

To: Leadership Board

On: 14 September 2022

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Update on Ukrainian Resettlement and Asylum Dispersal

1. Summary

- 1.1 In June 2022, a report to the Leadership Board outlined the response within Renfrewshire to the Ukraine crisis, including the establishing of the Welcome Hub at Glasgow Airport. The report also highlighted that the UK Government was proposing to widen the Asylum Dispersal programme.
- 1.2 This report 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, which is detailed within section 3 of the report.
- 1.3 Section 4 of the report outlines the work carried out by the Welcome Hub at Glasgow Airport. This represents an area of significant activity for the Council and is likely to be required into 2023.

The report outlines the achievements to date in managing the Welcome Hub and also provides an overview of the positive and proactive role that Renfrewshire Council has taken in meeting the needs of those seeking asylum and refuge and the positive and generous response that has been shown by the people and communities of Renfrewshire to the families and individuals who have sought safety here.

- 1.4 With the anticipated growth in the number of displaced people who are forecast to arrive in Scotland, Local Authorities have been asked to identify accommodation to support the resettlement of those fleeing the war in Ukraine, and proposals to support this are outlined in section 5 of this report.
 - 1.5 Section 6 provides an update on the Asylum Dispersal programme with the UK Government moving to a system of full asylum dispersal across Scotland and the implications this has for Renfrewshire Council.
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2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Leadership Board:

- (i) notes the contents of this report;
 - (ii) delegate authority to the Chief Executive and the Director of Communities and Housing Services to put in place such arrangements and resources as may be required to support the provision of suitable properties for resettlement as detailed in section 5;
 - (iii) note the current position in respect of the implementation of a national dispersal programme for asylum dispersal and the associated implications within the local authority area as outlined in section 6; and
 - (iv) approve the extension of delegated authority to the Chief Executive as detailed in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2.
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3 Resettlement of Ukrainian nationals

3.1 As highlighted in previous reports to Leadership Board there are several mechanisms by which Ukrainian people can come to the UK. These include:

- The Ukraine Family Scheme which allows family members of British nationals, UK settled persons and certain others to come to or stay in the UK.
- The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme which allows Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This is largely an independent process whereby Ukrainian nationals have linked themselves to host sponsors through a variety of mechanisms.
- As a part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Scottish Government “*Super Sponsor*” arrangement where Ukrainian people can apply to come to Scotland without having first secured hosted accommodation.

3.2 Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, Sponsors are asked to provide accommodation for a minimum of 6 months, and the UK Government will offer a thank you payment of £350 per month for the first 12 months period of this agreement. Local authorities across the UK will receive funding of £10,500 for each individual that settles within their area through this scheme.

To date, 78 households (comprising 161 individuals in total) from Ukraine are known to have moved into settled accommodation in Renfrewshire via one of the schemes.

- 3.3 The Scottish government's Super Sponsor scheme was paused on Wednesday 13 July 2022 for a period of three months. The pause on new applications did not affect anyone who had already made an application or had their visa granted. As at 23 August 2022, there have been 143,072 applications for UK visas, with 40,829 for Scottish Visas of which 35,987(25%) are for the Super Sponsor scheme. To date, almost 15,000 people have arrived in Scotland, 3299 to private hosts and 11,638 through the Super Sponsor scheme. The numbers of new arrivals to the country are being closely monitored, given the extreme pressure on temporary accommodation. At present there is a steady flow of new arrivals to the country – with most arriving through Edinburgh, and then moving to a range of welcome accommodation across the Country.
- 3.4 Based on the numbers of visa applications that are in progress, there is potential for thousands more of the displaced Ukrainian population, to travel to Scotland in the coming months. The Scottish Government in response to this has been considering a range of additional accommodation measures given these significant pressures including the chartering of two cruise ships, one which is docked in Leith, and the second to be docked at KGV dock in Govan, each providing capacity for up to 1700 people.

4 Welcome Hub – Glasgow Airport

- 4.1 Glasgow Airport was identified as one of the locations in Scotland for Welcome Hubs at the start of the Super Sponsor process. As a result, Renfrewshire Council required to quickly establish, staff and operate a hub at Glasgow Airport.
- 4.2 For people arriving under the Super Sponsor arrangement, the Welcome Hub provides temporary accommodation and support, an initial assessment of need and requirements is made and passed to the COSLA Migration team to allow matching of the family or individual to offers of accommodation within local authority areas across Scotland.
- 4.3 To date, almost 700 individuals have been supported by our team based at the Welcome Hub, and as of 23 August 2022, council staff were supporting 406 individuals in temporary accommodation at sites across Renfrewshire, who are currently awaiting offers of resettlement across Scotland.
- 4.4 Staff from teams within Communities and Housing Services, Children's Services and Renfrewshire HSCP have augmented the council's existing refugee resettlement team, and this enlarged resettlement team operates 7 days a week, from 9am – 9pm to meet the demands for advice, assistance and support from those staying in temporary accommodation, as well as meet, reassure, and safely check-in those arriving at Glasgow Airport on a daily basis.

- 4.5 Expressions of Interest to host a family from Ukraine were promoted as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. In exchange for providing a room or rooms in their home, and for assisting the households to settle, hosts are entitled to a £350 thank you payment which is payable monthly. Hosts were asked to provide their accommodation for at least 6 months to 12 months. In Renfrewshire, 54 hosts applied through the Homes for Ukraine programme, and a further 224 expressions of interests were received through the Super Sponsor route. Each of these hosting arrangements require to be checked for suitability, including property checks, and disclosure checks, and this work was completed by officers from our Environmental Health team with assistance on a voluntary basis from other suitable officers from a range of services. As is the case in most Local Authorities, a number of hosts subsequently withdrew their interest or failed to provide the supporting information that was required. At the current date 26 Homes for Ukraine, and 86 Super Sponsor hosts have been fully signed off.
- 4.6 While the early intention was to limit the time of stay in the welcome hub accommodation to a number of days, in practice this has proven difficult to achieve. Matching particularly to hosts has proven to be extremely resource intensive, and in recognition of this the Scottish Government has recently put in place some additional capacity to allow for a “surge team” to assist in more quickly progressing matching.
- 4.7 As the pace of community resettlement increases in Renfrewshire, there will be likely be significant additional demand to be managed in terms of facilitating integration, with an ongoing need to support Ukrainian arrivals, hosts and to manage any breakdown in support arrangements. The Welcome Hub therefore presents a very significant additional resourcing requirement over the medium term in Renfrewshire, over and above community integration.
- 4.8 In particular, there are demands on education, both from children of those households who have settled in Renfrewshire and who are enrolling at local schools, and also for children who are currently in the temporary hotel accommodation. A session was held on Thursday 25 August at the Welcome Hub to discuss the arrangements for education. Children and young people were enrolled temporarily into schools and transport was arranged to take them from the hotel to the schools. Schools have been exceptionally welcoming ensuring that resources such as uniform and materials were supplied to support inclusion. The support for learning team has been augmented temporarily to support pupils and staff with barriers to learning such as language.
- 4.9 There are also demand 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.
- 4.10 As households settle in Renfrewshire, they are provided with assistance via the Resettlement Team who establish contact and provide advice and support. Discussions have also been held with Engage Renfrewshire to discuss opportunities to integrate and support people in community and in the welcome hubs

4.11 The ongoing management and coordination of the welcome hub and resettlement activity locally will continue to be resource intensive. Additional resettlement officers have been recruited to assist with the management of the welcome hub and resettlement duties. This is likely to be an ongoing feature of our work for the foreseeable future. Costs relating to the Welcome Hub activities are being 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.

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, Renfrewshire Council has put forward 23 council homes, and 19 properties have been offered by local RSL partners. However, as noted in Section 3, there is a continuing demand for housing to meet the needs of those who have both arrived and are in welcome accommodation, and those who have been granted visas but are still to travel.

5.2 At present, the exact number of homes necessary to support Renfrewshire's contribution towards the Scottish Government's requirements is unclear. It is also recognised there are also a range of other pressures on the existing housing system, including the national UK Asylum dispersal programme, homeless people and others in housing need who are on council waiting lists.

5.3 A range of options that would bring additional housing supply are being considered including, temporary use of properties previously held for demolition (grant funding is available from the Scottish Government to bring properties back into use), and strategic acquisitions of private housing from the open market supported by affordable housing programme funding.

5.4 It is recognised that the pressure on available housing will continue to be an ongoing risk, especially as host relationships come to a natural end, or suffer break down. Work is being taken forward at a national level to develop a better understanding of the likely long-term demand, and to develop solutions.

6. Asylum Dispersal programme

6.1 In April 2022 the UK Government notified all UK local authorities of their intention to expand asylum dispersal arrangements.

6.2 The contract for asylum dispersal in Scotland is currently operated by Mears Group on behalf of the Home Office. Following a series of meetings, an initial phase of widening dispersal to seven local authority areas neighbouring Glasgow commenced during Summer 2022. This is now active in Renfrewshire, with 46 asylum seekers now accommodated locally.

- 6.3 Weekly partnership meetings are held to monitor progress and deal with any emerging issues. This is involving representatives from Renfrewshire Council, Police, HSCP, Mears and the Home Office.
- 6.4 The UK Government have outlined an initial funding package to support dispersal for the remainder of the financial year, with the longer-term financial envelope to be discussed and implemented at a later date. The asylum dispersal scheme is very different from resettlement schemes which the Council has participated in previously, and is a very complex area of activity which services and partners will have to operate within to support vulnerable people as appropriate.
- 6.5 The Home Office's long-term aim is to build a place-based system that considers all of the protection-based immigration demands and their impact on a Local Authority or region/nation, working in collaboration with local authorities and partners from across government. This approach is intended to deliver a sustainable and flexible end-to-end system for asylum dispersal, resettlement and the National Transfer Scheme (which covers unaccompanied asylum-seeking children). The intention is to launch the new system in 2023.
- 6.6 COSLA leaders recently approved a report setting out the proposed principles and model for a phased programme of full dispersal of the asylum seekers population of 9000 across all 32 local authority areas which would include a target share of 149 for Renfrewshire assuming full dispersal is achieved.

7 Next Steps

- 7.1 Given the level of uncertainty that currently exists in terms of the arrival of displaced Ukrainian nationals, and the requirement of the local authority to respond at pace to any requests for support, it is recommended that the Chief Executive and Director of Communities and Housing 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 It is intended that regular updates will continue to be provided to all elected members as this emerging situation develops further.

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** – This report contains information on the potential acquisition of residential properties by Renfrewshire Council to augment existing council house supply.
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** – This report contains information on the potential acquisition of residential properties by Renfrewshire Council
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.

List of Background Papers:

- (i) Leadership Board, 22 June 2022 - Update on Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine (Agenda item 5)
 - (ii) Leadership Board, 20 April 2022 - Update on Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine (Agenda item 8)
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