

7 March 2023		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Homes for Ukraine Response Programme		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non key	
Report of: Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a		
Accountable Director: Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director of Housing		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report has been drafted to reflect the activities of the service during the year. The challenges facing the Council during 2022 are well publicised and this report should be read in that context. Future service activity will need to reflect the intervention the Council finds itself in. Particularly difficult decisions will need to be made on levels of service and methods of service delivery during 2023 and beyond.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022 to allow the safe arrival of over 100,000 guests in the UK by the Government. However, the Ukraine and Russia war is worsening, so the need for new sponsors is increasing nationally.

Thurrock has welcomed 130 Ukrainian guests and 116 hosts have offered to sponsor a named Ukrainian national/family to live with them at the end of January 2023.

The council has kept up with the pace of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This report updates members on the support and duties that the council has under this scheme. The UK Government asks that local authorities make provision for a welcome and resettlement support service, property inspections, safeguarding checks, administering payments to Ukrainian guests and host households and a rematching scheme when host/guest relationships breakdown on when hosts decide to stop hosting.

The key services that have been and continue to be drawn into this work are:

Private Housing, Homeless, Children's, Adults, Finance, HR, Corporate Communications, Community Development, Education, and Public Health departments.

Senior Management have oversight of the council's response to Ukrainian guests and local sponsors, operating under the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Recently, the Government has announced new measures in January 2023 designed to maintain this programme's sustainability over the next 2 years.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Committee comments on the progress of the Private Housing Service response to the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Thurrock.**
- 1.2 That the Committee notes the council can deliver its Ukrainian response programme within central government funding**
- 1.3 That the Committee notes homeless Ukrainian guests may be housed out of borough given local housing pressures if homeless presentations steadily rise**

2. Homes for Ukraine scheme

- 2.1 The scheme allows Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor who can provide suitable accommodation.
- 2.2 Applicants can apply from Ukraine or from any other third country.
- 2.3 Children, who are currently outside of the UK, can use the scheme to reunite with their parent or legal guardian who are currently living in the UK, if they are the child's sponsor.
- 2.4 Hosts [sponsor] undergo eligibility and suitability checks prior to any visa being issued to a Ukrainian guest. Hosts have to sign up for a minimum of 6 months.
- 2.5 Individual members of the public can sponsor a guest from Ukraine who meets the eligibility criteria for this scheme.
- 2.6 Ukrainian guests have permission to remain in the UK for 90 days, and on arrival they can apply for a Biometric Residence Permit [BRP] to stay for 3 years in the UK. The BRP card allows the guest to work, proves their right to study and claim any benefits they are eligible for.
- 2.7 From July 15, 2022, young people with parental consent were allowed to enter the UK without an adult relative to live with a host. The host must pass an enhanced safeguarding check before an eligible child can begin their visa application.
- 2.8 The government is encouraging new hosts to come forward to meet the anticipated number of Ukraine guests rising as the war escalates abroad.

3. The Tactical Co-ordination Group Response

- 3.1 The Assistant Director of Housing chairs the council's Tactical Co-ordination Group [TCG] consisting of Housing, Public Health, Adults, Children, Civil Contingency, Education, HR, Corporate Communications, and Finance, that oversees the council's Homes for Ukraine response programme, including the co-ordination of support and activities, and monitors emerging issues to ensure the council fulfil their responsibilities.
- 3.2 Adults, Children's, Finance, Community Development, Homeless, Education, Public Health, Corporate Communications and HR departments have been all drawn into various workstreams from across the council to deliver this programme.
- 3.3 Wider council services also have attended multi agency meetings with East of England Strategic Migration Partnership [SMP] and Essex County Council to receive information, communicate updates and local responses, share good practice, and make effective decisions to support guests and sponsors.

4. Homes for Ukraine scheme key information

- 4.1 Please note these are the records at the time of writing this report, the numbers will change before Housing Overview Scrutiny on 7 March 2023.
- 4.2 This dashboard below shows the overall activity of the number of Guest arrivals and expected arrivals in Thurrock and Host payments from March 2022 to January 2023.
- 4.3 The key headlines are:
 - Thurrock has 116 sponsors matched to 244 Ukrainian guests of whom 130 have arrived and 74 have stayed to live in Thurrock.
 - 1 unaccompanied minor has arrived in Thurrock, since July 2022. The council's private fostering team is monitoring the young person's safety and care needs until he reaches 18 years of age.
 - The council has a statutory homeless duty where the sponsorship arrangement has broken down. So far, 11 Ukrainian guests have made homeless presentations requiring housing assistance and 3 of them have been housed in temporary accommodation.
 - 56 guests have left Thurrock to find an independent property, move closer to friends or nearer to work.
 - Ukrainian guests do have the right to leave the Homes for Scheme and find their own accommodation renting privately from a landlord in Thurrock or elsewhere in the UK, without involving the council.

- 4 guests have return back home to Ukraine.
- Sponsor ‘thank you’ payments are up to date as per the scheme conditions.
- The council temporarily increased the sponsor ‘thank you’ payment from £350 to £700 during the winter to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis and the rise of energy prices impacting sponsors housing Ukrainian guests.

Performance Data	Number
Total Number of Sponsor Requests	116
Total Number of Active Sponsors	44
Total Number of Sponsors withdrawn	15
Number of Ukrainian Guests Arrived in Thurrock	130
Total number of Ukrainian Guests expected to arrive in Thurrock	244
The total number of Adult Guests	99
The total number of Child Guests	31
The total number of Unaccompanied Minors who have arrived in Thurrock	1
Number of Ukrainian Guests who have left Thurrock	56
The number of current Guests in Thurrock	74
Number of Property Inspections completed	84
Number of Property Inspections waiting to be carried out within 10 days	3
No of Safeguarding Checks carried out	84
No of Welcome Visits	130
No of Resettlement Visits carried out	67
Number of Relationship breakdowns where the guest has left the property	6
Number of rematches of Guests reassigned to Thurrock Hosts from another local authority	1
Number of rematches of Thurrock Guests to a new Thurrock host	1
Number of Ukrainian Guests that have returned home to Ukraine	4
Number of Ukrainian Guests reassigned to another Local Authority	5
Number of Homeless approaches from guests here under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme	11
Number of £200 welcome payments paid to Ukrainian Guests	105
Total payment of Welcome Payments paid to Ukrainian Guests	£21,000
Total number of £350 Sponsor Payments made to Hosts	275
Total Value of £350 Sponsor Payments	£96,250
Total number of £350 top up payments made to Hosts from October to January 2023 for the cost-of-living crisis and energy price rise	138
Total Value of £350.00 top up payments	£48,300

4.4 The distribution of Ukrainian guests across Thurrock can be viewed in the table below.

Area	No of Guests
Aveley and Uplands	17
Belhus	8
Chadwell St Mary	2
Chafford and North Stifford	18
Corringham and Fobbing	4
East Tilbury	3
Grays Riverside	8
Grays Thurrock	15
Little Thurrock Blackshots	3
Little Thurrock Rectory	3
Ockendon	14
Orsett	6
Stanford East and Corringham Town	1
Stanford Le Hope West	9
Stifford Clays	1
The Homesteads	1
Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park	0
Tilbury St Chads	2
West Thurrock and South Stifford	9
Total	130

5. Government Funding

- 5.1 The council has received £959,000 of Homes for Ukraine funding in 2022/23, this is subject to increase.
- 5.2 The UK government has paid the council £10,500 per each Ukrainian guest that has arrived in Thurrock. It's paid once to support Ukrainian guest and their sponsors.
- 5.3 The council must comply with the following payment conditions of the Homes for Ukraine scheme:
- A] to have completed a property inspection of the sponsoring household property
- B] to confirm that the accommodation is suitable, the guest is well and there are no serious safeguarding or welfare concerns
- 5.4 The sponsors 'thank you' payment must be paid monthly in arrears. The council administers this payment on behalf of the government.
- 5.5 This money paid to the council has been used to pay for a wide variety of costs including staff time, and associated expenditure. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Pay each new guest a £200 welcome payment
 - Welcome visits to every Ukrainian guest and host family
 - Provide wrap around support to hosts, and guests whether this is providing direct support and signposting to available support eg health, CAB, etc
 - Staff costs associated to this scheme eg property checks, safeguarding checks, refugee meetings, translators, administrative duties, safeguarding visits, sponsor newsletter, etc
 - HR to carry out sponsor DBS checks
 - Current and future costs of providing accommodation should the Ukrainian guest become homeless including rent deposits
- 5.6 The £350.00 host ‘thank you’ payment is funded separately by the UK government for up to 12 months. This ‘thank you’ payment has been declined by some Thurrock sponsors.
- 5.7 The UK government are expected to carry out a reconciliation process at the end of this financial year, recovering monies paid to the council for guests rematched to another local authority area under this scheme.
- 5.8 From 1 January 2023, councils will receive funding of £5,900 for each new Ukrainian guest instead of £10,500 per guest For unaccompanied minors, the year 1 tariff will continue at £10,500 after 1 January 2023.
- 5.9 The council can contact DLUHC if they are experiencing “unmanageable financial pressures” under the scheme or for less severe pressures, they can make a claim to DLUHC for additional funding if they incur additional essential costs beyond what could reasonably be regarded as normal expenditure and not available through other mainstream funding mechanisms.
- 5.10 School Academies have received separate funding in 2022/23 for children and young people. This funding covers three phases of education at the following annual rates:
- Early Years [ages 2 -4]- £3000
 - Primary [ages 5-11] £6,580
 - Secondary [ages 11-18] £8,755

6. Environmental Health

- 6.1 The Environmental Health and Licensing Officers have led on the home inspection scheme part of the Homes for Ukraine.
- 6.2 The inspection checks the accommodation is suitable for the number and profile of people intending to live in it, with access to adequate facilities and that there are no serious safety issues, such as gas or electrical hazards.
- 6.3 The Private Housing Team have carried out this function alongside their statutory housing duties and priorities.

7. Homes for Ukraine Support Role

- 7.1 The Private Housing, Well Homes Team has responded to support Ukrainian adults and families settling into Thurrock and providing resettlement support under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 7.2 This includes the following activities:
 - Welcome visits
 - Welfare checks and ongoing follow up visits to guests and sponsors to check how their relationship is going and whether support is needed or if any concerns have emerged
 - 6 months checks in person
 - Joint safeguarding visits with adult services to host homes
 - Liaising with Adults and Children services supporting guests and hosts
 - Managing the requirements of the scheme and ensuring the Council are able to facilitate the necessary checks, payments process required to satisfy the scheme conditions
 - Responding to the new and emerging housing issues that are arising out of the scheme eg sponsor breakdowns, housing options, mediation, sponsor respite, rematching guests, council appeal for new sponsors, etc
 - Developing and supporting on the boarder resettlement outside of housing, there are growing demands on the council to work with partners to respond to needs around education, health, language, employment, benefits
 - Engaging with community partners and organisations eg British Red Cross, 180 Project, Thurrock Food Bank, Baby HQ, Gateway Peoples Centre, Thurrock Adult Community College, St Johns Church, Grays Job

Centre, who are proactively supporting the placement and settlement of families and their sponsors

- Encouraging new sponsors to register an interest in the scheme
- Responding to correspondence and FOIs that are being generated from the introduction and approach to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- Producing a host newsletter, regular sponsor and guest events to increase access to public services and information in regards to ESOL and adult education, school admissions, local activities and community safety.

8. Homelessness

- 8.1 The council has duty to help Ukrainian guests who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 8.2 Well Homes continue to prevent homeless presentations from Ukrainian households where there is a potential breakdown in relations between guests and hosts through mediation on trying to resolve their issues face to face.
- 8.3 So far, there has been 11 homeless presentations from March 2022 to January 2023, with 3 households having been placed in temporary accommodation/rehoused after being evicted by their host and where there has been no means of resolving the issue so that the Ukrainian households can stay on for an extended period.
- 8.4 It is evitable that the number of households requiring temporary accommodation will increase in the near future. The biggest challenge will be at the end of the host and guest arrangements because the council is not acquiring new housing stock to assist those households with accommodation. Therefore, it expected that there will be an increase in the number of homeless approaches as the only option available for the Ukrainian households if they cannot self-rematch and find a new host.

9. New Government Measures 2023

- 9.1 A new self-rematching scheme to encourage guests finding a new host for themselves in the first instance before approaching their local council. The council duty is carrying out their accommodation, DBS and welfare checks to facilitate the guest moving into the new accommodation and to make the 'thank you' payment payable to the new host.
- 9.2 Homes for Ukraine hosts to receive £500 a month as thank you for ongoing support after Ukrainian's first year of sponsorship. 'Thank you' payments will be extended from 12 months to 2 years.
- 9.3 £150m additional funding for local authorities across the UK to help support Ukraine guests move into their own homes and reduce the risk of

homelessness in 2023/24. This funding will be allocated between different parts of the UK in relation to their proportion of Ukrainian guests.

- 9.4 £2.2mn fund allocated to Thurrock to acquire housing stock in or out of borough for those fleeing conflict including Ukraine and Afghanistan refugees. The council has responded to DLUHC and not expressed an interest of acquiring new housing stock under this Housing Fund because of its section 114 notice and the match funding required to acquire housing properties.
- 9.5 A new marketing campaign to urge new hosts coming forward and apply to rematch existing guests through this scheme.
- 9.6 Councils shall receive a reduction in tariff funding to £5,900 per person for all new arrivals from 1 January 2023. We are reviewing the impact of this reduction of funding to the council to fulfil its responsibilities for up to 2 years.

10. Reasons for Recommendation

- 10.1 The Homes for Ukraine scheme provides safe passage for Ukrainian refugees to enter and live within the UK for up to 3 years.
- 10.2 The council has experience of managing and delivering refugee resettlement programmes eg Afghan Relocations and Assistance Programme and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme prior to the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- 10.3 The Well Homes Team works very closely with internal departments, external partners and the voluntary sector to ensure joined up services for new and existing refugees in Thurrock.
- 10.4 The UK government has provided the council with the funds and option to claim additional support in exceptional circumstances, to provide services and support to refugees for up to 2 years.

11. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 11.1 NA

12. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 12.1 The council's section 114 notice does not impact on this scheme in 2022/23.
- 12.2 The TCG will continue to oversee the council's response and monitor community safety tension levels with the Community Safety Partnership regarding the arrival of refugees in Thurrock to keep them safe.

13. Implications

13.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

The UK government's grant allocation makes this programme sustainable to deliver on their behalf.

There is a financial burden to the council on administering the Homes for Ukraine scheme within the grant allocated to the council. Regular budget monitoring tracks costs to tackle any significant variances.

The council's temporary accommodation costs may well increase if homeless presentations of Ukrainian guests steadily rise. To support local authorities, mitigate this potential risk, the government have allocated a new homeless budget to support guests move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness in 2023/24.

13.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Deirdre Collins**
Principal Barrister, Housing, Litigation and Prosecutions

The Homes for Ukraine Programme is a Government scheme, which allows local residents to put their homes forward to support Ukrainian refugees who wish to come to the UK. In signing up as a sponsor, the Council is obliged to put in place such arrangements to assess suitability of the Household and its occupants so as to safeguard the Ukrainian refugees when they arrive in the UK. As such, the Council is following its statutory duties insofar as safeguarding is concerned and the appropriate advice and sign off of suitability of accommodation to meet refugee/guests needs. The government has issued Guidance for Councils. The Council has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk and it has a number of responsibilities under the scheme, including to carry out accommodation checks, DBS checks, and welfare checks.

By virtue of the Housing Act, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the council must take reasonable steps to try to prevent and relieve homelessness for households who are threatened with becoming or are already, homeless when they apply for assistance.

Councils may facilitate the Ukrainian guest a rematch, providing the placement and accommodation are suitable and the authority is satisfied it will continue for at least 6 months.

The council must continue to consider their statutory homelessness duty if a suitable rematch is not available and provide housing to the Ukrainian guest. They do have to pass any requirements around 'habitual residence' ie a minimum amount of time that they have lived in the UK.

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 section 4 (2) require that:

“The relevant body shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body’s functions, and which includes the arrangements for the management of risk.”

13.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

The council supports the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to tackle inequality and support individuals fleeing from persecution.

The funding provided to the council will support Ukrainian guests to settle in Thurrock to

- Integrate into the local community
- Have access to local services including healthcare, education, ESOL, employment support, voluntary agencies, and
- Be able to contribute to the local community via volunteering opportunities

13.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

The TCG will continue to monitor staffing capacity levels to manage this scheme within existing resources if demand increases as new guests arrive in Thurrock. This will be reviewed to increase capacity within the funds provided to the council.

14. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- [Homes for Ukraine: council guides - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guides/homes-for-ukraine-council-guides)

15. Appendices to the report

- NA

Report Author:

Dulal Ahmed

Housing Enforcement Manager