

Report to:	Scrutiny & Overview Committee	28 March 2023
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bill Handley	
Lead Officer:	Liz Watts, Chief Executive	

Homes for Ukraine project status and future challenges

Executive Summary

1. This report sets out a short description of the Homes for Ukraine project as it has operated over the last 12 months and raises some of the challenges now faced by the project. South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) has played a nationally recognised role in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, partly due to the high numbers of Ukrainian guests housed in the area, but also due to successful partnership working and innovative approach to some elements of the scheme.

Recommendations

2. This report is written at the request of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, and the committee is recommended to note and provide feedback to the Homes for Ukraine project team on its content.

Overview

Scheme Launch

3. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on Friday 18 March 2022, the Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched by The Home Office. National guidance was published for Local Authorities as the onus was placed on them to manage the scheme at a local level. The upper tier authority receives a £10,500 tariff per arrival into the area. They must work in partnership with local district councils and agree locally how funding will be utilised and shared with partners. A national online system was set up to help manage and process the data records of both UK hosts and Ukrainian guests who had applied to join the scheme. SCDC received access to this system on the 28 March 2022, and combined with in-house datasets, use this system to record activity within the scheme.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's role in the scheme

4. The Government's Homes for Ukraine guidance set out clear expectations and duties for local councils to ensure sufficient checks were in place to protect hosts and guests. The detail that underpins the national guidance has developed considerably over time, but those core elements and mandatory checks remain. SCDC worked in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council, and the voluntary sector to agree

who was best placed to carry out each role. Most of the local checks were agreed to be undertaken at a district level. SCDC's role covered the following areas:

- **Accommodation checks** – to check host accommodation was suitable.
 - **DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks** – carried out on hosts and all people over 18 living with them. This was to ensure there was not a clear reason why a guest should not be placed with the host's family.
 - **Welfare checks** – to ensure both Ukrainian guests and guests were settled and safe once living together.
 - **Payments** – an initial one-off payment to guests upon arrival, and monthly 'thank you' payments to hosts.
 - **Data processing** – to manage and process data, including daily interaction with Government databases, to ensure the smooth running of the scheme.
 - **Community related activities** – to ensure needs of guests and hosts are considered and met using tariff funding.
 - **Rematching and homelessness cases** – responsibility for emerging homelessness cases arising from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme if host/guest relations break down. This includes rematching to a new host where necessary.
 - **Communications** – to keep guests, hosts, councillors, parish and town councils, community support groups and the wider community informed and updated.
5. Liz Watts (Chief Executive) as Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) appointed Gareth Bell (Communications and Communities Service Manager) to oversee and manage the project. Due to the scale of the project, specialist teams were formed with leads who had relevant expertise. These teams were able to quickly mobilise due to the urgency of the project. The teams created were:
- Accommodation (led by Rory Cosgrove, Environmental Health)
 - DBS (led by Rachael Jackson, Licensing)
 - Welfare checks and homelessness (led by Susan Hinawski, Housing)
 - Payments (led by Lynda Hayward, Benefits)
 - Data (led by Jason Clarke, Communities)
 - Community (led by Kathryn Hawkes, Communities)
 - Communications (led by Tom Horn, Communications)

Following an initial period of redeploying existing SCDC officer resources to ensure each team had sufficient resources, each team lead assessed the resources required for a longer-term project and additional fixed term and temporary staff were employed. The manager overseeing the project spoke regularly with team leads, and teams interacted daily with one another. Team leads were empowered to make the necessary decisions to ensure the best use of resources and a swift and effective service was provided. More formal weekly meetings were set up to ensure the corporate project was fully joined up across the sub-teams and departments.

6. Officers have supported the Department for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up, the Home Office, Central Government, and their software partners to enhance and shape their systems, learning from our experience and solid handle on our cases, processes, data, and our communities. Housing colleagues also being involved in policy conversations to help shape the national programme of funding to increase the number of homes for refugees.

Current statistics

7. Throughout the scheme, South Cambridgeshire has remained one of the Local Authorities with the highest number of Ukrainian arrivals. This shows how South Cambridgeshire residents were keen to support and provide homes for Ukrainian refugees. The key statistics to demonstrate the local response in South Cambridgeshire so far, are:

- **995 visa applications** by Ukrainians (Gov data 28/02/23).
- **894 visas granted** in South Cambridgeshire (Gov data 28/02/23).
- **408 hosts** have received **787 Ukrainian guests** into their homes.
- **914 DBS checks** have been completed.
- **405 welfare visits** have been made.
- **516 home checks** have been completed.
- **747 payments (totalling £261,450)** have been made to guests upon arrival.
- **3,353 thank you payments (totalling £980,000)** have been made to hosts.
- **232 hosts** are currently housing **475 guests** (as of 10 March 2023).

Communications and community support

8. Regular communication with hosts and guests was an important factor in the success of the project. A regular newsletter was created updating hosts, summarising relevant information from the previous week and upcoming changes or opportunities. This was also provided to councillors, parish and town councils and people who signed up for updates.

9. Web pages were developed to provide an online welcome pack and resource centre for hosts and guests. This approach made it easier information to be translated into the guests' first language and to ensure as the national scheme changed our information remained up to date and current. Translation services were set up for those who needed it and Facebook groups were set up for hosts and guests to promote conversation, learning and interaction.

10. Some early decisions were made by the council around payments. The initial £200 payment to help guests through their first weeks in the UK was increased to £350 to make sure they had enough money until they found work or applied for, and received, Universal Credit. This was funded through the Government tariff. An additional £150 opt-in payment was also offered to hosts each month from 29 September 2022. This was in addition to the £350 per month thank you payment set by the national scheme. The change was due to host feedback on cost pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis. Our communication channels allowed us to make decisions that were informed by effective conversations and feedback.

11. The Communities team also researched the needs of guests and launched several schemes to support them, which included:

- **Bus tickets** – 10 free day tickets as an initial welcome, arranged by Cambridgeshire County Council in partnership with Stagecoach
- **Free bikes** – over 200 bikes to guests in partner organisations Owl Bikes, Tag Bikes and CamTrust (organisations that recycle bikes for reuse)
- **Bikeability cycle training** – 12 sessions have been held so far
- **English lessons** – over 100 guests have received ESOL English lessons through our partners, A Learning Place and CamRuss

- **Cambridge Russian School activities** – funding for 11 children to attend to carry out a range of activities to improve their health and wellbeing
- **Small grant fund** – funding allocated for bids from local projects to improve integration and wellbeing of guests. 20 funded so far.
- **Free devices to get online** – 243 laptops/tablets/phones have been provided to guests through Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign
- **Outdoor wellbeing programme** – 5 Ukrainian children have been provided places on outdoor mental health programme
- **Forest school** – 10 children have been provided places at Forest School which provides inclusive outdoor fun sessions to improve their health and wellbeing
- **Mental wellbeing support for hosts** – 26 hosts have attended monthly sessions provided by the Association of Family Therapy
- **Cambridge Botanical Gardens** – 105 guests have received a free pass
- **Pantomime tickets** – 71 guests were provided with free local pantomime tickets
- **Information events** – 60 people attended information events aimed at supporting guests and hosts, and a further 67 are signed up for upcoming sessions related to supporting guests to consider moving on to more independent living.

The 'Moving On' project and the key future challenges

12. Following the initial phase of the Homes for Ukraine project where we worked with partners and got all the core systems, checks and support in place, it was apparent that the biggest challenge would be how we support people to find suitable and affordable accommodation following their stay with a host. A Moving On Team was set up to focus on how to help people understand their options for more independent living. This team is led by Ben Thackray. The Moving On Team works closely with all sub-teams but in particular the existing Welfare team which is led by Susan Hinawski and involves a number of housing colleagues.
13. The initial Government Homes for Ukraine scheme asked hosts to commit to hosting for a minimum of 6 months. As the scheme approached the 6 month point the Government encouraged as many hosts as possible to continue for at least 12 months. Host payments were available for up to 12 months at that point. The Government subsequently announced in December 2022 that thank you payments for hosts would be extended again, this time to 24 months. This has seen the approach for the Moving On Team have to adapt.
14. Reasons for moving on are varied, including guests experiencing relationship breakdowns with their host or coming naturally to the end of the time with their initial host as all hosts have different views on how long they wish to house their Ukrainian guests. Their circumstances also change. The team have managed to collate a list of hosts who are happy with shorter term placements, which is especially helpful in more urgent situations and means the team have another option to avoid homelessness applications and temporary accommodation. These hosts are known as "Interim Hosts". This form of short-term hosting is far preferable to SCDC needing to use bed and breakfast accommodation. The biggest benefit is that interim hosts

also provide the additional support many guests need during their stay. We are not aware of this innovative approach being implemented widely.

15. The Moving On Team provide a single point of contact (SPOC) for guests who are leaving their hosts and existing hosts who would like us to support their guest move on. The Moving On Team either support guests move into their own accommodation or help them rematch to another host who have expressed an interest in hosting.
16. The Moving On Team pro-actively contact guests and hosts at least 2 months before the point we know the host may be considering whether they are able to continue hosting (this is based on survey feedback and landmarks in the scheme). This ensures a common understanding between hosts and guests, and where necessary the team can then begin a dialogue around their future options in good time.
17. The Moving On Team has processed results from surveys sent out to hosts, capturing how long hosts wish to house their guests. This data forecasting has helped predict when we are likely to see an increase in guests needing support with rematching or moving on to live more independently in their own rented homes. The data shows a peak predicted over May and July 2023 with larger numbers of hosts wishing to end their current arrangement. The Moving On Team proactively support and tailor their approach according on a case-by-case basis.
18. The main moving on options are:
 - **Rematching** – support from the Council to find the guest a new host
 - **Rematching to an interim host** (for shorter term placements)
 - **Applying for social housing**
 - **Renting privately**
 - **Shared Renting with another Ukrainian family** – this makes rental more affordable
 - **Lodging** – remaining with your host under a new agreement
19. The moving on options are supported by schemes SCDC has set up to ensure the same support is available to Ukrainian guests as all other residents who contact SCDC for housing support. The following schemes are funded through the Government tariff:
 - **Rent Deposit Scheme** – providing a one-off payment as a gift to cover the deposit for a rental property (equivalent to a maximum of 5 weeks rent)
 - **Rent in Advance** – providing a one-off payment as a gift to cover one months' rent in advance
 - **Help with essential Items** – we provide up to £2,000 worth of essential furniture and/or white goods to help guests when they transition into their own property
 - **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** - a Ukraine specific DHP fund has been launched which allows guests to apply to the fund if they have a shortfall between the Local Housing Allowance rate and the rent charged on their property, similar to the existing DHP scheme that was already in place
20. All initiatives have parameters to ensure fair and consistent support. The overarching guidance states that if the guest has savings that amount to more than 3 times the value of the market rent of the property they wish to rent, they will not be eligible for support.

21. Other existing support such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support is available to guests if they qualify.
22. Due to the proactive nature of the Moving On Team, including the early identification of guests who we know are coming towards the end of their initial stay with their host, nearly all moves are planned. Through this work, the council has worked directly with 170 families or individuals to either rematch them, provide advice on their moving on options, or support them to move on to live more independently. There has been a further 125 families or individuals that have sought their own accommodation, or moved on without support from the council, totalling 295 families or individuals that have now moved on. This data has been tracked by our leavers form which is completed by hosts. You can see below a breakdown of where the 295 families/individuals moved on to:
- **Rematched:** 68 families or individuals
 - **Returned to Ukraine:** 74 families or individuals
 - **Renting privately:** 139 families or individuals
 - **Provided with social housing:** 14 families or individuals
23. Guests still arrive on a weekly basis into South Cambridgeshire under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, normally with three years granted on their visa or biometric residence permit to remain in the UK. The rate of new arrivals is now far lower than in the initial months of the scheme. With no sign of the conflict in Ukraine ending, it appears this programme will continue for the foreseeable future.
24. Although we have seen success in supporting people to move on, and some have moved on with little support and advice, the high private rental costs in this area, lack of rental properties, and the gap between private rent and the Local Housing Allowance means that good quality and affordable housing will remain the greatest pressure we face over the coming months and years.

Implications

25. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

26. The Homes for Ukraine scheme costs have been met by the £10,500 tariff received per arrival. Funds are provided to Cambridgeshire County Council and SCDC have been able to request and draw down from these funds to meet all funding and resourcing requirements. The funding has been used to support all of the ongoing activities, and adequately resource the scheme by recruiting additional staff to meet the new demands incurred through the work. There is adequate funding available for all current work, and future work at this time.

Staffing

27. Temporary staff have been recruited to meet the demand of the scheme. Some existing staff have had work reallocated, and some temporarily moved into slightly different positions to allow sufficient time working on the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Risks/Opportunities

28. The main risk associated with the Homes for Ukraine scheme is the potential to see an increase in homelessness applications, which could in turn result in the need to house Ukrainian guests in temporary accommodation, at a cost to the Council.

Equality and Diversity

29. Appropriate equality impact assessments have been carried out on each element of the scheme to ensure parity and to ensure no one is adversely impacted.

Health & Wellbeing

30. Health and wellbeing has been at the heart of the Homes for Ukraine operation, and the report details in section 6, the many ways SCDC has been able to support and help guests and residents during the scheme.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

31. The scheme has supported some local businesses and charitable organisations through some of the community-based work that has been undertaken. Ukrainian guests are free to work in the UK, and we are aware that many guests have sought their own employment within South Cambridgeshire and Cambridgeshire. The initial bus ticket scheme helped many of these guests travel to work in the early stages of their employment.

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in

32. The Moving On project assists guests moving into rented accommodation, and ensures support is available to make the move affordable.

Being green to our core

33. The project has promoted reuse and recycling of bikes, laptops, phones and other items to support Ukrainian guests.

A modern and caring Council

34. A corporate priority on our Business Plan (A Modern and Caring Council 6d and 6dii) explains how we will coordinate the homes for Ukraine scheme and ensure support for hosts and guests is available especially around moving out of initial hosted accommodation. This report covers how we are achieving this objective.

Background information

Decision notices on schemes in place – please see the below links that lead to decision notices regarding support packages for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

19 December 2022:

[Issue details - Discretionary Housing Payment scheme - Homes for Ukraine \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

19 December 2022:

[Decision - Homelessness Prevention Fund - Homes for Ukraine \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

7 February 2023

[Decision - Essential items support policy - Homes for Ukraine \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

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