

# People and Health Overview Committee

3 May 2022

## Resettlement and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

### For Review and Consultation

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr L Miller, Customer and Community Services

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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**Report Status:** Public

#### Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of how Dorset Council and partners are responding to meeting the needs of people escaping the conflict in Ukraine and those that are hosting them through the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme and how this fits with the other resettlement activity taking place within the county.

**Recommendation:** Members of the committee are invited to comment on and support the intended approach.

**Reason for Recommendation:** Dorset has a proud history of offering a warm welcome to those displaced by conflict, violence, and persecution. Refugee resettlement plays a key role in supporting the global response to humanitarian crises. It saves lives and offers stability to those most in need of protection. Councils are required to deliver a 'Homes for Ukraine' programme to respond to the conflict in Ukraine. This is being delivered alongside other resettlement programmes including the Ukraine Family Visa Scheme, nationally mandated transfer of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and voluntary participation in the UK Resettlement, Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and the Afghan Citizen's Resettlement Scheme.

## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of how Dorset Council and partners are responding to meeting the needs of people escaping the conflict in Ukraine and those that are hosting them through the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme and how this fits with the other resettlement activity taking place within the county.
- 1.2 Dorset is committed to offering a warm welcome to people fleeing the war in Ukraine that is sustainable over the coming months and into the future. To do this well, it is important that people are safe and well supported when they arrive, support is well coordinated, and the council has sufficient resources to meet needs.
- 1.3 There are 2 new visa schemes designed to support individuals and families. All refugees arriving through these schemes can live, work and study in the UK and access public funds. They are eligible for all local services, including help with accommodation. The Home Office undertakes basic police checks prior to issuing visas. The two schemes are described below:
  - The UK Family Scheme, led by the Home Office, offers entry visas to immediate and extended family members of British Nationals, a person with settled status or a person with refugee status or humanitarian protection. There is no additional support offered to arrivals or to family members who have supported them to come over. Local services do not receive any additional funding from the government and councils have no specific responsibilities in supporting this scheme.
  - The Homes for Ukraine Scheme, led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, enables people living in the UK to sponsor a named refugee. Sponsors are asked to offer a minimum of 6 months suitable accommodation and can receive a £350 'thank you' payment for up to 12 months, which will not affect benefit entitlements. Guests will be given initial financial support (up to £200) when they arrive and provided with on-going support. Councils will receive £10,500 per person for the first year and have been given specific responsibilities to support the scheme.

1.4 Local councils are required to undertake the following activity to facilitate the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme – unless otherwise stated it is expected that this activity will be covered by the £10,500 payment offered per guest:

- Sponsor Accommodation suitability checks – this includes at least one in-person visit
- Sponsor DBS checks
- Guest welfare checks – this includes at least one in-person visit to check wellbeing and may include a needs assessment
- Interim payments to guests of £200 per guest for subsistence costs
- Provision of education – additional per pupil funding will be provided (Early Years: £3,000; Primary: £6,580; Secondary: £8,755)
- Service referrals, signposting to specialist services and support to access local Jobcentre Plus appointments for benefits assessments and job seeking
- Homelessness assistance where host/sponsor arrangements breakdown
- Community integration
- Administering payments to sponsors – this is one monthly payment per address paid in arrears, regardless of the number of guests being supported and regardless of size or location of the property. The £350 payment will be funded separately, but councils will be expected to cover the administration costs and fraud prevention costs from the £10,500 payments. Sponsors receiving these payments or hosting guests should not be disadvantaged financially and it should not affect any benefit entitlement including council tax benefits.
- Completion of management information returns following completion of checks

## **2. Dorset Council Approach**

2.1 The 'Dorset Together' network, a multi-agency network of statutory and voluntary and community sector groups, formed during the Covid pandemic has been reformulated to coordinate our collective response.

2.2 Political leadership for the programme and community engagement is being provided by Cllr Laura Miller, with Cllr Graham Carr-Jones taking the lead on housing and accommodation aspects.

- 2.3 All responses are being coordinated through Dorset Direct, but the operational response reaches across all council departments including Corporate Services, Place, Children's Services and Adult's Social Care and Housing Services, offering a 'One Council' approach. Arrangements are in place to contact hosts to arrange housing and DBS checks; undertake accommodation suitability checks, upload information to the national database; visit arrivals; arrange education; make initial payments and administer the 'thank you' payments.
- 2.4 The Dorset Together group is working with local community groups, local charities, and faith groups to enable coordination of the local effort. As well as sharing of resources, best practice and avoiding duplication, this approach enables us to target our communication strategies ensuring that timely, reliable, and up to date information is shared effectively. Local organisation, HelpAndKindness, has a list of local community groups in Dorset that can provide support for refugees, and support for sponsors. Further information can be found at <https://www.helpandkindness.co.uk/support-for-ukraine>
- 2.5 This is an emerging policy area and guidance is being regularly updated. Council officers and designated Elected Members are participating in regional and national working groups to ensure that we are addressing the issues as they emerge. Discussions have also taken place with our local MPs.

### **3. Current Issues and challenges**

- 3.1 The council is rightly proud of the offers of support from people in Dorset to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine but responding is not without challenge. These challenges include:
- (a) Ensuring the safety of arrivals: People escaping conflict are in a very dangerous and precarious situation and are more vulnerable to exploitation. The current phase of the Homes for Ukraine scheme is open to named guests only and has resulted in some hosts and refugees meeting through social media platforms, this route is more open to abuse. The government is working with national and international charities to help make this safer and protect both hosts and guests. Although local councils are required to undertake DBS checks, we have been informed by that national team that people will be able to travel prior to completion of these checks. There has been some frustration from some members of the public in the length of time it is taking to issue visas and in

understanding the scheme which has resulted in some customer complaints to the council.

- (b) Accessing support: the only route for securing additional resources (including benefit protection) both for hosts and arrivals is through the 'Homes for Ukraine' visa scheme. This support is not offered through the other visa routes. The lack of support offered for those supporting arrivals through other routes has led to frustration from some members of the public and resulted in several customer complaints.
- (c) Financial support to councils: Although the council is responsible for offering services and support to Ukrainian people when they arrive, there is no additional funding associated with this unless people arrive through the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, where the council will receive £10,500 per year per individual that arrives. At the time of writing we are awaiting guidance on the payment system and administration of the thank you payments.
- (d) Data quality and availability: The quality of the data received is improving and the national team are making amendments to the system in response to feedback from local councils, however, there remain some challenges for officers to work through. In addition, we are awaiting a process for informing councils of when refugees have arrived. Currently councils only have access to information about hosts and sponsors once they have been matched. Many more people have expressed an interest in hosting a Ukrainian refugee and are currently awaiting a response from the Home Office and in some cases are contacting the council to try to seek information but we are unable to respond and this is resulting in some frustration.
- (e) Host/sponsor breakdown: Currently councils are expected to provide homeless assistance in the event of host sponsor breakdown, however members will be aware that there is already pressure on the availability of accommodation in Dorset. At the time of writing we are awaiting further guidance on how re-matching with alternative hosts could work as council's do not currently have any role in matching nor do we have access to any information on potential hosts. This would be preferable to placements in emergency accommodation, particularly as we know there are potential hosts who have yet to be matched.

#### **4. Other resettlement activity**

4.1 Dorset Council participated in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) since 2015, helping those in greatest need, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture and women and children at risk. This scheme closed to new arrivals in 2021 but ongoing commitment to resettlement has continued through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). Following the withdrawal of British Troops from Afghanistan the council has been participating in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), offering support and relocation to those who have served alongside British armed forces in Afghanistan and are assessed to be at serious risk as a result of such work. The council also participated in the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), which prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy; women's rights and freedom of speech and the rule of law as well as vulnerable people including women and girls at risk and members of minority groups at risk.

4.2 These schemes are supported by a small resettlement team. Councils receive a similar level of funding (£10,500 per individual) to the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Individuals and families are housed in privately rented properties that the landlord has offered or agreed to rent to refugee families. The team also works with community groups and local charities who help families settle in Dorset or who sponsor people to arrive through a community sponsorship scheme. At the time of writing the council resettlement team has resettled over 100 Syrian and Afghan refugees through these schemes.

4.3 The council is also required to provide care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children – these are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but have been separated from their parents and carers. While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority. The local authority in which the child first arrives is normally responsible for their care. This has placed a disproportionate pressure on some local authorities who have significant ports of entry and in Croydon where the Asylum Entry Point is based. In response to these pressures the government introduced a National Transfer Scheme to ensure a more even distribution of separated children seeking asylum across the country, participation in the scheme was voluntary. In the Summer of 2020, due to increased pressures the government introduced reforms to the scheme, including the introduction of a rota, with local and regional quotas and an increase in the payments made to local authorities. In July 2021, the government made the decision to mandate the scheme and since then local authorities are required to participate in the rota. The council has 10 days to find a placement for the children and young

people assigned to them. Despite our best efforts, the council is facing significant challenges in securing sufficient local accommodation and as a result many children and young people are being placed at a distance. There is currently a shortfall between the funding local government receives and the actual cost of caring separated children and young people seeking asylum. At the time of writing the council is caring for 22 unaccompanied minors aged between 14 and 17 years.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Government has issued information on the grant payments that will be made to the local authority to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but the likely allocation to the council is not yet known. The council has already invested in securing capacity in Dorset Direct, in expansion of the resettlement team and in additional capacity for welfare checks. Accommodation suitability checks are currently being carried out using existing capacity, however this may change based on demand. Costs already incurred will be offset against the grant allocation and closely monitored through the life of the programme. There may be additional costs, yet to be quantified for all services, but, if housing assistance is required – potentially placing a pressure on the Adults Social Care and Housing budgets.

There are some unknown financial implications for arrivals from Ukraine through other Visa routes as this scheme does not attract any additional payment, but individuals are eligible for all council services. As above there may be additional costs to all services, but in particular if housing assistance is required potentially placing a pressure on the Adults Social Care and Housing budgets.

The UK Resettlement scheme and the Afghan resettlement programmes are grant funded and its spend is in line with the grant received.

There is a shortfall in the amount received for caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people which may place a pressure on the Children's Services budget.

## **6. Climate Implications**

None identified

## **7. Well-being and Health Implications**

Refugees and people seeking asylum have been through great hardship and settling in a new country is a huge challenge. Many will have faced long and hard journeys and spent time in harsh and overcrowded conditions which may

make them more susceptible to infections including Covid-19. Traumatic events and ongoing stressors mean that they are more likely to experience poor mental health. The council will work with partners to ensure access to local health services.

## **8. Other Implications**

Providing a warm welcome to all those fleeing conflict and seeking asylum is well evidenced in Dorset, but it is important to be mindful of potential community cohesion issues and potential exploitation of refugees and those seeking asylum.

## **9. Risk Assessment**

9.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

## **10. Equalities Impact Assessment**

Not completed

## **11. Appendices**

N/A

## **12. Background Papers**

[Homes for Ukraine: guidance for councils](#)

[Ukraine Family Visa Scheme](#)

[Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme](#)

[UK Resettlement Scheme](#)

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Afghan citizens resettlement scheme](#)