

- 1 The Homes for Ukraine scheme allows individuals in the UK to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to come to live in the UK with them, providing they have suitable accommodation to offer. Under the scheme, launched in March 2022, UK-based sponsors commit to providing accommodation for at least six months after the arrival of their Ukrainian guests.
- 2 The scheme has enabled over 110,000 Ukrainians to arrive in the UK, as of 2 January 2023. All Ukrainian guests were issued with a three-year residential visa enabling them access to the relevant health care, education and financial assistance through the welfare benefits system.
- 3 Since the launch of the Homes for Ukraine scheme Officers have:
 - Checked host accommodation is safe and doesn't have any health and safety issues;
 - Carried out DBS background checks on everyone aged 16 or over living at the host property;
 - Distributed a £200 welcome payment to Ukrainian guests on arrival;
 - Made monthly "thank you" payments to hosts in the District;
 - Helped Ukrainian guests access public services;
 - Visited Ukrainian guests in their home to check there are no safeguarding or other issues;
 - Encouraged community events to help Ukrainians settle in the district, meet new people and develop friendships, find jobs, and access support.
 - Arranged a Tandridge Job Fair, with Ukrainian translators to support Ukrainians trying to find local jobs.
 - Recruited a Homes for Ukraine Scheme Co-ordinator to oversee the administration of the scheme, support hosts and their guests and ensure compliance with government guidelines
 - Recruited a Community Support Officer to assist Ukrainians in the community by liaising with the community and voluntary sector

Current Position

- 4 According to Surrey County Council, as of 27 January 2023, 3087 Ukrainian guests had arrived in Surrey across 1641 sponsor households.

It is currently forecast that 4648 Ukrainian guests will arrive in the County based on the number of visas issued.

- 5 As the first-tier authority, Surrey County Council hold responsibility for education and health care for guests as they arrive in the County. Ukrainian children are now attending schools in the District as per below:
 - 13 are in nursery / early years schools.
 - 45 are in primary schools.
 - 33 are in secondary schools
 - 15 are 16-18 in schools or sixth form colleges.

- 6 Locally within the District, as of 20 February 2023, 219 Ukrainian guests had arrived and been welcomed into the homes of 121 households in the district. 35 additional visas have been issued with a further 9 currently pending.

- 7 Those residents wanting to support the scheme were asked to sign up to sponsor and host their Ukrainian guests for a minimum of six months from April to September. Whilst most sponsors have continued to extend their hosting responsibilities beyond September 2022, there have been approaches as homeless, from three households, made to the Housing Options service:
 - Two successfully relieved by way of rematch following a brief spell in bed and breakfast
 - One household currently under a prevention duty as they are at risk of homelessness shortly

- 8 In addition to the three households above, three homelessness approaches have been made from Ukrainians who entered the Country under the Family Scheme. One family's homelessness was prevented by way of securing private rented accommodation outside the District. Two families were owed a prevention duty, but relief was unsuccessful, both are now residing in temporary accommodation and owed a main housing duty. The Family Scheme is a separate scheme where families fleeing Ukraine were able to come to the UK and be accommodated and supported by family members already resident in the UK. Households arriving via the Family Scheme are not supported in the same way as those who have been sponsored under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. No financial support has been provided to either party and they do not have the ability to be rematched to another guest household. Government announced plans to enable those arriving under the Family scheme to transfer to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but detailed guidance is yet to be received. No funding has been made available to support those who arrived under the Family scheme, all costs are currently being met from existing budgets.

- 9 A further eight households have approached the Council for housing options advice. These households are not currently threatened with

homelessness and are from both the Homes for Ukraine and Family schemes.

- 10 In recognition of the increased demand on local authorities and local accommodation, government have recently launched the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). This fund provides local authorities with grant funding toward the purchase or development of property to support in accommodating Ukrainian and Afghan nationals. Once the properties have become vacant following the initial let to Ukrainian and Afghan nationals, they will be used to support meet the housing need of those on the Councils housing register.

Financial support

- 11 Under the guidance of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, a sum of £10,500 per Ukrainian guest is paid to Surrey County Council as the first-tier authority. This grant is to support first-tier authorities with the cost of administering the scheme, education, health, and other social support activities.
- 12 While Surrey County Council initially receive the £10,500 grant, agreement has been reached through both the Surrey Treasures Group and a Surrey wide District and Borough working group that £5,025 per guest will be distributed to each District and Borough based on the number of confirmed arrivals in their area.
- 13 This grant is to cover costs incurred by the Council for the administration of the scheme, home safety checks, safeguarding visits, rematching responsibilities, homelessness duties and community engagement. Whilst this appears to be a generous sum per guest, it is anticipated that the cost of homelessness prevention will be the highest area of spend, if rematching and private rental opportunities continue to become unavailable. At this point in time, no additional funding has been agreed by government, therefore the current allocation must cover the three-year scheme duration.
- 14 For every guest arriving in the UK from January 2023, the sum per guest provided to first-tier authorities has reduced from £10,500 to £5,000 meaning the sum passed to District and Borough Councils will also reduce.
- 15 When a Ukrainian guest arrives in the district, they are issued with a £200 welcome payment. This payment is to assist with the purchase of items such as essential clothing, toiletries and food. Funds for this payment are made available by Surrey County Council in addition to the allocation of £5,025.
- 16 During the first six months of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, hosts were paid a monthly "thank you" payment of £350. This payment was intended to incentivise participation in the scheme and subsidise hosts for any additional costs incurred. Since November 2022, all hosts in Surrey have

been receiving increased “thank you” payments of £600 per month due to the cost-of-living crisis. Again, the funds for these payments are provided by Surrey County Council in addition to the £5,025 per guest. Increased payments of £600 to hosts were expected to reduce to the original £350 from April 2023. However, Surrey County Council have recently confirmed the continuation of the increased sum of £600 per month until further notice.

What are the challenges a year on

- 17 Sponsors were initially asked to host Ukrainian guests for a six-month period, although the war has not yet ended many hosts have continued to support their guests. These are the current challenges being faced:
 - Some hosts are no longer able to provide a home, increasing demand on the Housing Options service
 - Some Ukrainians no longer want to live with their hosts, again increasing demand on the Housing Options Service
 - There is a shortage of affordable accommodation available to rent privately
 - Ukrainian guests are struggling to find jobs in their chosen sectors, often due to a language barrier
 - An increase in mental health conditions.
- 18 Following the launch of the scheme, response from residents has been overwhelmingly high. Sponsors have been able to seek support and advice from the Homes for Ukraine Co-Ordinator and the Community Support Officer as and when required. Events have been held with community and voluntary groups around the district to support both sponsors and guests adjust to the new arrangements and provide wider community focused support.
- 19 Many sponsors have spoken about how rewarding the experience is and how much they have enjoyed welcoming Ukrainian guests into their family and home. Without the commitment and support of sponsors, the scheme would not have provided safe and secure accommodation for Ukrainians fleeing war in their country.
- 20 To ensure the continued support for Ukrainian guests and the success of the scheme, more host accommodation is required. If residents would like to host and have spare rooms in their home, or separate, unoccupied self-contained accommodation and it is available rent free for a minimum of six months, they are asked to register with us via the Councils website.
- 21 Continued support for Ukrainians residing in the district is a necessity regardless of which ever scheme they arrived under. It is important that partnership working with Surrey County Council and neighbouring authorities continues to provide the much-needed wrap around support to our guests. Whilst numbers approaching the Council for housing

options advice has been limited to date, it is anticipated that this will spike over the forthcoming months as sponsors are no longer able to continue to host their guests. This will not only put pressure on the housing options service and increase use of and therefore the spend on bed and breakfast accommodation but will provide new challenges for community and voluntary groups, as they look to adapt their approach to supporting the additional needs of their communities.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

The costs of providing the scheme set out in this report are met from funding provided by Government through Surrey County Council. At present the funding has proved to be adequate, however there are risks associated with reduced Government funding and the potential for homelessness if hosting arrangements break down.

Scheme costs and funding are monitored continually within the Council, along with regular review with the County Council, to manage these potential risks and identify as soon as possible whether ultimately the funding will be sufficient.

In the meantime, there is no general fund impact of providing the scheme.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

The Homes for Ukraine Programme is a Government scheme, which allows local residents to put their homes forward to support Ukrainian refugees who wish to come to the UK. In signing up as a sponsor, the Council is obliged to put in place such arrangements to assess suitability of the household and its occupants so as to safeguard the Ukrainian refugees when they arrive in the UK. As such, the Council is following its statutory duties insofar as safeguarding is concerned and the appropriate advice and sign off of suitability of accommodation to meet refugee/guests needs.

The government has issued Guidance for Councils. The Council has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk and it has a number of responsibilities under the scheme, including to carry out accommodation checks, DBS checks, and welfare checks.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Homes for Ukraine scheme and the proposals therein caters to a predefined group of refugees who are arriving in the District and hence will not result in unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.

The scheme will advance equality of opportunity among those of Ukrainian ethnicity and in particular Ukrainian females given the disproportionate impact of the war and displacement on these two groups.

The scheme will foster good relations between people from different groups through the wider integration support offered to Ukrainian arrivals and related workstream planned to help Ukrainian arrivals feel welcome and settled in the District.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

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