

Agenda Item	12
Report No	HC/23/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 22 September 2022

Report Title: Update on the Highland response to the Ukraine Displaced Persons Scheme

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on Highland's response to the Ukraine crisis and the support being offered in Highland to Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs). The Council is aware of the funding streams in place to support UDPs and is focused on ensuring that the funding is distributed to support access to the services as outlined in the Scottish Government's super sponsor scheme and homes for Ukraine guidance for local authorities.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to: -

- **NOTE** the responsibility that we have to Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Highlands to continue to support the effort in the way those fleeing conflict deserve
- **NOTE** the current support given and the costs incurred to date, However further clarification on grant conditions is still being sought to confirm that we will be recompensed appropriately for the costs incurred
- **RECCOMEND** that a letter is submitted to Scottish Government requesting clarification on the Grant spend conditions of the £1.037m Homes for Ukraine scheme and request that further funding is made available for spend set out in 11.3 of this report connected to the Super sponsor scheme

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – At this time The Council has received confirmation of funding of £1.037m in response to the return submitted to the Scottish Government at the end of June 2022.

In addition to this £0.467m has been received for the Warm Scottish Welcome A Summary of additional costs are shown at 11.3

- 3.2 **Legal** – Grant conditions are still being sought by the Scottish Government regarding the £1.037m grant award
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – There are concerns that the families arriving have differentiated needs and that the funding model does not take this into account.
- 3.4 **Climate Change** – There are no climate change implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Risk** –The Highland Council have welcomed a number of Ukrainian refugees and the Council wishes to ensure that these families receive the highest level of support when they need it
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Background

- 4.1 Highland Council has a strong track record in supporting refugees and has already welcomed Syrian and Afghan families in recent years. The Highland Council debated the Ukraine crisis on 10 March 2022 and gave its unequivocal support to the people of Ukraine. The discussion also covered humanitarian support; support for refugees and support for staff, young people and the wider public and in particular for those with families and friends involved in the crisis.
- 4.2 Members agreed that the Council will engage to help deliver Government schemes and to build on current programmes and structures already in place to support refugees and migrants.
- 4.3 As of 5 September, the Scottish Government has advised that there are over 9,000 Ukrainians living in sanctuary in Scotland, and that a total of 21,000 visas have been issued which allow Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs) to live, work and claim welfare support.

5 Homes for Ukraine Scheme

- 5.1 This scheme was initiated by the UK Government on 14 March 2022, encouraging private homeowners to provide guest accommodation for displaced clients.
- 5.2 The Resettlement Team received daily updates from the Scottish Government which enabled Environmental Health to carry out property checks and the Revenue & Customer Service Team to subsequently process the enhanced disclosures for hosts. This determined the suitability of hosts and their accommodation.
- 5.3 Since the start of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, 86 properties across Highland registered under the HFU scheme who have matched with 205 guests. Many guests had to wait several months for their visas to be issued and this proved challenging for them and their hosts.
- 5.4

The administration of the £200 one-off payment to guests has taken place and the £350 optional 'thank you' monthly payment to hosts has been set-up through the Council website.

6 Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme

- 6.1 The Scottish Government announced this scheme on 18 March 2022. It effectively means that clients can register the Scottish Government as their sponsor ahead of visa application and travel, rather than requiring an arrangement to already be in place with a host family.
- 6.2 The total Expressions of Interest received from the Scottish Government of hosts offering their properties under this scheme was very high across all areas of Highland, with 672 expressions of interest. To allow properties to be considered for hosting, property inspections and disclosure checks of the hosts have taken place and extra Council staffing has been put in place to support this work. This has been a significant logistic effort on behalf of the officers involved and has involved the prioritisation of this work at the expense of day-to-day work remits.
- 6.3 A total of 458 property inspections have been completed with 54 scheduled following host access arrangements. Of this figure 17 host properties had major fails against their condition which excludes them from consideration.
- 6.4 Since the start of this scheme, 160 potential hosts have decided to withdraw following contact, for a variety of reasons including expressions of frustration with the delays in the process. All potential hosts were contacted on a number of occasions.
- 6.5 The Scottish Government announced on 11 July that the scheme would be suspended for 3 months from 13 July. All existing visa and sponsorship requests would be fulfilled. The main benefit of the suspension had been to alleviate some of the pressure in place and allow councils, COSLA and the Scottish Government to focus on more structured and supported outcomes for clients. This included some much-needed time to assess the impact of new arrivals in communities and determine what support was needed to assist with their health, education and employment needs.

7 Contingency Hotel Accommodation

- 7.1 The main reason for the suspension of the Super Sponsorship Scheme was to alleviate the pressure on hotel accommodation which had reached capacity in the welcome hubs in the Central Belt.
- 7.2 Following discussion with the Scottish Government, Highland agreed to support a contingency hotel in Aviemore for families arriving to Scotland and the first arrivals were welcomed on 8 June 2022. Contingency hotels are subject to contractual arrangements directly between the Government and the hotel owners.
- 7.3 As a result of the increased number of arrivals in Scotland, the Scottish Government has now established numerous hotel placements across Scotland. In Highland, the current situation as of 8 September is as follows:

Inverness (3 hotels) – 181 clients
Strathpeffer (1 hotel) – 39 clients
Aviemore (2 hotels) – 201 clients.

- 7.4 However, it is anticipated that this number will continue to rise in the next month
- 7.5 Highland are working with NHS and the third sector to support families while they are in the hotels and ensure all their needs are being met. British Red Cross volunteers have been visiting the hotels to assist and support families.
- 7.6

The Council's Resettlement Team are working with local community groups who are keen to support families to access activities, especially those with children.

The Scottish Government have requested that the Resettlement Team start the matching process to help move guests from the hotels into hosting offers under the sponsorship scheme. 35 people have been matched in host arrangements so far by the Resettlement Team.

Families continue to receive a valuable service from the Resettlement Team and partner services/agencies. However, there are concerns that continued hotel arrivals in Highland is unsustainable.

8 Educational Requirements and Challenges in Highland

- 8.1 Guidance from the Scottish Government has been that the educational needs of Ukrainian children and young people are met in Highland. This has proved challenging with pupils now placed in 42 schools across Highland.

- 8.2 Whilst schools and education services have achieved school enrolment and pupil support at limited notice in challenging circumstances, a number of additional support needs of pupils have been identified. Further challenges have been identified in terms of school transport arrangements, interpretation services and school capacity and teaching levels.

- 8.3 Pupils are also being supported in their continued Ukrainian studies as well as studying the Highland curriculum. The challenge around the influx of pupils has proved challenging.

There are currently approximately 180 Ukrainian children and young people in schools across the Highlands, however this is changing daily. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are funding streams in place for the first arrivals seeking refuge there is no agreed funding mechanism for those linked to the super sponsor scheme living in hotel accommodation. The average cost of educating a Primary School pupil in Highland is £6,167 pa, rising to £7,755 pa for a Secondary pupil. Based on the current numbers this would give rise to additional costs of £1.212m to provide quality education support for those in temporary/hotel accommodation. We have incurred significant logistical challenges with regards to staff recruitment and physical accommodation which comes at an additional cost particularly in the rural context of the Highlands.

There is also a requirement to provide adult learning as part of Education's statutory regulations, and as such we will be required to provide additional English as an additional language tuition for many of our families

Based upon recent COSLA papers and discussions there is a need to articulate these significant costs to the Scottish Government as has been carried out by those Councils who were first to experience these additional costs.

9 Health and Wellbeing Support Requirements and Challenges in Highland

- 9.1 Many of the young people arriving in Highland have left family members in Ukraine, likely creating a great deal of separation, loss, and bereavement issues. Families have experienced trauma and multiple transitions over the last few weeks and months which could impact on their long term- Health & Wellbeing.
- 9.2 A multiagency response is in place, and this includes officers from NHS, Health & Social Care, Educational Psychology, and trauma-informed practitioners who between them can support children, young people and the staff supporting the pupils in schools and in the community.
- 9.3 The high number of hotel guests arriving in the Badenoch & Strathspey area in particular has put extra pressure on Health Visitors and the School Nursing Team. This will require the use of “bank” staff to be authorised and funded as there are national recruitment issues. Health staff (School nurses and Health Visitors) are not trained to provide psychological assistance to Education, and this should be done by suitably trained staff in this area.

10 Housing and Homelessness Requirements and Challenges in Highland

- 10.1 There are concerns that six-month hosting arrangements are beginning to come to an end under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The Resettlement Team are supporting families to match them into a property offer through the Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme. This approach will not always be successful and there is a risk in an increase in homeless presentations as a result.
- 10.2 Clear guidance from the Scottish Government on how to deal with these presentations is now needed. Local authorities across Scotland have been working on the premise that clients have access to full homelessness services, but it is unclear as to whether temporary accommodation provided to family’s needs to reach the standards of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
- 10.3 There have been limited homelessness presentations in Highland to date and none which have ended with a homelessness application being processed. Clients have either voluntarily moved to other accommodation sourced through the Resettlement Team or through their own personal arrangements. However, further presentations are anticipated as hosting arrangements come to an end.
- 10.4 There is concern that the anticipated increase in applications from these families will place further pressure on existing housing demand. This demand will be particularly focused on areas where Highland Council have a high number of families in hotel accommodation as some hotel guests are currently indicating that their preference is to settle in these areas having found employment and educational support.

11 Funding Arrangements and Concerns

- 11.1 The Ukraine crisis was discussed at COSLA Leaders’ Meeting on 2 September 2022 when COSLA reinforced its commitment to supporting the resettlement schemes., b
- 11.2 The table at 11.3 is a summary of unfunded costs to The Highland Council, further clarification is sought regarding current Scottish Government grant condition terms and

that additional funding will be made available to support our Ukrainian Families in the Highlands.

11.3

Summary of Unfunded costs		
Education Support	Education - Primary	592,032
Education Support	Education - Secondary	620,400
Chromebook	each pupil	53,100

The overall funding provided to Highland Council amounts to £1.496m, consisting of £0.467m from the Warm Scottish Welcome fund and £1.029m from the Homes For Ukraine fund. At the point of writing, the actual spend and anticipated spend for the current financial year amount to £1.537m.

At present there is therefore an estimated in year budget pressure of £0.041m. This will inevitably increase with the passage of time and with any additional arrivals into the Highlands. It is also likely to rise further if the Scottish Government lifts the pause on the Super Sponsorship Scheme, and particularly so if it does decide to actively publicise the scheme with a view to expanding the number of host properties.

We intend to write to Ministers seeking confirmation of the future funding arrangements to address the issues arising and summarised in the preceding two paragraphs. This will also include seeking confirmation from the Governments for the holistic, outcome focussed and flexible use of the schemes to cover the circumstances set out above in order to ensure family's needs are met.

Positive Outcomes

Officers have reported emerging good practice in Education linked to the inclusion of Ukrainian children and young people in our school communities and this will be subject to a report at the Education Committee. It is worth noting that although many challenges are set out in this report there are equally so many positive outcomes being experienced by the families themselves, the positive impact they are having both within our schools and communities.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

Date: 8 September 2022

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