

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 28 March 2023 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Drew – Chair
Councillor Graham Cone – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Anna Bradnam Tom Bygott
Sue Ellington Sally Ann Hart
James Hobro Helene Leeming
Richard Stobart

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Chamber: Gareth Bell (Communications and Communities Service Manager), Laurence Damary-Homan, Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser), Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Remotely: Ben Thackray (Development Officer - Homes for Ukraine)

Councillors Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities) and Heather Williams were in attendance.

Councillors Peter Fane (Committee member), John Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Housing) and Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) were in attendance remotely.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillor Judith Rippeth sent apologies.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stephen Drew declared an interest in Item 6 (Homes for Ukraine) having been a Ukrainian host since June 2022.

For the record, Councillor Bill Handley stated that, as Lead Cabinet Member for Communities, he had been heavily involved in the Homes for Ukraine project.

Councillor Helene Leeming declared an interest in Item 6 (Homes for Ukraine) having been a Ukrainian host since June 2022.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

By affirmation, the Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2023.

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

6. Homes for Ukraine project status and future challenges

The Committee considered a report that had been requested by its Chair and Vice-Chair. The report enabled Committee members to review the way in which the Homes for Ukraine project had operated during the previous 12 months and recognise some of the challenges now being faced by the project. The Committee noted that South Cambridgeshire District Council had played a nationally recognised role in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, partly as a result of the high numbers of Ukrainian guests housed in the district but also because of successful partnership working and an innovative approach to some elements of the scheme.

Committee members noted the significant financial contribution made by central government, which had enabled the Council to resource the project effectively. They also noted the variety of measures put in place to manage the gap between local housing allowance and local private rents, thus reducing the risk of homelessness among Ukrainian guests. These measures included a buddy scheme allowing Ukrainian guests jointly to seek alternative accommodation, and support from central government enabling the Council to purchase additional housing to be rented to guests. In response to a question concerning the health and wellbeing of both guests and hosts, Members were told that feedback had been limited so far (possibly because the support from South Cambridgeshire District Council had exceeded expectation) but good two-way communication was in place to ensure feedback was received and needs could be met.

There had been, and continued to be, good co-ordination between the team supporting Ukrainian guests and the Council's existing housing advice and homelessness service. Financial support from central government had helped manage an increase in demand on existing staff from the scheme and extra resource had been employed to ensure efficient management of the whole project, including the support to help guests move-on to live more independently.

The financial commitment from Government had also meant the Council was able to take early action to resource the moving on team which the committee heard had helped the Council get into a good position to ensure a variety of options to move on were available.

Committee members were reassured to hear that Ukrainian guests seeking Council housing were subject to the same process as other South Cambridgeshire residents. They welcomed evidence of the alignment between the many achievements of the Ukrainian guests project and the Council's priorities.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Communities assured the Committee that South Cambridgeshire District Council would continue to do everything it could to support all its residents, whether permanent or refugees.

Having reviewed the report, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee was impressed with success of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Homes for Ukraine project to date and

- a. **emphasised** the need to document the considerable number of positive lessons learned, including the benefits of a well-structured and corporate approach; and

- b. **encouraged** Cabinet and officers to continue the excellent two-way communication with hosts and guests to seek more feedback and ensure that support remained appropriate and focussed.

7. **Work Programme**

Members noted the Scrutiny and Overview Committee work programme attached to the agenda.

Councillor Richard Stobart, Chair of the Young People Task & Finish Group, updated the Committee about the Group's progress to date.

8. **To Note the Date of the next meeting**

The next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting had been scheduled to take place on Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 6.20 p.m.
