

Information

Sheet Number:

2022-27/24



for County Councillors

Official - Sensitive

From:	Brittney Strange, Public Health Specialist
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Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:	Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health
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Date:	16/09/2022
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To:	All County Councillors
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Homes for Ukraine update

Homes for Ukraine workstreams

We have a multi-agency tactical group, chaired by Matthew Hibbert, Consultant in Public Health at Somerset County Council.

The work is divided in to seven streams:

- Accommodation (Sarah Stillwell, *Sedgemoor District Council*)
- Children & Education (Kate Daunton and Paul Shallcross, *Somerset County Council*)
- Communications (Livvi Grant, *Somerset County Council*)
- Health & Social Care (Shona Turnbull-Kirk, *Somerset ICB*)
- Support for Sponsors & Guests (Alex Melbourne, *CHARIS* and Lisa Westlake, *Resettlement Somerset County Council*)
- Finance & Benefits (Mark Antonelli, *Somerset West & Taunton Council*)
- Info & Intelligence (Nicola Dawson, *Somerset County Council*)

Facts and figures

Number of Sponsors and Guests:

- In total, 1,561 Ukrainians have been matched and either arrived or issued visas:
 - 1,263 Ukrainians have arrived in Somerset
 - A further 298 visas have been issued.
 - In addition, a further 125 visa applications are being processed.
- Expressions of interest: 2,567 – These are sponsors who have 'expressed an interest' in participating in the scheme but are not matched to guests. It is the individual sponsor's role to match with a guest and apply for the scheme.
- 714 property offers by sponsors

Decision Making

The Government ask councils to report on 5 areas in relation to guests' placements. A £350 'thank you' payment is then issued, subject to sponsors passing the checks. These are:

- 1) Residential accommodation exists
- 2) Accommodation visited and suitable
- 3) DBS initiated
- 4) Group arrived in accommodation
- 5) Safeguarding checks completed

Update on Checks:

- Property checks that have been booked/completed: 667
- Total DBS Completed: 1,103
 - Enhanced: 795 initiated, 710 completed
 - Basic: 442 initiated, 393 completed
- Welfare Checks: 1240 completed from 558 households (Data as of 4th October)

Sponsor Update

Since reducing the frequency of the sponsors update, from weekly to fortnightly, we have seen great uplift in engagement. We are continuing to obtain more contact details for guests so that, in time, updates can be translated and sent to them directly. We have included a pdf of last week's Sponsors Update for info.

Updates and Current Issues

Small Grant Fund

The Small Grants Fund is now live. This was set up in recognition of local community groups who have rallied together to offer support to Ukrainian guests and sponsors who live in more rural areas of the county, where access to Welcome Hubs might be limited.

There are two routes for application:

- CHARIS will be administering grants to smaller groups without charitable status, with the first round of applications closing on Friday 28th October. Further details can be found here: [Small Grants Programme — CHARIS refugees](#)
- Somerset Supports Ukraine will be administering grants to groups with charitable status. Charitable organisations who are eligible to apply include schools, universities, churches and other local groups engaged in providing support for Displaced People. Further information can be found here: [SSU Grant Application \(cargocollective.com\)](#).

Transport

Transport solutions for Ukrainian guests within the County continue to provide a variety of challenges. The Homes for Ukraine team have recently submitted proposals to Members which includes a one-off payment of £400 to all Homes for Ukraine guests who will apply via an online form.

Increasing Financial Support to Hosts over the winter months

Recognising that many Somerset hosts are facing significant financial challenges, in part due to their generosity in hosting Ukrainian guests, over the forthcoming winter an increase in host payments has been agreed. Somerset County Council recognises that energy bills are rising, and it is important to ensure that homes are properly lit and heated over the winter period.

Every household hosting Ukrainian guests, under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme will see their monthly host payments increase to £700 from the current £350 payments. This uplift will be automatically paid for a 6-month period from October 2022 to March 2023. As host payments are paid a month retrospectively, hosts will see the higher payments go onto their bank accounts from November - April.

HfU believe that this increased payment will not only reduce the financial hardship for some hosts but will greatly increase their willingness to continue to offer their accommodation to their guests and will prevent breakdowns and guests being made homeless.

6 Month point

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), has recently emailed all hosts and guests who are between their 4 and 6 month point with advice and guidance on their future. We continue to receive updates from hosts about their intentions: most hosts who have replied have offered to continue to host beyond the 6 months point. However, as of 13/10/22, the SCC HfU team have been notified by 34 sponsors who currently have guests, that they are not extending their offer beyond their 6-month period.

Ongoing breakdowns and cases of concern

Since the scheme has begun, a small percentage of placements have broken down. Breakdowns can happen for a variety of reasons which can range from cultural differences, a change in sponsor circumstances, differing household expectations between sponsors and guests, and relationship challenges. We are working with Workstream Leads and other partners to circulate a weekly update to sponsors, which will aim to help realistically manage housing expectations and signpost and guide sponsors and guests to preventative support.

Housing offer

As we enter the six-month stage of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, we recognise the need for a housing offer to support guests to move on from their current sponsors, to gain some independence and autonomy. Additionally, there is a need to support sponsors so they can empower their guests to make an informed choice about moving on, and to alleviate some of the pressures they are facing themselves at this six-month mark, and to navigate the rising cost of living.

We are exploring offers other local authorities have developed, in conjunction with listening to guests via Welcome Hubs on their most pressing needs. It is worth stating that although there are guests who are working and in receipt of benefits, there are still challenges with the affordability of housing and practicalities such as securing a guarantor to enable a private let. The Accommodation workstream are considering all the information above and are developing a package of support

relevant to the Somerset population; we hope to be able to share this shortly once the details have been finalised.

In addition, a new Refugee Housing Team has now started to work at pace, with the aim of early prevention and intervention to minimise the number of breakdowns taking place – this team will be supporting Somerset West and Taunton, Sedgemoor, and South Somerset. Mendip District Council have also appointed a Refugee Housing Options Officer who is actively contacting all Ukrainian guests and sponsors in the Mendip District to establish the level of support needed.

For more information please contact:	Name: Brittney Strange Email: BStrange@somerset.gov.uk
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