

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **13th September 2022**

Title: **Homes for Ukraine**

Portfolio Area: **Cllr Barry Ratcliffe**
Hub Lead for Homes

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

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Recommendations:

That the Hub Committee:

- 1. notes the progress that the Council has made under the Homes for Ukraine scheme**
- 2. agrees to the Leader writing to the Minister for Refugees urgently seeking clarity of the future of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and request a more permanent solution; and**
- 3. notes the significant contribution that our voluntary and community sector have already played in welcoming Ukrainian guests to the area.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of how the Council are responding to the needs of people escaping the War in Ukraine and our role in not only delivering the Homes for Ukraine scheme but wider support to other Ukrainian people settling in the borough.
- 1.2 The Council responded quickly and positively to ensure there were no barriers to people arriving and both they and their hosts received the support they needed to access benefits, funding and

help with housing. To date we have welcomed 139 Ukrainians to West Devon in 51 family groups.

- 1.3 Whilst we have been able to successfully welcome a number of households, there are mounting concerns about the risks of placement breakdowns and the pressures on the Council in performing its statutory homeless duties if alternative rematched placements cannot be found. The challenges Ukrainian people are also seeing in attempting to resolve their own housing need and the effect the housing crisis is having on available options for everyone means there is a lack of affordable options anywhere in the borough.
- 1.4 This report also informs Members of the work we are doing with Team Devon to seek joint solutions to some of the issues surrounding placement breakdown.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Government (in response to overwhelming public support), launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The scheme opened for applications on the 18th March. This is a sponsorship scheme for individuals or households fleeing from Ukraine who had named people in the UK willing to sponsor them for a minimum of 6 months. In reality, this was not through known acquaintances and friends, and most were arranged through social media pages, where willing sponsors could connect with potential guests and take the process through the visa application together. There have been other schemes such as the family sponsor scheme which have brought other people into West Devon however the involvement of the Council has been limited in most cases to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 2.2 As of the 26th July 119,000 visas have been issued nationally. There now 1,345 arrivals in Devon, of which there are 139 individuals across 51 family groups in West Devon (there are currently no unaccompanied minors in the County) data correct as of 12th August 2022
- 2.3 Devon Districts and the County Council have worked together on the Homes for Ukraine scheme since March and continue to do so. All Councils are concerned about the likelihood of placement breakdown and the pressures this puts on housing advice teams with the availability of housing in acutely short supply and are considering ways we might respond to the challenge collectively. Further details of this will provide part of the regular update to Members through their Friday bulletins.
- 2.4 As we saw through the Covid-19 pandemic, our communities have rapidly and successfully stepped up to deliver a wide range of community support

3. Support already implemented

- 3.1 Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, each individual arriving attracts a funding allocation of £10,500. The County has retained £4,200 of this money with the remaining £6,300 available to District Authorities to fund activity to support the

scheme. This funding has so far been used to fund staff resource to undertake welcome visits and property checks, leisure passes and individual items such as car seats and transport. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of this funding will need to be used to fund temporary accommodation placements or incentives to private landlords as placements begin to breakdown and alternative accommodation options need to be found.

- 3.2 Initially the Council's role was to arrange and carry out home visits with potential hosts to check the suitability of the accommodation. The County Council arranged safeguarding checks and co-ordinated the data on potential arrivals. Due to early challenges with the available data from the Government, there were some cases where the guests had already arrived prior to checks and visits.
- 3.3 Utilising systems it had deployed for the business support grants, the Council has been able to implement processes to issue welcome payments to each guest (£200 each) and to automate the £350 host thank you payment each month. This has meant that financial hardship has been mitigated as much as possible by quick payment to both hosts and guests.
- 3.4 Wider wrap-around support has been commissioned from both the Citizens Advice Bureau ("CAB") and the Council for Voluntary Sector ("CVS") who have supported us in responding to service requirements. The CAB is providing support to individuals (Hosts and guests) who require support in claiming benefits, jobs, childcare, and immigration enquiries and the CVS have supported with arranging community events and supporting volunteers and support groups.
- 3.5 Due to the volume of guests arriving and the expectations of Government that each guest receives three 'Welcome Visits'. it has been necessary to create a shared project team with South Hams (where we are currently supporting 155 guests over 66 groups) to ensure that we are as effective as possible to meeting the needs of hosts and of guests. There are 5 members of staff within this team, 3 of which started on the 5th September with overall project leadership from the Head of Housing and Head of Strategy. Collaboration between the project team and the housing options team will become more closely linked because of the risks of homelessness and placement breakdown representing key challenges for the scheme.
- 3.6 The Voluntary and community sector has again stepped up and played a significant role in addressing the challenges. Individuals and organisations across the borough have played a huge part in welcoming Ukrainians to West Devon.

4. Challenges

- 4.1 Hosts who signed up to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme were asked to commit to a period of at least 6 months, so by its very nature the scheme was temporary and offered no permanent solution. The

first of our placements come to the end of that time this month. We are working with hosts to better understand the likelihood of placements continuing after the initial 6 months. Hosts at this moment can continue to receive the thank you payment for 12 months, however any further advice from Government has not been finalised. Anecdotally we are aware there are hosts who are unable to continue over the 6 months.

- 4.2 Placement breakdown is a significant risk, and it is important that we remain vigilant and responsive to hosts and guests asking for help, hence the significant staff resource we have invested in supporting the scheme. A need to continue with good rematching options, avoid use of temporary accommodation wherever possible and support with other housing options will be key objectives of the Homes For Ukraine delivery team.
- 4.3 There have already been 5 placement breakdowns in West Devon, 3 of which have required temporary homeless accommodation before rematching options were found. Temporary accommodation is already under significant pressure at this time of year, so placements have been out of area in 2 of these cases. The Council has statutory homeless duties towards anyone on either the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or any other sponsorship scheme in relation to placement breakdown. Whilst costs can be recovered from the Homes for Ukraine funding, the availability of suitable accommodation in the right location is the biggest challenge.
- 4.4 Whilst initial arrivals have slowed, we are still seeing on average 1 new household a fortnight. We have also received out of area placement rematch requests.
- 4.5 Whilst funding can continue to hosts for 12 months, there remains a lot of uncertainty about how we can keep hosts engaged with the scheme and continuing with the placements. The cost of living and rising energy bills is likely to be further cause for concern as the £350 thank you payment may not be enough to counteract the increase in costs.
- 4.6 The previous Minister for Refugees (Lord Harrington) had indicated his wish for the monthly host 'thank you payment' to be increased from £350 to £700 in recognition of the increasing cost of living being seen at this time. We would support this proposal and encourage Government to implement this enhancement to the current support package as soon as possible.

5. Options available and consideration of risk

- 5.1 That the Council continues to resource appropriately the Homes for Ukraine support team and continues to take early intervention to prevent placement breakdown wherever possible
- 5.2 That the Council continues to assess the impact of the support the CAB and CVS can offer to ensure value for money
- 5.3 That we continue to work as part of Team Devon on holistic solutions to placement breakdowns on a large scale
- 5.4 That the Leader writes to the Minister for Refugees to lobby for the need for more information regarding the future plans for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	<p>The Council has made a commitment to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, and it is an expectation of Government that we adhere to the scheme framework, and that funding is used to resource the support required to manage the scheme successfully.</p> <p>The Council has statutory duties under homelessness legislation which has been amended to include specifically people who are residing in England under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		<p>The Council currently receive £6,300 for each guest and the County retains £4,200 as a reserve. It is expected that all funding associated with the scheme is accounted for through this funding. The £350 host thank you payment is in addition to this funding. West Devon has salary commitments of approximately £55,171 (40% of 1 x Level 5, 1 x Level 6 for 12 months and 40 % of 3 x Level 7 for 6 months.)</p> <p>West Devon also has committed costs to the CAB to deliver services to individuals of £14,800 and the CVS of £20,625 to deliver support services to groups and hosts.</p> <p>Funding will likely continue to be spent in increasing numbers on temporary accommodation top up costs, incentives to private landlords and resettlement packages</p>
Risk		<p>The Council has declared a Housing Crisis and recognised the significant difficulty in finding accommodation in the Borough. It is therefore a significant risk that rematching opportunities will not be found for placements that breakdown and the Council may be required to place in temporary accommodation for significant periods of time. Whilst the cost of this is one factor, there are other concerns including the challenges with finding temporary accommodation or rematch placements close to where people may have their children in school, have work or training requirements or</p>

		<p>receive support. It should not be forgotten that these are people who have fled their County because of the invasion and no doubt some will have significant trauma attached to this. A further placement breakdown may have further effects on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Whilst the Council will seek to avoid placements that might be deemed unsuitable it is inevitable that some people will be placed in temporary accommodation some distance from their support networks.</p>
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Homes Council Services Wellbeing
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		We will continue to monitor this impact
Safeguarding		We continue to work closely with our colleagues in children and adult services to address any safeguarding concerns
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		We will continue to monitor this impact
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		We will continue to monitor this impact
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None