

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 7 September 2022

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Exemption applied: None

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Homes for Ukraine

Report summary:

This report updates members on the continued duties that the council has under the UK Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The UK Government asks that district councils make provision for a welcome and support service, property inspections, administering payments to Ukrainian guests and host households, and a re-matching scheme when host / guest relationships irreparably break down or when hosts decide to stop hosting.

This report also provides an update on our experiences and challenges under the scheme, the issues arising, funding and resources required, with details of our extended Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice East Devon for wraparound support.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

Cabinet:

- (1) Note the extended Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice East Devon and the progress report, and
- (2) Note the Exemptions from Standing Orders to commission the welcome and wraparound support service, and
- (3) Approve the additional resource requirements as set out in the report to successfully administer the scheme, and
- (4) That Cabinet note the report from Andrew Mitchell, Housing Solutions Manager, reviewing the staffing requirements of the Housing Options Team, where reference is made under section 6 to utilising funding in respect of the Ukrainian refugee scheme to finance a fixed term Housing Officer post to be created to specifically manage homeless applications from Ukrainian refugees facing homelessness at the end of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Reason for recommendation:

To provide Cabinet with a progress report on our response to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, highlight the challenges that the scheme presents and identifies an approach that ensures that Ukrainian refugees are welcomed and settled in this country and that host families are supported until a longer term exit strategy is developed by the UK Government.

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

Some Ukrainian guests are vulnerable, having left their country at war. There are also many children and young people arriving as Ukrainian guests.

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 [Agenda front sheet 08th-Jun-2022 18.00 Cabinet.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

[Ukraine support provided by East Devon District Council - East Devon](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

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

1. Homes for Ukraine scheme key information

Please note these are the records we have at the time of writing this report (mid-August), this will have changed significantly before the Cabinet meeting on 7 September.

We have investigated creating this information, and the Government quarterly report data using Power BI so that we have a visible dashboard of activity. However, this is not possible currently as we cannot work from the Government data because of a large number of errors with the data we have received.

Key information for Homes for Ukraine	Number
Number of groups of Ukrainian guests that are currently living within host households (some households have more than one group of guests, and a group could be anything from one person upwards).	118
Number of Ukrainian guests currently with hosts in EDDC area.	232
Number of Welcome Visits completed in person with the Ukrainian guests and host at the property the Ukrainian guests are living in.	62
Number of Welcome Visits waiting to be undertaken.	57

Numbers of groups of Ukrainian guests that are currently definitely expected to arrive within East Devon but have not yet arrived.	29
Numbers of Ukrainian guests that are currently definitely expected to arrive within East Devon but have not yet arrived.	70
Number of £200 Interim Payments made to individual Ukrainian guests.	124
Total amount paid through £200 Interim Payments to individual Ukrainian guests.	£46,600
Number of £350 Thank You Payments made to hosts.	99
Total amount paid through £350 monthly host Thank You payments.	£34,650
Number of host households who have submitted an Expression of Interest form currently without Ukrainian guests.	95
Number of initial Home Inspection checks completed.	120
Number of initial Home Inspection checks waiting to be carried out.	90
Relationship breakdowns under Homes for Ukraine that we are aware of where the guest has left the property	Number
Number of rematches of groups of Ukrainian guests made to hosts within EDDC from inside the EDDC area.	4
Number of homeless approaches from groups of Ukrainian guests here under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.	12
Number of groups of Ukrainian guests that have been housed in emergency accommodation at any point that are here under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.	3
Number of groups of Ukrainian guests that have left the Homes for Ukraine scheme by choice. This is usually to go to another country.	4

2. Government funding available

The UK Government is due to pay Devon County Council £10,500 per Ukrainian guest that arrives in Devon. East Devon District Council will then receive £6,300 of that, the remainder will be kept by the County Council. At the date of writing this report we have 236 Ukrainian guests on our records as having arrived within East Devon, this means potentially a receipt for EDDC of £1,486,600.

We only receive the funding once per Ukrainian guest. If a Ukrainian guest is re-matched into East Devon from outside the district we received no money from Government for this additional guest.

This money has to pay for a wide variety of costs including:

- Paying each host an initial £200 Interim Payment, if they choose to apply for it.
- The costs of providing the Welcome Visits and Welfare Checks after 6 months in person to every Ukrainian guest and host family.
- Providing ongoing wraparound support to hosts and guests, whether this is providing direct support, or signposting to other available support.
- All of our current and future staffing costs.
- All of our current and future costs of providing accommodation should the Ukrainian guests become homeless.

Please note this funding does not pay for the hosts £350 a month thank you payments, if the hosts apply for them. This is funded separately by the UK Government.

3. Issues Log and Government response to lobbying

Unfortunately there are many significant issues with the Homes for Ukraine scheme. These have been collated by officers in to an issues log. The vast majority of the issues are still very much current.

We have raised these issues with both the Chief Executive's and Leader's group of Team Devon. We have also sent this issues log to Simon Jupp, MP for him to raise within Government and recently received a response via Simon Jupp, MP from Lord Harrington from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. However, this response as attached **Appendix 1** only sought to address one issue, which is not an issue we are having, and the response does nothing to address any of our concerns. We will respond to Simon Jupp, MP to query this and further lobby for his response.

4. Financial support for hosts and guests

- 4.1 On arrival each guest is entitled to a £200 interim payment to provide immediate financial support. These payments are applied for through our on-line application form and are processed by a member of the Benefit's team. Payments are made directly into bank accounts or via the Post Office's pay out now service, that allows cash collection from any Post Office.
- 4.2 A monthly Thank You payment is also payable to each sponsor at the end of each month that the guest is residing in their property. To be entitled to this payment the criteria as detailed in the Department of Levelling Up Homes and Communities Guidance must be met. This includes ensuring that all checks are passed on the Foundry system before payments can be released. Payments are applied for through our on-line application and processed by the Benefit's Team. All payments are made by BACS.

5. Home Inspections and Expressions of Interest

- 5.1 As part of the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme there is a requirement to undertake inspections of the sponsor home in order to obtain the grant funding of £10,500 per refugee.
- 5.2 The Environmental Health Private Sector Housing (PSH) team started home property inspections in April following a Devon wide collaboration to co-ordinate a consistent and proportionate inspection regime and inspection report form.
- 5.3 PSH are responsible for two out of the five required tests for the payment process. This is to confirm that the property exists and is suitable accommodation for the guest. We maintain two databases. One is a shared Devon County database which records the tests and is used to update the Government Foundry system. We use the Council's Uniform database to record and store information on the property and sponsor in accordance to our Privacy Notice.
- 5.4 A pre-visit health and safety questionnaire is completed when the appointment for a visit is made. On the day of the visit a telephone call is made to ensure that the household does not have any infectious respiratory diseases and that sponsors have all the paperwork required for the inspection (Gas safety/ electrical safety certificates). A Devon wide inspection report form is completed during the inspection covering the condition of the property; health and safety in the home and safeguarding.
- 5.5 After the visits the team meet with the Principal EHO to decide if each property is suitable/ improvements/ works needed or unsuitable. One property required additional safety improvement to protect the intended guest. One property failed for safety and safeguarding reasons. Residents and properties that fail and have not completed necessary works have the opportunity to complain through the Council's complaint process.

- 5.6 After each peer review the databases are updated for each individual visit, with whether the accommodation exists and is suitable; and satisfactory health and safety and safeguarding checks completed.
- 5.7 In June Devon County Council completed a list of sponsors without guests called Expressions of Interest. There are 95 sponsors on the Expressions of Interest (EOI) list in East Devon. This list will be used to rematch or reallocate accommodation to refugees who may be requiring sponsors after they have been given notice by their sponsors and new refugees.
- 5.8 Accommodation checks are required on these (EOI) properties. We have prioritised these inspections based on sustainable communities (access to transport links/ schools/ employment) of Exmouth/Lympstone/Honiton/Axminster.
- 5.9 PSH are supporting the Private Rented Sector Transition draft policy to provide support through the Council's PSH loans company Lendology to offer small grants and the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme for which a new capital investment will be required through the Government grant.

6. Exit Strategy and Homelessness Implications

- 6.1 It is acknowledged that we are currently facing a housing/homelessness crisis with high numbers of homeless cases approaching the council for assistance and limited available accommodation options with which to assist homeless households. Added to this scenario is the need to acknowledge the high numbers of expected Ukrainian guests becoming homeless currently and over the next year, a scenario that threatens to overwhelm the Housing service by adding unprecedented numbers of new homeless households on top the already high levels of homelessness being experienced, adding to pressure on temporary accommodation provision and available housing accommodation resources within the community.
- 6.2 We are currently experiencing homeless applications and are expecting to see a huge number of further homeless applications from Ukrainian guests who have become homeless through either breakdowns in relations with hosts, or hosts deciding to stop hosting where the Ukrainian guests are here through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or the Government's Family Visa scheme. We have no involvement in or sight of those that arrive through the Government's Family Visa scheme as this is entirely separate from the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- 6.3 There is no means of clarifying the numbers of Ukrainian guests within East Devon through the Government's Family Visa scheme who have arrived or are likely to arrive. At the date of writing this report (early August) we have records of 236 Ukrainian guests who have arrived through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, however this is likely to be slightly higher and around another 70 are expected imminently.
- 6.4 Initial Visas are only for six months, then guests need to re-apply to stay in the country. Government rules are that Homes for Ukraine scheme hosts have to sign up for a minimum of 6 months, a significant amount (around 40%) of our hosts that have received their initial Welcome Visit from Citizen's Advice East Devon have stated they will only host for 6 months. In addition, hosts only receive the monthly £350 Thank You Payments for 12 months. There are no such guidelines for the Families for Ukraine scheme which is not as regulated and no funding is provided to hosts, so there is a greater expectation of failed arrangement.

- 6.5 At the present time 3 Ukrainian households have become homeless from these schemes, following breakdowns of relations with hosts and family members. These households are currently being provided with temporary accommodation, within a scenario where there are no realistic opportunities to move on to more settled accommodation due to the reasons mentioned previously e.g. a lack of social housing numbers, lack of and inaccessibility to accommodation within the private sector. There are several other cases where the households are under threat of homelessness e.g. relations have broken down but they have not yet been evicted, and these situations are being managed by the Housing Options team on top of their current caseloads. The amount of time and resources attributed to supporting all the households throughout the schemes and afterwards cannot be understated.
- 6.6 However, these numbers could pale into insignificance compared to the numbers expected in the coming months. The concerning factor from a homelessness perspective is that there is no government exit strategy in place to assist Ukrainian refugees at the end of the lifespan of the various schemes. This scenario creates a high degree of certainty that we will be receiving high numbers of homeless applications from Ukrainian refugees at the end of the schemes, with no realistic alternative accommodation options available with which to assist them.
- 6.7 This situation will inevitably add massively to the pressure already placed on temporary accommodation resources, adding to the existing budgets, and ultimately social housing.
- 6.8 A re-matching scheme is being implemented, where a reserve list of hosts are recorded as showing an interest in accommodating Ukrainian refugees where relations with existing hosts have broken down, but this will only provide a temporary respite before the arrangement ultimately ends and is only considered as a temporary 'sticking plaster' solution.
- 6.9 In a situation where there is already a homelessness crisis and no accommodation available to resolve the problem, the impact on the service threatens to be overwhelming.
- 6.10 Therefore, in order to better enable the Housing Options team to be set up to deal with this additional demand, a case is being made within a separate Cabinet report for an additional fixed term Housing Officer to be brought in to manage cases of homelessness from Ukrainian refugees and to oversee the re-matching scheme. The cost for the additional post, which would be financed through the Ukrainian Support Scheme, would range between £34,380 (salary of £26,446 at the bottom of scale 6 plus on costs) and £37,926 (salary of £29,174 at the top of scale 6 plus on costs). This section of this report, and the attached recommendation (no 3) are a means of cross-referencing the case.

7. Second Service Level Agreement with Citizen's Advice East Devon

- 7.1 As anticipated, there was a need for significant enhancement to the previous Service Level Agreement (SLA) developed with East Devon Citizens Advice, which commissioned them to provide a welcome and wraparound support service to Ukrainian guests and hosts on our behalf for a cost to us of £31,000. This needed to be enhanced with urgency as many more Ukrainian guests were arriving with hosts in the district. We now have 118 host / guest arrangements compared with the 31 initially provided for under the previous Service Level Agreement. There was scope within the previous SLA to scale up, but not to that extent. In addition, the support needs and ongoing support required by both the hosts and Ukrainian guests are proving to be significant. The new Service Level Agreement also tries to anticipate a moderate growth in the number of hosts and Ukrainian guests as numbers are still rising.

7.2 The previous SLA was to provide the welcome and support service required by Government. Government has also now given us a duty to provide a re-matching scheme where relationships between hosts and guests have irreparably broken down and / or hosts have decided to stop hosting. We did not have the resources within East Devon District Council to provide this scheme. Citizen's Advice East Devon are uniquely placed to provide this on our behalf having already visited and met a lot of our Ukrainian guests already. Various teams within East Devon District Council will be involved in this re-matching scheme at certain stages but it will be led by Citizen's Advice East Devon.

7.3 The new Service Level Agreement has been commissioned, using an Exemption to Standing Orders (**Appendix 2**) and delegated authority, in anticipation that we can use the government funding to cover the cost of the service. This second Service Level Agreement is an additional cost of £203,580.

8. Staffing – how we have been dealing with Homes for Ukraine scheme

The Homes for Ukraine scheme designed by the UK Government is a very resource heavy and complex scheme. There are large amounts of errors in the Government data, much of the data is unreliable, and there are many other issues with the scheme as outlined in this report.

8.1 Virtual Project Team

Partly due to a lack of available capacity within the council and partly due to being unsure what the project would entail and how it would develop, we have been managing the Homes for Ukraine project using a virtual team made up of the Community Engagement and Funding Officer, Benefits Manager, Principal Environmental Health Officer and Housing Solutions Manager. This was a measure we could put in place immediately. However, in addition to the issue of those team members being over-stretched, there are issues that would benefit significantly from having another member to the team, as proposed below.

8.2 Current staffing resources being utilised

8.2.1 The Community Engagement and Funding Officer has been working full time on Homes for Ukraine since early May 2022, whilst also spending a few hours a week dealing with urgent parts of their normal job role. Even in them being full time, the backlog of work that they need to do on the Homes for Ukraine scheme alone is growing significantly. They did have support 3 days a week for several months from a Business Support Officer from within the Environmental Health service. However, due to increased workloads within this Service this agreement has ended so this adds a significant extra workload onto the Community Engagement and Funding Officer.

8.3 Benefits

8.3.1 One Benefit Officer has been allocated to making the interim payments for guests and the Sponsor Thank you payments. This is currently a full time role due to the number of sponsor payments that are needing to have the five safeguarding checks completed on the Foundry system before payment can be made. A number of these checks are still outstanding and require extra time to investigate and request that that checks are correctly recorded to allow payment. The Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager also spends one day a week on average authorising payments, attending meetings and ensuring that payments are made in line with the guidance that is continually being updated.

8.4 Housing Options

- 8.4.1 The Housing Options team are responsible for managing the Council's statutory homelessness duties. Since early May 2022 the Options team have been dealing with homeless presentations and potential homeless presentations from Ukrainian households where there is a breakdown in relations between guests and hosts. Our records show that to date there have been twelve such cases to date, with a current total of three households having been placed into temporary accommodation (spot purchase, B&B accommodation) after being evicted by their hosts and where there has been no means of resolving the issues so that the Ukrainian households can stay on for an extended period. It is inevitable that this number of households requiring temporary accommodation will rise sharply in the near future, and remain high due to the scenario of there being no suitable and available accommodation options to move the households on to. The biggest challenge will be at the end of the host and guest arrangements as there is no exit strategy in place to assist those households with accommodation. Therefore, it is expected that there will be an overwhelming number of homeless approaches as the only option available for the Ukrainian households.
- 8.4.2 The Housing Options team are also responsible for the re-matching programme for Ukrainian households facing a breakdown in relations with their hosts, although this process will only provide a temporary solution. No additional resources have been made available to undertake this significant stream of work, it has been absorbed by the Housing Officers who already have very high caseloads and in a scenario where we are already within a housing/homelessness crisis. There are approximately 300 live homeless cases at any one time and therefore an expected wave of approaches from Ukrainian households who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, will be extremely challenging for the Council, and a real challenge for the existing resources (staff and accommodation) to cope with.

8.5 Environmental Health

The Principal EHO works on average 0.2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) on Homes for Ukraine. The home inspection scheme part of Homes for Ukraine was led by the Empty Homes Officer working 0.9 FTE up to August. An Environmental Health Technical Officer has now taken on the project officer role working 0.4 FTE. One Environmental Health Officer and one Technical Officer have been working 0.2 FTE per week. Another Environmental Health Officer was on a 3 month fixed term contract 0.4 FTE which ended on the 30 August 2022.

We will continue to commit two officers to undertake the home inspection, at the equivalent of a total of 0.4 FTE and one officer 0.4 FTE to provide project management support to complete home inspections on the 95 Expression of Interest. We aim to complete 20 -30 of these home inspections by October, which is the end of the first six months.

The Private Sector Housing (PSH) team currently has one full time vacancy for an Environmental Health Officer so we have had to prioritise the workload based on public health priorities. PSH has had to pause proactive empty home visits and target those empty homes owners that could support the Homes for Ukraine scheme and problematic empty homes. We continue to deliver our core statutory duties.

9. Additional staffing requests

9.1 Homes for Ukraine Support role

- 9.1.1 Since June the Community Engagement and Funding Officer has had to stop their own day to day work to focus on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Doing

this is not sustainable for the council in the long term.

A number of key projects and priorities need action in the near future, namely preparing for the new Local Plan and using the new software package the council has purchased to increase engagement with local residents. Analysing the results from the Exmouth place-making consultation and the Worksmart survey with council staff. There is also the next stage of the Colyford Governance review that needs to be actioned.

The lack of a Council for Voluntary Service facility in the district has meant the voluntary sector has relied upon the current post-holder for advice and support. There has also been a lack of progress with consultation exercises with parish and town councils on projects to spend Section 106 money. A number of grants (such as the Community Building Fund) also need to be administered and managed.

9.1.2 It has also become apparent that the Homes for Ukraine role is not going to reduce as was originally expected. This is due to the continuing issues with the scheme that are discussed within this report, the increasing number of Ukrainian guests arriving, and also the fact that significant numbers of host / guest relationships that are now breaking down and hosts that have stopped hosting.

9.1.3 Due to a lack of available capacity within the council we have been managing the Homes for Ukraine project using a virtual team described above. This was a measure we could put in place immediately. However, all of those team members are over-stretched and there will be a definite benefit to recruiting an additional person to work on this project.

9.1.4 We propose to recruit a new full time role to the Communications, Digital and Engagement Team to support the Community Engagement and Funding Office at an officer level for a fixed-term period of 12 months. The cost for the additional post, which would be financed through the Ukrainian Support Scheme, would range between £34,380 (salary of £26,446 at the bottom of scale 6 plus on costs) and £37,926 (salary of £29,174 at the top of scale 6 plus on costs).

9.2 Housing Officer

Please see accompanying Cabinet report for an additional fixed term Housing Officer to be brought in to manage cases of homelessness from Ukrainian refugees and to oversee the re-matching scheme from East Devon District Councils side.

9.3 Home Inspections / Environmental Health

The ask is for retrospective approval for overtime 6 hours per week (£150.18) for 10 weeks (£1501.80), plus extending a fixed term contract 15 hours role for another 3 months £5631.75. This was an urgent need in the service, so unfortunately had to be started before this Cabinet report was discussed by Members.

9.4 Benefits

As a Benefit Assessment Officer has been allocated full time to making payments staff left to process benefit applications and answer telephone calls have been reduced. This is impacting on the number of days taken for the speed of processing applications reported on by the Department for Works and Pensions. We are looking into the possibility of recruiting a full time member of staff on a temporary contract to help answer phone calls coming into

the section. This would free up staff left to process the high level of benefit applications along with the administration of other discretionary funds such as the Household Support Fund and the Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme.

10. Conclusion

It is important for us to help Ukrainian residents out of such a terrible situation in their home country. We want to welcome our Ukrainian guests and hope that they are settling in well, and the relationships between them and their hosts are positive ones. However, Homes for Ukraine is a resource intensive Government scheme, with currently no exit strategy and many significant issues. This comes at a time when many existing staff are full to or beyond capacity, and it is difficult to recruit additional staff. We are very thankful to existing staff who have picked up areas of Homes for Ukraine work, and to Citizen's Advice East Devon for coming forward to offer to provide a significant amount of the service on our behalf. The council is also already seriously financially stretched due to years of reductions in the amount of funding we receive from Government. We are concerned that as time goes on the £6,300 per Ukrainian guest upon arrival will not be enough for us to continue to provide the administration and the support necessary under this complicated scheme and do it to the best of our ability. We will raise this issue with Devon County Council and with Government.

Financial implications:

Details of the financial implications are contained in the report. It is the assumption that all costs incurred by the Council will be covered by redirected Government Funding passed from County to us. This is being monitored carefully and our concerns over ongoing costs compared with a one off grant has been raised. The costs to date and proposals in the report are within the funding available.

Legal implications:

There is no direct comment to be made in relation to this report, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises.