

Report to Modbury Parish Council 3 May 2022

Homes for Ukraine – a proposal for the provision of support

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's approval to set up a network of volunteers to provide support for sponsors and guests under the Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

Background

Under the scheme, launched on 14 March, householders are able to sponsor named Ukrainian refugees, bringing them to the UK and offering them accommodation for a minimum six months. The guests themselves are able to register for all public services, for benefits and for work and will have leave to remain in the country for up to three years.

As at 20 April 2022, 107,200 visa applications had been submitted to the Home Office. A total of 71,800 had been granted, including 39,300 through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Visa approvals had resulted in 22,600 arrivals by 18 April including 6,600 via Homes for Ukraine.

According to latest estimates in excess of 200 Ukrainian families are currently in the pipeline to be settled in South Hams or West Devon and some have already arrived although none yet in Modbury.

At its last meeting on 5 April 2022, the Council considered a report detailing the main elements of the scheme, resolving to undertake further investigations and to consider a further report with recommendations for action if appropriate.

Results of further investigations

Since the last meeting there have been several changes and clarifications to the Homes For Ukraine Scheme by the Government although it remains substantially the same as originally reported.

Both Devon County and South Hams District Councils have developed their responses and have clarified that primary responsibility for coordinating support with the voluntary sector will rest with the lower tier authority. A range of support is now available through a new online portal (www.devon.gov.uk/supporting-ukraine/).

The lead officer at the District Council, Neil Hawke, Head of strategy and Projects, has been approached (8 April 2022) and has confirmed that joint working on a support network at the district level is progressing well. He was unaware of any other Parish Councils offering to be involved but acknowledged that a support network at the community level, including Parish Councils, faith groups and youth and community groups will be key to the success of settlement scheme. He has undertaken to keep in contact with the Parish Council as the situation develops.

There are examples of good practice around the country which demonstrate that local communities can add value to the process of settlement whilst at the same time avoiding duplicating the work of Tier 1 and 2 authorities. A good example can be found in Lincolnshire (www.facebook.com/groups/706706817353933/?ref=share) where there is a well-developed Ukrainian diaspora and where effective use of social media is connecting sponsors and their guests to community support.

Other parishes around the South Hams have also been contacted for their views but only one, Ivybridge Town Council, has so far (21 April 2022) considered mobilizing a community response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Their proposals are currently limited to the promotion of resettlement schemes throughout the community, the provision of free room hire for meetings and the signposting of sponsors and guests to other support agencies.

Various local charities are offering to collect contributions and make up welcome packs for newly arriving Ukrainian families. A good example of this is the Summerhouse Services Little Welcome Box Project in Plymouth (www.summer-house.org/help-for-ukraine).

Within Modbury, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St George's Church has met (6 April 2022) and considered the issue. It was agreed that the Church could, in principle, be made available for a Ukrainian drop-in centre and the possibility of approaching the Ukrainian Orthodox Church authorities about the delivery of Orthodox services, was discussed. The PCC, in principle, stands ready to support sponsors as they offer accommodation to Ukrainian refugees.

Modbury Caring has also been approached (2 April 2022) and has indicated in-principle support for any medical transport and befriending needs.

Further tentative investigations in the community via word of mouth and social media during the last three weeks have revealed that approximately seven households and one organisation have currently registered as sponsors with nine offers of accommodation. Another household has indicated they may be able to provide temporary accommodation to provide respite for sponsors. An article which appears in the May issue of the Modbury Messenger may yield more potential offers in the near future.

At the same time, several people have made it known that they wish to offer help short of registering as sponsors. They include seven individuals with a wide range of skills and experience who could form the nucleus of an effective volunteer support network in the Parish.

Further discussions with potential sponsors has confirmed the need for close support for both them and their guests as Ukrainian families start to arrive in due course. Some of the key concerns were identified in the previous report to Council. There are one or two very useful 'toolkits' for sponsors to understand the commitment they are making (RESET Training and Support - <https://resetuk.org/toolkits/homes-for-ukraine> - and Citizens UK - <https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Citizens-UK-Hosts-Briefing.pdf> - have been reviewed). Both emphasise that sponsors should not try and deal with all the issues on their own – that they should have a 'welcome team' behind them. The latter guide puts it very succinctly:

“...in our experience, welcoming refugees new to this country is best done at the community level. We therefore urge hosts to form around them a small neighbourhood ‘welcome team’...”

The list of tasks which could be involved is given as follows:

- Neighbourhood orientation – shops, sports and leisure facilities, public transport;
- Helping securing residence permits and NI numbers (if not already done);
- Assistance with opening bank accounts;
- Helping applying for Universal Credit;
- Registering with GPs and dentists;
- Enrolling children in schools and nurseries/playgroups;
- Enrolling in English tuition classes;
- Assistance hooking up with other Ukrainians in the area.

A key characteristic of such support is that it should not remove responsibility from the sponsor/guest nor should it be so close that it provides a safeguarding concern. It is simply to take some of the load off the sponsor and maximise the sustainability of the hosting relationship.

The rest of this report concerns a proposal to create a community network team to provide this support in Modbury where and when requested.

Financial implications

Since, at this stage, the support network will be comprised of volunteers providing advice and guidance coupled perhaps with some practical help only, there are no financial implications associated with this report.

Risk implications

The main risk implications associated with the provision of support in this environment are the potential for financial and safeguarding improprieties. For this reason, the team will only be mobilized at the request of a sponsor or guest with the prior agreement of both and working alongside the sponsor.

Recommendation

That Council approves the creation of a support network team under the leadership of a Parish Councillor, aided by a second Councillor, and that the Team Leader reports all activity back to the Parish Council at each full Council meeting.

Phil Smith
V2.0
25 April 2022