

To: Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Date: 9th November 2023

Subject: Homes for Ukraine

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To update the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) on the local implementation of the UK Government 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 For the Scrutiny Board to consider and comment on this briefing note, making any recommendations to the Cabinet Member as desired.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched on 14 March 2022 by the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This scheme is open to Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and also to their immediate family members (for example spouse/partner and children under 18) who may be of other nationalities, to be sponsored to come to the UK. Applicants can apply from Ukraine or from any other third country.
- 3.2 Coventry City Council and the voluntary and community sector are continuing to work in partnership to ensure the necessary LA functions are in place to provide sanctuary to Ukrainian people and families arriving in the city and the on-going support required.

4 Update on Progress

- 4.1 Coventry City Council continues to deliver its 9 key functions under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. These include safeguarding DBS checks on all hosts, accommodation checks for suitability and safety of properties, administering of interim payments to guests, provision of education, service referrals, employment and benefits support, homelessness assistance, community integration and administration of 'thank you' payments to Hosts.

4.2 Arrival of Guests

Ukrainian guests are continuing to arrive but in much smaller numbers. Currently we have welcomed 390 guests, of which 71 are children under 18. A central registration portal managed by DLUHC has been set up which provides information about hosts and guests and is showing that a further 68 people are intending to

come to Coventry. We have not received any unaccompanied minors (without a parent or guardian).

4.2 Support for guests

Our main support for Ukrainian guests has continued to be centred on co-ordinating a range of wraparound support including the provision of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), employment support, benefit advice, finding school places, provision of temporary bus passes and provision of Library cards and GoCV cards. More importantly, safeguarding of guests remains a constant activity. The team are in regular contact with guests as they settle in the city through:

- In-person welfare checks
- Monthly welfare calls
- Meeting guests at one of the activities taking place at the Central Library

4.3 The second year of the Scheme has seen an increase in the number of guests moving into privately rented accommodation. This has necessitated the creation of a number of support mechanisms. Liaising with local landlords has been a key element, and the creation of a Coventry City Council Rent Guarantee Agreement, has supported guests to take a tenancy of their own, and has given Landlords the confidence to let properties to Ukrainian guests who have no history of managing a tenancy or a family to act as guarantor.

4.4 It has also been possible to provide accommodation for some guests in a dedicated HMO. By working closely with the Landlord, who is herself Ukrainian, a group of guests are sharing a property but with their own tenancies, thus enabling them to build up a level of independence for any future tenancies.

4.5 Guests have also needed support to understand and manage all their bills for energy supplies, council tax, water etc. and we have supported the implementation of the 50% council tax liability working closely with colleagues in the council tax department.

5 ESOL and Employment support

5.1 Whilst continuing to provide ESOL classes in the Central Library, twice per week and at different levels, a new ESOL Intensive course was introduced in January 2023. The key aim of the course is to support those nearer to the labour market with key information about finding work with each learner having a dedicated employment adviser to support them throughout the 4-week course with a view to helping them find work. These classes are delivered at two different levels of English and the 8th course is due to commence in November 2023. As well as ESOL there is guidance about interviews and other work-related experiences to help prepare guests for work in the UK.

Other Ukrainian guests who already have adequate levels of English also receive employment support and opportunities for work experience ahead of job applications and interviews providing vital preparation.

4.3 Education

A shortage of school places in the city has made placing children locally to sponsors challenging, but children after being placed in schools are settling in well overall. On arrival support with the purchase of school uniforms is provided and extra language support is provided to help children integrate. Some students have moved into FE facilities such as Coventry College and a few have taken University

including places at Coventry University and De Montfort University.

4.4 Employment

Over 30% (121) of eligible guests are currently employed in a range of different jobs including warehouse workers at one end of the job market, through to Web Design, Data Analytics, and Teaching at the other.

4.5 Leisure activities

Guests have enjoyed different performances at the Theatre with donations of tickets from the Albany Theatre and trips out to Baddesley Clinton National Trust, Skegness, and Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

6 Support for Hosts

6.1 A number of host webinars have been delivered to sponsors whose guests have already arrived in the city. This provides the opportunity for the team to update hosts with latest guidance and support available to them and their guests as well as for hosts to ask any questions they may have. The team is also available to answer queries by email and phone and hosts are encouraged to make contact regarding any issues or concerns arising.

6.2 There are a significant number of hosts now in their second year of hosting and these hosts are receiving £500 per month 'Thank You' payments, whilst those in their first year are receiving £350 per month.

7 Communication

7.1 There are several ways that both hosts and guests can communicate with the team. This includes:

- The use of our functional email address which is checked daily: H4UTeam@coventry.gov.uk
- A page on [the Council website](#) has been set up providing up-to-date information on the scheme: Coventry City Council website:
- A bi - weekly newsletter is also distributed to hosts and guests that details the provision and support available in the City.

8 Matching and Rematching

8.1 Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC) have been commissioned to:

- Facilitate the matching process between potential hosts and guests
- Provide support in finding alternative accommodation for guests where necessary (re-matching).
- Provide benefit advice and Universal Credit applications to new arrivals.

9 Coventry Ukrainian Community

9.1 Association of Ukrainians Great Britain (AUGB) has a community centre in Coventry and a vibrant community, there is also an active Ukrainian Catholic Church which has been very supportive. Together these organisations have supported the newly arrived guests from Ukraine by offering pastoral support, weekly coffee mornings with events such as outings and topical speakers and have supported us as a local authority extremely well.

10 Challenges

- 10.1 The Homes for Ukraine scheme is running efficiently but there are a few challenges now and some unknowns, creating uncertainty for guests for the future.
- 10.2 Finding appropriate work experience for those looking for employment is an important element of support. The team are looking to increase the number of work experience and volunteering opportunities available to guests to enable them to move into work more quickly.
- 10.3 We have had very few homelessness cases, mostly via the Family Scheme and two from the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but there is always a risk of people becoming homeless if their host arrangement breaks down.
- 10.4 The Homes for Ukraine Scheme is in its second year and there has been some speculation that it will be wound down at the end of the year (March 2024). The support implications of this are significant. Even if the war ends in Ukraine not everyone will want to return immediately and the level of support for those who arrive towards the end of scheme will remain significant. For those who remain but are still learning English and looking for employment, support will be needed. For those who would like to stay there is the uncertainty of visa extensions as the current Ukraine Visas are for 3 years only and are not a route to citizenship.
- 10.5 Clarity is needed regarding potential visa extensions and more assurance that local Councils will be resourced to provide support to all Ukrainian arrivals during the whole life of the scheme.
- 10.6 Officers will be supported at the meeting by a representative of the AUGB and one host and three of the Ukrainian guests who have arrived under the Homes for Ukraine scheme to provide a narrative about their 'lived in experiences' and to answer Members questions.

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