

## **UPDATE FROM TOM HORWOOD – CHIEF EXECUTIVE, GUILDFORD & WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCILS**

A long update this time as a lot has been happening both in Surrey and from Government.

### **Two schemes**

The Government currently has two schemes for Ukrainian arrivals, which are sometimes getting confused: the [Ukraine Family Scheme](#) and the [Homes for Ukraine Scheme](#). The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK; the great majority of arrivals in the UK so far have been under this scheme. The council has no direct involvement in administering it. Applicants and hosts are not eligible for the payments that have been announced under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, which allows visa applications from Ukrainians who have named people in the UK willing to sponsor them. I am hearing from elsewhere in the country of people trying to transfer from the Family scheme to the Homes scheme. DLUHC officials have advised that that is not legally possible.

A third group of arrivals is being identified in parts of the country of Ukrainians who have arrived by other means, such as via the Republic of Ireland. They also will not be eligible for payments under Homes for Ukraine. I am not aware that this is a significant issue in Surrey at this time.

For Homes for Ukraine, Guildford, Waverley and Surrey Councils are designing a detailed end-to-end process to administer the checks required by the Government, and to prioritise the safety and welfare of arrivals, sponsors and their families. This has been complex, particularly as we want the process to be as straightforward for participants as possible. It will require the Disclosure and Barring Service to prioritise their part of the process, and we are assured that they will do so. We expect to 'go live' in the coming week. We are sharing our process with the other nine district councils in Surrey, who have also been making their preparations.

There have been rumours that council checks delay the visa and arrival process. DLUHC confirmed in a call with council chief execs on Thursday that this is not the case. Councils get the information from the Government on visa applicants that are already matched with sponsors, and the visa process does not depend on the local council checks. Once the visa is approved, the Ukrainians and their sponsors make arrangements for arrival; the council checks may then take place as soon as possible, and may be before or after arrival. We do not get information on Ukrainians or sponsors who are not matched.

Throughout this crisis, the two borough councils' officers are working together closely to avoid duplication. There will be a clear audit trail of resources allocated to and spent by each council, as we will have to account to councillors and to Government.

As well as the urgent focus on the processing of arrivals under Homes for Ukraine, we are working with the county, other district councils and public services on the welfare support required for arrivals, whatever their route. Surrey CC is leading on the welfare aspects and the CCGs are in the discussion too.

### **Pairing scheme**

DLUHC has funded a scheme that offers a matching, training and support service to sponsors and refugees: <https://www.homesforukraine.org.uk/>.

### **Homelessness**

We are in discussion with Surrey and Government about what happens when a placement fails; for example, if there is a relationship breakdown that results in eviction. Elsewhere, 140 Ukrainians have presented to their local councils as homeless. Once a Ukrainian family that has a visa is homeless, this is the responsibility of the local borough council under its normal homelessness duties. As confirmed this week by the Home Office, there is no additional funding for this, so I am exploring with colleagues in GBC and WBC what provision we will need to put in place to ensure that we have resources, budget and staffing to process an increase in homelessness applications.

## Information for residents and arrivals

A reminder that DLUHC has a growing FAQ page online, which ought to be the first place of referral: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions>. The council is putting in place a dedicated email address for enquiries in the coming week, and I will let you know once that is live.

A DLUHC factsheet for Ukrainians is now here in English, Ukrainian and Russian:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homes-for-ukraine-factsheet-for-ukrainians>. DLUHC has also published a Welcome Pack, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welcome-a-guide-for-ukrainians-arriving-in-the-uk>. A Ukrainian translation is being prepared.

## Council tax

As expected, DLUHC confirmed on 1 April that the Government will be legislating so that sponsors who are currently eligible for the single person's council tax discount will still be able to claim it when they hosting Ukrainians under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Regulations to enable this will be laid before Parliament on 11 April.

It is not possible to alter Local Council Tax Support Scheme during a financial year and so the £350 monthly thank you payment must technically be considered when calculating a LCTS reduction for the host household, but councils will be able offset this through discretionary discounts once the Government amends the relevant 2013 Directions. DLUHC states: "billing authorities and major preceptors will receive the same amount of income as if there had been no Homes for Ukraine-related impact on the LCTS claim during 2022-23".

## Schools

The Department for Education [has confirmed](#) that all children and young people arriving under the two Government schemes have the right to access education and childcare. DFE is writing to Local Education Authorities (i.e. Surrey CC) outlining the rights of Ukrainian refugee children, and schools are being made aware. This is covered in the [Welcome Pack](#) and also here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/schools-admissions-applications-from-overseas-children>.

## Russian and Belarusian suppliers

The Cabinet Office has called on public sector organisations to review contracts with Russian and Belarusian companies. We did this several weeks ago. However, the Cabinet Office has also reminded councils that section 17 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibits councils from taking into account in their procurement decisions, non-commercial considerations, including the location of any country or territory of the business activities or interests of contractors, or from terminating contracts for non-commercial reasons. This constraint is unhelpful to the sector, but I am not aware that it is a pressing issue for us at this time.

## Local Government Pension scheme

The Surrey scheme has made this announcement: "The Surrey Pension Fund is saddened by and strongly condemns the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Given the current circumstances we have immediately suspended making any further investments in Russia and Belarus and continue to review our existing investments with a view to exiting in due course as and when markets permit, as long as the current circumstances prevail. This is above and beyond the UK sanctions currently in place." I understand that the fund has less than 0.25% exposed to direct holdings in the region and that it is not currently possible to sell any Russian equities or bonds due to sanctions and reciprocal actions by the Russian Government.