

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 8 June 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Homes For Ukraine scheme

Report summary:

This report concerns the provision and mobilisation of a support service for Ukrainian refugees and host/sponsor households. This is a key part of the government's Homes For Ukraine Scheme and is one of the asks of local authorities to make provision for a welcome and support service alongside property inspections, Disclosure and Barring Service safeguarding checks; and administering payments to refugees and host households.

The report outlines an arrangement developed with East Devon Citizens Advice based on a Service Level Agreement which specifies the support service required. There is an urgency with refugees arriving in the district and a number of enquiries being received from host and refugee families. The service has been commissioned in anticipation that we can use the government funding to cover the cost of the service. We are also trying to anticipate a growth in the number of hosts and refugees alongside the need for peer support and access to other wellbeing services. This will increase the cost of the service if/when we trigger the enhanced provision.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. Cabinet note that officer delegated authority has been / will be relied upon to:
 - Commission the East Devon Citizens Advice to provide wraparound support for a 6 month period – Total commitment for service: £32,000 initially
 - Provide the Ukraine café in Exeter with a grant to support their work – Total commitment for service: £5,000
 - Commission Devon Communities Together to provide further wraparound support to compliment the work they currently do – Total commitment: £5,600
2. Cabinet note the use of an exemption to Contract Standing Orders to appoint Citizens Advice Bureau to provide wraparound support and agree to an exemption to Contract Standing Orders to enable commissioning of Devon Communities Together to provide further wraparound support.

Reason for recommendation:

To commission a support service for Ukrainian refugees and host/sponsor families to enable the welcome, settlement and integration of refugees, and ensure that the scheme operates as intended in government guidance.

The Strategic Lead for Finance has delegated authority:

To award discretionary Council Tax and Business Rate reliefs and Government Grant Schemes which are in line with agreed Council Policy or in line with Government Guidance which falls

outside existing policy in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder and where costs are recovered from Government.

An exemption to Standing Orders is being reported to confirm the procurement of a support service for Ukrainian refugees and host/sponsor households.

Officer: John Golding Strategic Lead – Housing, Health & Environment.

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Medium Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; There is an assumption that the service will be funded by government grant to support Ukrainian refugees. We are seeking a flexible arrangement to allow for the increase in refugees and/or host offers. A flexible approach will also allow us to address any changes required as a result of our inexperience in this field and changes to government guidance.

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1. Background

- 1.1 When the Homes for Ukraine scheme was hastily assembled central government asked local government to undertake property checks of host/sponsor families; perform Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on host households; administer subsistence payments to refugees and payments to host/sponsor households; and provide welcome and support services to Ukrainian refugees.
- 1.2 Government has stated that we (local authorities) need to provide 'wraparound support' for both Ukrainian refugees arriving in East Devon under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and their host/sponsor families. They have given minimal guidance on what this should be in practice. In most other local authority areas this is being provided by their Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) or a local group ready and able to deliver the service. We are in the unfortunate position in East Devon of being the only district in Devon without a CVS so have had to spend time researching what could be / should be provided, and by who.
- 1.3 As of mid-May I am aware of 95 sponsor households have offered accommodation and to be hosts, which we estimate could accommodate circa. 300 Ukrainian Refugees. We have

inspected 66 properties with a further 25 visits booked. We have made 67 subsistence payments to 28 households, and 22 hosts have applied for monthly payments.

- 1.4 We anticipate being able to access the Government promised £10,500 per refugee fund to finance the wraparound support proposed below, once this is available, and on this basis have proceeded to commission the service 'at risk'.

I have relied upon delegated authority to initiate the following package:

- Commission the East Devon Citizens Advice to provide wraparound support for a 6 month period – Total commitment for service: £32,000 initially
- Provide the Ukraine café in Exeter with a grant to support their work – Total commitment for service: £5,000
- Commission Devon Communities Together to provide further wraparound support to compliment the work they currently do – Total commitment: £5,600

Total financial request = £42,600

- 1.5 In order to respond to the government asks of local government we have come up with the following package of support measures.

2. East Devon Citizen's Advice – wraparound support

- 2.1 East Devon Citizen's Advice (EDCA) will be providing the bulk of the wraparound support to both Ukrainian refugees and host families. This will include making contact with clients as soon as possible (with the refugee or hosts permission) to fully discuss any support they might need and then either providing that help, or in some cases signposting to more relevant organisations.
- 2.2 This will also include things like help with accessing the initial £200 payments for Ukrainian guests, setting up a bank account, getting a National Insurance number, finding employment / training, finding out about eligibility for and applying for benefits, dealing with debt, finding and registering with a doctor or school or childcare, support if arrangements go wrong, replacing any documents that may have been left in Ukraine, and more. At the time of writing we are finalising the service specification.
- 2.3 EDCA will offer face to face help where required, and follow all data protection and safeguarding requirements.
- 2.4 We are currently finalising a draft 6 month Service Level Agreement with EDCA (latest draft attached **annex 1**). This SLA will end after 6 months, with the option to change/extension and / or renew it at the end of that term. We want the facility to expand the service if the number of refugees and/or host/sponsor families increases significantly beyond the 95 that we are aware of currently. This will have a cost implication.
- 2.5 To provide the service outlined in the SLA EDCA need our commitment to commission the service at £32,000, which would be £31,000 to provide a full time worker, and £1,000 as petty cash to use to help the Ukrainian refugees travel to essential appointments and to our preferred social / peer to peer support service in Exeter.
- 2.6 There will be additional costs of the language / translation service from Language Line, which are somewhat unknown at this stage. EDCA's agreement to provide translation services with Language Line costs a lot less per minute than our potential agreement with Language Line, so it is envisaged that EDCA would use their Language Line agreement to provide this support and invoice us monthly for these costs. EDCA would make every effort to keep these costs to a minimum and are in fact trying to source something cheaper, and arguably better, in the form of a qualified local translator.
- 2.7 EDCA are very keen to help with this welcome and support service, and are ready and willing to start providing it at the earliest opportunity, if the proposal meets with our approval and we commit to agreeing the funding they require. This timeline would be incredibly helpful, as we are already receiving demand from host families and others for the service. Some other Devon districts are already providing this support.

2.8 The SLA would take two weeks to receive all the detailed Legal checks, so we are considering that the service starts before all checks are in place with the main principles and approach agreed. In terms of procurement we are anticipating an exemption from Standing Orders (exemption form attached as **annex 2**) on the basis of urgency and the specialist nature of the support required.

3. Devon for Ukraine / Community Conversations Café – more social, wellbeing and informal side of support

3.1 Devon for Ukraine are a new group that have set up within the last few weeks to provide support. They are a group of Ukrainian nationals / Russian speakers from the Ukrainian community within Exeter.

3.2 They have set up a Ukraine Café in Paris Street, Exeter, which is providing basic advice and peer to peer support from people that speak the Ukrainian language and know the culture, that have already been living here a while, and will be running social events for both host families and Ukrainian refugees.

3.3 As the majority of our host families are coming forward from Cranbrook, Exmouth and Honiton, all of which have good public transport links into Exeter, we intend signposting people to the Ukraine Café for the more social / peer to peer side of support that they would find incredibly useful. This could help reduce relationship break down between refugees and hosts, reduce social isolation, reduce mental health issues, and could prevent demand on statutory services in the future.

3.4 They currently have only one paid worker, and the remainder of support is provided by volunteers. They are currently being given the physical space they use by Princesshay for free on a month to month basis until they can gather in grants to help contribute towards the costs of the facility.

3.5 Exeter City Council are also hoping to be using Devon for Ukraine's Café for similar purposes.

Their main presence is found in the following links:

- Devon for Ukraine website: <https://devonforukraine.com/>
- Devon for Ukraine Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/280290300845714>
- Ukraine Café Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ConvoCafeExeter/>

3.6 They are only just setting up the group formally and have only just established a bank account. We would like to offer them some support to get together their data protection, safeguarding and whatever else they might need to get going more formally. This support could be provided by Devon Communities Together, as it is the kind of thing they do frequently. However, DCT would want funding support to provide this service.

3.7 I am recommending we offer the Ukraine Café a small amount of funding for providing this service for our refugees once they have safeguarding, data protection etc. in place, at least initially until they get established. We suggest a grant of around £5,000 and then we could consider giving them further support again in 6 months' time once we have seen what has developed, how much funding they have gathered in from other sources, what their costs are, and how useful it has been. We can specify exactly what this grant could be spent on, as we would want to make sure it is a facility that East Devon refugees and host families would use, bearing in mind the services proposed to be provided by East Devon Citizen's Advice. We will specify things like having Ukrainian nationals present in the Café to provide informal peer to peer support, and funding social events.

4. Devon Communities Together

- 4.1 In our discussions with potential support providers and developing vision we envisage a role for Devon Communities Together (DCT) to support this scheme and provide resilience.
- 4.2 There are currently two gaps that we have asked DCT to put a proposal together to fill:
- As discussed in item 2 above, Devon for Ukraine and their Ukraine Café are very new and do not as yet have a full range of policies / procedures etc. in place. Helping voluntary groups set up properly is something that DCT do regularly. DCT have stated that they require £2,800 to provide this service (**annex 3**).
 - Gathering information on what quality support is being offered by other voluntary groups throughout East Devon, for example Ottery Refugee Group, Sid Valley Lions etc. EDCA can then use this information for signposting purposes if necessary and links can be made where appropriate. DCT have indicated that a further £2,800 would be the cost of this service

5. Mental health support

- 5.1 We recognise the likely need for mental health support for both Ukrainian refugees and host families. A lot of refugees are arriving having suffered terrible trauma, and being placed with host families who may well not know how to deal with this. Our Community Engagement & Funding Officer is attending fortnightly meetings at the Ukraine Café and has met refugees who look very traumatised.
- 5.2 In the absence of any Government guidance on this at the moment, we would presume that refugees who are eligible for health services, and host families, should access the Devon Partnership Trust support via the GP and source mental health support that way if they meet the required thresholds. We could also signpost to national charities such as the Samaritans if a list was provided / collated.
- 5.3 However, as we are all aware the mental health support system, both statutory and non-statutory agencies is already struggling and people are having to wait a long time for appointments, and the support available is limited. This is an area that we need to monitor closely and respond as appropriate.

6. In conclusion

- 6.1 In order to de-risk the financial aspect of the scheme we have been in contact with DCC. I advised DCC that in response to Government advice for local authorities we have developed a specification for a support service for refugees and host/sponsor households. Our East Devon Citizens Advice are keen to deliver the service and can mobilise quickly.
- 6.2 I informed DCC that we are proposing to fund this service 'at risk' whilst seeking some assurance over funding from the government grant to implement the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. I advised that I wish to access some of the £10,500 per refugee government have identified for refugee support to meet the costs of the service.
- 6.3 DCC has helpfully advised that they appreciate us working at risk to get this scheme in place. DCC have confirmed that in the event of funding not being made available from Government for the H4U scheme, DCC will underwrite the risk (and if required fund from the DCC Communities budget) 50% of the agreement we put in place.
- 6.4 At the time of writing we are attempting to finalise the SLA with EDCA. We are seeking to ensure that we can meet demand and operate a flexible scheme that can be adapted to meet needs and any increases in demand for the service. This will mean additional costs above the baseline if EDCA have to employ extra staff to deliver the support. We have captured this in the SLA in a manner that both parties are comfortable with.

- 6.5 We are making good progress on inspecting properties of host/sponsor families, making payments to refugees and host/sponsor households, DBS checks on hosts. There is an urgency to ensuring that this wraparound support element of the responsibilities handed to local authorities is in place.
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Financial implications:

The financial details are contained in the report. It has been assumed that the costs incurred by this Council will be met from Government Funding passed on by DCC, discussion with County indicate this to be the case.

Legal implications:

The report sets out the legal position. The use / approval of contract standing orders exemptions in this case seems well justified. Appropriate documentation will need to be put in place in relation to the commissioning / funding of the various bodies. Otherwise there are no legal implications requiring comment.