

Community Wellbeing and Housing Committee

14 June 2022



Title	Homes for Ukraine Scheme
Purpose of the report	For the Committee to note the Council's role in the above scheme
Report Author	Steph Green, Housing Strategy and Policy Officer
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Corporate Priority	Community / Service Delivery
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: Note the Council's role in the Homes for Ukraine scheme
Reason for Recommendation	To help the current refugee crisis in Ukraine by assisting with the Governments delivery of the Homes for Ukraine scheme

1. Key issues

1.1 In February 2022, Spelthorne Borough Council approved a Refugee Scheme policy. This policy requests the Council to assess and examine the details of Refugee Schemes brought forward by the Home Office, for its impact on the local community, the Council's resources to support the scheme, and deliverability. Details of a new scheme to support the refugee crisis in Ukraine is given below.

1.2 The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched on 14 March 2022 by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and their immediate family may be sponsored to come to the UK as 'guests'. There is no cap to the scheme and is dependent on the capacity of sponsors who come forward. The scheme is a visa-based scheme.

1.3 Under the scheme, guests can live and work in the UK for up to 3 years and be able to access welfare benefits, healthcare, and employment.

1.4 Sponsors must provide accommodation for a minimum of six months and in return, can receive an optional 'thank you' payment of £350 per month for up to the first 12 months (per residential address and not per each guest). Sponsors are unable to charge rent¹.

1.5 Individual sponsors (and organisations) were able to register their interest from 14th March 2022 and the Home Office opened visa applications from 18th March 2022. Sponsors and guests agree to match themselves externally prior to making the visa application. Both parties must pass security checks.

1.6 Councils are expected to offer several support services:

- **Initial Reception** – Sponsors are expected to meet guests upon arrival or provide instructions on how to reach the accommodation. Due to proximity to

¹ Therefore a HMO license is not required

Heathrow Airport as a port of entry, LB Hillingdon Council have been asked to establish welcome arrangements to support short-term arrival needs. This includes immediate humanitarian assistance. From Sunday 20 March 2022, guests arriving were eligible for a free single onward journey via rail, bus, or coach.

- **Data Sharing** – Spelthorne Borough Council have direct access to DLUHC's case-management system to see matched data for Spelthorne and submit confirmation of necessary sponsor checks.
- **Safeguarding Checks** – Councils have a safeguarding duty and must inspect sponsor accommodation once guests arrive. Once a visa application has been made, Councils must conduct an in-person visit to confirm that the accommodation is suitable and establish there are no serious welfare or safeguarding concerns. Councils are required to undertake basic DBS checks on all adults in the sponsor household. Where guests arriving include children or vulnerable adults, Councils must undertake enhanced DBS with barred lists checks on all adults in the sponsor household.
- **Interim Payment for Guest** – The Council should provide an interim payment of £200 per guest for subsistence costs² which does not need to be repaid by guests. Surrey County Council (SCC) have provided pre-paid cards which are being issued by Spelthorne Borough Council.
- **Provision of Education** – SCC are required to provide school places for children.
- **Service Referrals** – Councils should provide advice and make referrals to health services as appropriate.
- **Work and Benefits** – Councils should support guests to access the Jobcentre Plus for benefit assessments and employment advice.
- **Homelessness Assistance** – Where a relationship breaks down between a sponsor and guest and the guest becomes homeless or is threatened with homelessness, the Council's statutory homelessness duty will apply.
- **Community Integration** – Councils must support the integration of Ukrainian families into the local community e.g. through community events, community champions, interfaith networks and provide access to translation services. Mutual support is being enabled between guests arriving in the borough of Spelthorne where they are happy to connect with other applicants of the scheme. The North East Surrey Family Support Team have recently set up weekly drop-in sessions at Ashford Youth Club providing a supportive environment for both guests and hosts to connect and get signposting information. The Family Support team are also recruiting two dedicated Ukrainian resettlement workers to provide more intensive support as families continue to arrive in the area.
- **Administering Payments to Sponsors** – sponsors will be eligible for an optional 'thank you' payment of £350 per month paid in arrears for up to the first 12 months. This is not released until property checks have been completed and the family has arrived³.

² Factored into the funding tariff. Councils will have discretion within the tariff to top-up guests with additional payments.

³ Funding for these payments will be provided, but it is expected that Council's cover administration costs from the tariff including costs of fraud prevention.

2. Administering the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

- 2.1 Committee are asked to note that the scheme has opened, and individual residents have offered to sponsor Ukraine refugees. As of 26th May 2022, 61 guests have arrived across 25 properties. The Housing Options team are inspecting each property to ensure suitability and are carrying out a re-inspection once guests have arrived. Figures fluctuate slightly but we are currently expecting around 115 guests in total.
- 2.2 A process has been determined by each district and borough with SCC to administer the scheme. Housing Options are obtaining the host and guests details from the DLUHC portal. The team are then undertaking a property inspection to ensure suitability and safety. Following this, the team are initiating DBS checks via SCC's DBS system. Any safeguarding concerns are being flagged to SCC. After all host checks are successfully completed and uploaded to the DLUHC system, a subsequent visit is undertaken to confirm the guests have arrived and to issue family members with a £200 pre-paid card. If no concerns, the team are advising finance to issue the sponsor a monthly £350 payment (where opted for by the sponsor). The two dedicated Ukrainian resettlement workers appointed by the North East Surrey Family Support Team will assist guests with community integration, education, employment, benefit, and health care arrangements.
- 2.3 All Surrey district and boroughs are meeting fortnightly to share updates and good practice. A fortnightly wider immigration meeting hosted by SCC also provides updates across all refugee schemes. Funding of the scheme is being discussed between Surrey Finance Officers at the Surrey Treasurers meeting. Spelthorne Borough Council have set-up a working group of key officers, this includes a staff member who is a sponsor and is providing their perspective from the host's experience.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 For the first year, the Government is providing funding at a rate of £10,500 per person. Surrey Treasurers have agreed that a 10% contingency will be set aside for homelessness prevention with the remaining balance to be apportioned 50:50 between SCC and district and boroughs. Surrey Treasurers indicate an initial allocation to Spelthorne Borough Council of £486,000, this is to reflect the resource provision to support the families. Some of this funding will be used to appoint the two dedicated Ukrainian resettlement workers who will sit within the North East Family Support team. Surrey Treasurers are agreeing a template for capturing costs to enable grant claim submissions and to monitor expenditure to ensure no council is at a disadvantage. Government payments will be made in arrears every quarter from June 2022. We are currently awaiting guidance on funding for future years.
- 3.2 This funding is not ringfenced and has several conditions attached. It will match the tariff offered under the first year of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) schemes. However, Councils are not being asked to source initial accommodation under this scheme as it is being provided by the sponsor.
- 3.3 The sponsor thank you payments of £350 per month are administered by districts and borough councils which is covered by additional Government grant funding. We have made our first payments. However, Councils are expected to cover administrative costs within the tariff.

- 3.4 The Government is providing additional funding to upper tier Councils to provide education services under this scheme. The Department for Education will allocate funding per pupil bases at the following annual rates:
- Early years (ages 2-4) - £3,000
 - Primary (ages 5-11) - £6,850
 - Secondary (ages 11-18) - £8,755
- 3.5 Councils are expected to use the tariff to meet all associated costs for providing services and administering payments. The Government will consider claims for additional essential costs regarded as exceptional to normal expenditure.
- 3.6 Spelthorne Borough Council has set-up as a cost centre and associated budget codes to monitor expenditure.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1 The Committee should note there is a second separate 'Ukraine Family Scheme'. Family members of British nationals, UK settled persons and certain others are permitted to come to or stay in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme. Applicants can extend their stay for up to 3 years and are able to work, study and claim benefits in the UK.
- 4.2 Whilst councils have not been instructed to provide support to applicants accessing this second scheme. It is still within the Council's interests to provide advice to Ukrainian refugees who approach the Council for support, to ensure accommodation is sustained and to prevent homelessness.

5. Risk Considerations

- 5.1 There is a risk of homelessness arising in cases where the relationship between host and guests breaks down. In this instance, the Council's statutory homelessness duty will apply. There are greater risks associated with the 'Ukraine Family Scheme' due to the relative lack of oversight. Whilst funding has been provided for the first year of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, future funding has not yet been advised so there is a longer-term risk around rehousing guests.
- 5.2 To mitigate these risks, the Housing Options team are arranging home visits as soon as possible to welcome the family upon arrival and to issue a £200 pre-paid card per guest. As noted, it was agreed at Surrey Treasurers that a 10% contingency be set aside for homelessness prevention for districts and boroughs. Wrap-around support is being provided by the North East Surrey Family Support Team to assist households with benefit applications, education, employment opportunities and ongoing support. If there are potential risks of eviction, these will be flagged to the Housing Options team who will negotiate with the host to sustain the accommodation arrangement. Furthermore, DLUHC have recently announced a rematching process whereby guests can be matched to a new sponsor in certain circumstances. If a local authority determines that it is not viable or safe for guests to stay where they are, guests can be rematched. In instances of early sponsorship breakdown, local authorities may be able to end a homelessness prevention or relief duty owed to a guest by facilitating a rematch, providing the placement and accommodation are suitable and there is a reasonable prospect of it continuing for at least 6 months.

6. Equality and Diversity

- 6.1 An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out and is provided in Appendix B. This assessment has not identified any significant impact on equalities, although Committee should note that the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty is an ongoing duty and not discharged through the completion of an assessment. The Options team will minimise any potential disproportionate impact through regular data monitoring and ongoing review of the scheme.

7. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 7.1 The proposed scheme itself does not have any impact on the Council's sustainability / climate change position.

8. Timetable for implementation

- 8.1 Spelthorne Borough Council is already liaising with the Home Office, DLUHC and SCC to support the scheme.

Background papers: See the Council's Refugee Scheme Policy.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Homes for Ukraine Scheme CEX Letter

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment