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**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 22 February 2023**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: Update on Ukrainian Resettlement and Asylum Dispersal**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 In September 2022, a report to the Leadership Board outlined the response within Renfrewshire to the Ukraine crisis.
  - 1.2 This paper provides a further update on the local response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, with a focus on the work undertaken to welcome and support the resettlement of Ukrainian nationals across Renfrewshire communities. The report also outlines the work carried out to provide accommodation within Council's Housing Stock and RSL partners to support the resettlement of refugees.
  - 1.3 The report also highlights the UK Governments widening the asylum programme. This is the process by which the Home Office moves asylum seekers to specified local authority areas across the UK. In Renfrewshire two hotels have been procured by the Home Office for this purpose, and this report provides an update on this process.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Leadership Board:
    - (i) notes the contents of this report; and
    - (ii) approve the extension of delegated authority to the Chief Executive as detailed in paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2
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## **3 Ukrainian resettlement – Welcome Hub arrangements**

- 3.1 For Ukrainian displaced people who arrive under the Scottish Super Sponsor arrangement, the Welcome Hub provides temporary hotel accommodation and support. An initial assessment of need and requirements is made and the details are then passed to the COSLA Migration team to allow matching of the family or individual to offers of accommodation within local authority areas across Scotland.

- 3.2 Currently there are 98 rooms occupied in hotels in Renfrewshire, made up of 137 individuals. This is significantly lower than the peak time, when around 400 individuals were occupying welcome hub accommodation across 4 local hotels.
- 3.3 To date, over 1100 individuals have been supported by our team based at the Welcome Hub, and as of February 2023, more than 150 households (300 individuals) have been resettled in the Renfrewshire area and a further 59 households have secured accommodation in other local authority areas.
- 3.4 Many of the residents within the Welcome Hub have made local connections, for example being employed locally or have children within local schools and so wish to remain within Renfrewshire when they leave the hotel. Schools have been exceptionally welcoming ensuring that resources such as uniform and materials were supplied to support inclusion. As outlined in section 7 below, there are now two Ukrainian refugees on trainee programmes located within schools to augment the support for learning team to assist pupils and staff with barriers to learning such as language.
- 3.5 There are also demands on health, with those settling in Renfrewshire registering at GP practices. A health presence is in place at the Glasgow Airport hub providing support for presenting health issues, and assisting with signposting to health services, and with access to medication/ prescriptions.
- 3.6 Costs relating to the Welcome Hub activities are closely monitored, and it is expected that all costs incurred by local authorities hosting Welcome Hubs will be fully met by the Scottish Government, and agreement on the detail of this financial arrangement is currently being progressed by officers through COSLA and the Scottish Government.

#### **4 Decommissioning of MS Ambition**

- 4.1 The ship MS ambition, located at the King George V docks in Glasgow has housed refugees from Ukraine since September 2022. MS Ambition is being decommissioned at the end of March, and as a result all current residents require to have left the ship by 31 March 2023. There are 439 households ( a total of 1,100 people) on board at present, which gives an average of 122 people requiring to leave each week in the nine weeks leading up to 31 March.
- 4.2 The Scottish Government has written to all local authorities asking them to provide information on how they can assist in accommodating the 1,100 people currently on the ship.
- 4.3 Renfrewshire council has offered the use of up to 30 rooms within the existing hotel provision for Ukrainian refugees, which would provide accommodation for up to 60 people in either double or twin rooms, this reflects the current position and potential future requirements within the hotels within Renfrewshire.

#### **5 Provision of housing**

- 5.1 All Local Authorities have been requested to assist in providing accommodation for those who have fled the crisis in Ukraine. To date, in Renfrewshire, a total of 70 social rented properties have been provided to Ukrainian households. 51 of these from the Council housing stock and 19 from local Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) with a further 11 RSL properties currently being processed.

## **6. Private sponsors**

- 6.1 There are currently 88 private sponsors across Renfrewshire, who are housing a total of 162 Ukrainian guests.
- 6.2 It is likely that some of these hosting arrangements will come to an end in February and March 2023 and where this occurs, and the sponsor does not wish to continue with the arrangement, the Ukrainian guests will be accommodated at the welcome hub.
- 6.3 As the Council administers the payment for private sponsors, we will communicate to the sponsors that payments for providing accommodation will continue to be available to apply for and indeed the level for those continuing the hosting arrangement is being increased from £350 to £500 per month.

## **7. Economic Development**

- 7.1 Through the Economic Development team, Renfrewshire Council are providing an opportunity for up to 11 unemployed people from Ukraine (with established English language skills) to join the Council as trainees for a 6 month period to assist the Council to support Ukrainian refugees.
- 7.2 The payment is at Scottish living wage rate and Economic Development pay the trainee with the relevant Services within the Council where trainees are located covering any ICT/ equipment costs and providing the supervision and management in the role.
- 7.3 Trainees will receive support from Employability Services to secure further work at the end of the 6 month period. Trainees can apply for internal council vacancies, and they get access to the range of other employability supports (such as the training fund of up to £3,500 for certificated training for work, which could for example be used to support the individual to become formal translator).
- 7.4 There are currently 4 individuals in post across Renfrewshire Council, including two within schools to assist Ukrainian children to settle within their new school environment.
- 7.5 Additionally, Glasgow Airport hosted its biggest-ever jobs fair on Thursday 19 January offering a wide range of job opportunities. Over 35 employers based across the airport's campus and beyond took part in the event, which was attended by over 200 Ukrainian refugees.

## **8. Asylum Dispersal programme**

- 8.1 In April 2022 the UK Government notified all UK local authorities of their intention to expand asylum dispersal arrangements nationally and since then, Mears, the Home Office's contractor has been working to secure the use of hotel accommodation and other dispersal properties to house asylum seekers until their asylum decision is decided.
- 8.2 The Watermill Hotel in Paisley has been in use by the Home Office for this purpose since July 2022 and this arrangement has since inception continued to remain a successful operation supporting and integrating the temporary residents into life within Paisley town centre. More recently the Muthu hotel at Erskine Bridge has been procured as contingency accommodation for asylum seekers.

- 8.3 The decision making in connection with the procurement of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers as contingency accommodation rests with the Home Office and their contracting partner MEARS. Within this process the Chief Executive of the Council and the Member of Parliament are initially notified by the Home Office that they have identified a property that they intend to utilise for contingency accommodation. Following this notification, arrangements are made to engage with local authority officials, Police and Health Partners.
- 8.4 MEARs on behalf of the Home Office procured the Erskine Muthu Hotel for the purpose of the asylum dispersal programme with the first service users moving into the property during the week of 23<sup>th</sup> January. The property has 174 room capacity, and the initial proposal from the Home Office was that this hotel would be used as contingency accommodation for single males. Following feedback from both elected members and the local community a revised population mix has now been put forward by the Home Office. This property will now house a mixed population comprising families, couples and single people. Regular partnership meetings have been established at a senior level to provide oversight to the establishment of this facility with membership including the Council, Police Scotland, HSCP, MEARs and the Home Office.
- 8.5 All supports that are required by the asylum population are provided directly by MEARs as part of their contract with the Home Office. This includes engagement with the community, and ensuring that those resident in the asylum properties are provided with a healthy and wide and regular range of activities, supports and opportunities during their stay.
- 8.6 At the point of writing this report, the planned phased occupancy of the Muthu Erskine Bridge Hotel has been put on hold temporarily by the Home office whilst feedback from the Council and the community is given further consideration. In particular this includes exploring the potential for supporting a mixed population of family groups and individuals within the hotel, slowing the pace of phasing in the population to assist in managing demands on services and supporting ongoing engagement with the community reflecting the community response over recent weeks.

## **9. Next Steps**

- 9.1 Given the requirement of the local authority to respond at pace to any requests for support, it is recommended that the Chief Executive continues to be authorised to put in place such arrangements and resources as may be required to support both the operation of the Welcome Hub and the resettlement and support of refugees from Ukraine within Renfrewshire. This was previously agreed by Leadership Board in September 2022 to be in force until the end of 2022.
- 9.2 Further that, the Chief Executive is authorised to put in place the necessary arrangements to ensure a coordinated partnership response to any implications that may arise from the asylum dispersal programme.
- 9.3 It is intended that regular updates will be provided to all elected members as this emerging situation develops further.
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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - The paper notes the funding that will be allocated to local authorities by the UK Government for each arrival through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Funding arrangements for the Welcome Hubs remain subject to further agreement with the Scottish Government.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – the recommendation in this report supports 'Our Renfrewshire is fair' and 'Our Renfrewshire is safe' given the potential for addressing inequalities and protecting the vulnerable.
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – COSLA Leaders agreed that local authorities would support those seeking refuge in Scotland through the UK Government schemes, and would work with Scottish Government to ensure support was in place to any Ukrainian arriving through the Super Sponsor arrangements in place as part of the wider Homes for Ukraine scheme
13. **Climate Risk** – none

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## List of Background Papers:

- Leadership Board, 14 September 2022 - Update on Ukrainian Resettlement and Asylum Dispersal (Agenda item 5)
  - Leadership Board, 22 June 2022 - Update on Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine (Agenda item 5)
  - Leadership Board, 20 April 2022 - Update on Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine (Agenda item 8)
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