
Overview Select Committee

Date of meeting: 3rd November 2022

Lead officer: Jo Russell, Head of Service (Housing)

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: ALL
- Report author: Jo Russell, Head of Service (Housing)
- Authors contact details: 0116 4540245
- Report version number: v0.1

1. Summary

- 1.1 The reports sets out updated information on the Immigration, Migration and Asylum within Leicester City with a focus on the Homes for Ukraine and Afghan schemes.

2. Recommended actions/decision

- 2.1 That the Executive members read and comment on the report.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

- 3.1 **Homes for Ukraine** is now established but is continuing to develop weekly with additional arrivals in small numbers but changes to this and the associated visa schemes continue regularly. We continue to engage with the Ukrainian Association Great Britain (Leicester Branch) and the Leicester Ukrainian Club and we have developed a strong working relationship.
- 3.2 Officers continue to work closely with both internal and external partners on delivering the scheme and the additional Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) model for Ukrainian arrivals noting while a similar name this is different to the scheme for asylum seekers from outside of the Ukraine.
- 3.3 Officers attend local and regional meetings including those on the use of the IT system which administers the system and DLUHC safeguarding meetings and we feedback that data quality continues to be an issue.
- 3.4 **ARAP/ACRS Afghan schemes** are now established and we work closely with the Home Office and also a number of partner organisation to deliver support and re-settlement activities for this group.
- 3.5 Officers attend local and regional meetings with partners to discuss developments and issues with the scheme and share good practice and training opportunities.
- 3.6 **Asylum Seekers** Leicester has been a volunteer in the Home Office NASS scheme since 2001 and so over the last 11 years we have assisted a large number of asylum seekers/refugees to re-settle in our City. As a result we, alongside other agencies and the 3rd sector have become very skilled in supporting this group. The Home Office continue to locate 2 dispersal hotels and a further 297 properties in the City which are all managed by Serco.

- 3.7 Officers engage with Serco and the Home Office around this group and Lead Members meet with the 3rd sector groups which is facilitated by the strategic Lead for Immigration, Migration & Asylum, Jo Russell, Head of Service, Housing Division.
- 3.8 Chris Burgin, Director of Housing recently met with meeting with Home Office regarding the potential additional dispersal hotel which may be opened in Leicester. This was to re-affirm our commitment to supporting those fleeing violence and oppression however the sheer numbers of individuals placed in the city is putting intolerable strain on all local services including 3rd sector organisations and request that they reconsider Leicester and seek out hotels in other authorities under their national dispersal model which to date have not had a significant role to play in supporting asylum seekers.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

- 4.1 **Homes for Ukraine:** As a result of the invasion by Russia of Ukraine on the 24th February 2022 an estimated 6 million Ukrainian people have fled their homes and their country to seek safety and sanctuary from the violence and registered in countries across Europe.
- 4.2 The UK Government has set up 4 schemes which are designed to allow Ukrainian refugees to remain in or come to the UK quickly and safely, the Family scheme, the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Ukraine Extension scheme.
- 4.3 **The Family Scheme** is designed so that those in the UK can nominate family members who are fleeing from the violence in Ukraine to join them in the UK. Those from Ukraine can enter the UK and remain for up to 3 years and will have recourse to public funds.
- 4.4 The Local Authority is not provided with data on this scheme and we have no additional responsibilities or funding linked to this scheme. We do know that anecdotally we have 15 arrivals in the City from this scheme made up of 4 families.
- 4.5 **Homes for Ukraine** is a sponsorship scheme designed to link up UK sponsors offering a home to a Ukrainian individual or family.
- 4.6 To date we have 100 sponsor homes within the City with 170 Ukrainian guests linked to them. These numbers are increasing but at a pace of 1-2 a week on average. It should be noted that while we do have access to the Plantir-Foundry system provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) the quality of the data remains poor.
- 4.7 We visit and support all arrivals with whatever their needs are in each case and we offer weekly sessions at the Brite Centre to all arrivals and sponsors.
- 4.8 The Local Authority is provided with £10,500 per Ukrainian under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and an additional amount for education (detailed later in the report) have to deliver specific responsibilities around settlement.
- 4.9 We are in the process of delivering an additional £200 to sponsors using these funds to assist with the cost of living during the winter months.

- 4.10 The Support team are working with guests to seek out longer term options for housing which is now one of the key priorities of the team. We are providing a package to assist with locating and obtaining housing for this group and housing solutions have been found in most instances. This has included extending sponsorships, re-matching and locating homes in the private rented sector. These are working well and limiting any impact on our Homeless Services.
- 4.11 To date of those who we have spoken to about their plans (55 families) we have been able to extend or rematch 37% of guests with a further 14% having located privately rented accommodation and 12% of individuals returning to Ukraine. We continue to work with the remaining families who are undecided about what they wish to do once their sponsorship comes to an end in the coming months.
- 4.12 As a Local Authority we remain focussed on managing the safeguarding risks around the Homes for Ukraine scheme and have recently attended the safeguarding Adults Board to give a presentation and undertake a question and answer session.
- 4.13 The risks linked to the scheme are well mitigated and have been notably well managed when matters have arisen. It should however be noted that there have been relatively few issues with this scheme or the Afghan scheme noted in 4.15 and onwards.
- 4.14 **Ukraine Extension Scheme** allows a Ukrainian or the family member of someone who is Ukrainian to extend an existing visa, if they are already within the UK, so that individuals can live, work and study in the UK. The scheme applies to those who hold any valid UK visa or held one that expired on or after 1 January 2022.
- 4.15 **Ukraine UASC** to date we have had no arrivals under this scheme in the City.
- 4.16 **ARAP/ACRS:** On 29 December 2020 the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched. This scheme offers relocation or other assistance to former Locally Employed Staff (LES) in Afghanistan and is has been prioritised due to the withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan, and the following escalation in violence and the initial evacuation was named “Operation Pitting”. The scheme has been amended and so now only applies to those directly employed in Afghanistan by a UK government department on or after 1 October 2001 and they must now have a “high and imminent risk” of threat to their life to be able to come to the UK.
- 4.17 On the 6th January 2022 the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) was launched. The scheme offers relocation and other assistance and prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law.
- 4.18 In Leicester there is a single Home office bridging hotel that has a number of individuals under both schemes who are awaiting a permanent housing solution from The Home office. This hotel was stood up in August 2021. There is no other bridging hotel of this type in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

4.19 There are currently 16 families made up of 85 individuals within the hotel (34 adults & 51 children). All children of school age are in school placements and those in the hotel are actively taking part in re-settlement work.

4.20 Leicester City Council have offered to provide 12 homes to individuals within the bridging hotel and we will fill that quote shortly.

4.21 In August 2022 there remained approximately 10,000 Afghan people still living in bridging hotels across the UK.

4.22 **Asylum seekers**

4.23 As we are all aware there are a number of people migrating across the world to escape violence and oppression and for other social and economic reasons.

4.24 The UK receives a number of asylum seekers each day from across the world with entry into the UK via small boats from mainland Europe being a particular entry route of note.

4.25 A National Dispersal scheme has been set up so that arrivals in to port authorities can be shared across the UK. This dispersal scheme has been in place for unaccompanied minors (UASC) for some time and is now in place for adults.

4.26 At this time it is not envisioned there will be a slow down of arrivals into the UK any time soon.

5. **Detailed report**

5.1 **Homes for Ukraine scheme.** This section of the report is more detailed than following updates as we hold significantly more responsibilities under this scheme as a Local Authority.

5.2 **Resource for delivery:** The STAR AMAL Team in Housing are delivering the wrap around support for those arriving from Ukraine under the sponsorship scheme and a team has been stood up for an initial period of 6 months to manage these roles have recently been extended for a further 6 months.

5.3 The Team Leader is in post and 6 specialist Refugee Support workers have now been recruited, two who will focus on the IT systems which are complicated and changing regularly. Some recruits also have key language skills to assist in delivering support to this group.

5.4 A generic E-Mail has been set up refugee-asylum@leicester.gov.uk which has been useful in managing communications.

5.5 The DBS and property checks continue and are monitored weekly and going well.

5.6 Safeguarding checks are being carried out and the Early Help Team have also visited all arrivals with children to date. There are also follow up face to face visits with all arrivals and then support is provided on a needs basis.

5.7 Impact on Homelessness Services

5.8 The Councils' statutory homelessness duties will apply to those in both the Family and Sponsorship schemes as they have full recourse to public funds. If a Family or Sponsorship arrangement break down or accommodation is unsuitable an amendment has been made to the Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 which confirms our duty.

5.9 To date we have had four approaches to Housing Options from arrivals, two linked to Homes for Ukraine and two from the Family scheme.

5.10 As part of the wrap around support a key stream of work is managing the sponsor and arrival relationship to maintain accommodation and avoid breakdown of the relationship/accommodation and to seek to extend that passed the 6 months where possible.

5.11 The team are now focussed on supporting arrivals to find more long term accommodation options where possible.

5.12 Education

5.13 Data is shared daily with the Head of Service for Education Sufficiency & Admissions (nominated officer while the post is vacant) about the sponsor households and where available the Ukrainian arrivals.

5.14 A pathway has been designed between Education and STAR AMAL so that when children arrive in the UK they will be able to access education as soon as possible as we recognise this is a critical step in settlement and support. This is working well.

5.15 Benefits & looking for work

5.16 Links have been made with the Job Centre who are prepared with work advisors who can assist arrivals and they have access to translation services. They will advise on benefits, getting in to work and associated issues such as childcare. STAR AMAL will support arrivals to make benefits claims, attend appointments and open bank accounts (among other things).

5.17 Property Inspections

5.18 These inspections are carried out by our Environmental Health Officers. They have mainly been of a good standard and any issues we are working with the sponsors to improve and we have not declined any property to date. The issues that have come up have been minor and the sponsor is supported to meet the standard and given 28 days to do so. This has included issues such as the installation of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

5.19 To date 113 of the 115 potential properties have been inspected and all are scheduled in (please note that the properties where guest are residing, 4.6, have all passed an inspection). 20 properties have failed inspections for a variety of reasons around safeguarding and suitability.

5.20 Integration

5.21 Many of the arrivals within the City to date are very independent individuals with skills and education and are very keen to work and “stand on their own feet”.

5.22 We continue to work closely with the Association of Ukrainians UK and the Leicester Ukraine Club and we have included the County in those meetings as the Club does not have such boundaries.

5.23 A package of integration activities and support is provided for arrivals and this includes welcome packs and information, ESOL, access to work and locality and travel alongside accessing childcare and GP services.

5.24 Transport support will be provided to those under the Homes for Ukraine scheme as required and assessed on a need’s basis but you will note in 5.9 there is financial provision for this type of expense.

5.25 DBS checks for sponsors

5.26 The Local Authority has been tasked with carrying out DBS checks on all sponsors over the age of 16 in the household.

5.27 To date 114 checks have been carried out with a further 40 underway. 32 of those currently underway are with the DBS and 8 people we have been unable to contact and will be removed from the system (they have no guests).

5.28 Scheme Risks and Risk Assessment

5.29 There are a number of risks for the Local Authority associated with delivery of this scheme. The most significant risk that we are working to mitigate is the appropriate safeguarding of both the sponsors and the Ukrainian arrivals.

5.30 There is a strategic meeting where the risk is over seen at the highest level and this is led by Richard Sword and Martin Samuels to review and ensure our safeguarding response is thorough and working effectively. This meeting is also attended by other Senior staff members in adult and children’s social care and Lindsay Bampton the Safeguarding Board Manager.

5.31 The chairs and key stakeholders of both the Children’s and Adults Safeguarding Boards have been made aware of the scheme and associated risks and a further updates provided to the boards with Joanne Russell attending the most recent Adult Safeguarding Board to give a presentation and undertake a Q & A session.

5.32 Bridging Hotel – Afghan resettlement

5.33 Leicester City Council have offered to accommodate 12 Afghan families in Leicester and we have found a number of suitable properties. 6 people have been housed and a further 4 properties are “under offer” with the SMP. 5 of those properties are in the private rented sector, 4 are City Council properties and 1 is from a Housing Association (RSL).

- 5.34 STAR AMAL are working hard to make those properties available and support those both in the homes and those who are in the hotels.
- 5.35 The recent “Self Service” scheme launched by the Government where hotel guests can find accommodation independently anywhere in the UK if they choose and can seek assistance from Local Authorities on arrival in their self located homes should they wish to.
- 5.36 We have received a number of enquiries about this scheme in Leicester, however to date no one has arrived to live here under this route.
- 5.38 **Dispersed Hotels (Asylum Seekers)** are located in the City and there is currently 2 housing around 300 people between them at any one time. There are also 297 properties ranging from homes in multiple occupation to family accommodation holding a further circa 1100 asylum seekers.
- 5.39 Support is provided to this group via Serco who provide the accommodation and local 3rd sector organisations such the Red Cross, After18, TREC and City of Sanctuary to name only a few.
- 5.40 The significant numbers of asylum seekers within the city is putting significant pressure on these services and their ability to deliver. There is a shortage of legal aid immigration specialists within the City and a need to work with asylum seekers in advance of them receiving refugee status to ensure their transition into the community.
- 5.41 It is hoped that with the Introduction of the National Dispersal scheme noted at paragraph 4.25 above this will result in a reduction in reliance on Leicester by the Home Office which should in turn reduce the numbers of arrivals within the City easing the pressure on local services.
- 5.42 The Local Authority will be provided with £250 per asylum resident in the City as of the 22nd March 2022 which will equate to a forecasted income of £299k which has a strict set of criteria on how this can be used to support local services throughout the stay of an asylum seeker in the City (this can sometimes be more than a year).
- 5.43 As Leicester has been a volunteer dispersal area since 2001, we have built up notable expertise in working with these group. We and our 3rd sector colleagues are often contacted by those in authorities who are newly in the dispersal scheme for advice, guidance and good practice. With this in mind a roadshow is being organised for local, regional and national colleagues and 3rd sector organisations to attend to share some of that knowledge and good practice. This will likely be in the new year and more details will follow in a future update.

6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

The Council receives government grants to cover the direct costs incurred in supporting refugees; in general indications are that these fully cover the operational costs of the

Council. However, there are wider financial risks for the Council: (1) The standard per capita education funding does not provide for SEND, so any increase in the number of children with such needs could add significant costs, (2) any breakdown of accommodation arrangements under government schemes will result in an increase in homelessness presentations, an area already under financial strain. The extent of these risks is being monitored.

Stuart McAvoy – Acting Head of Finance, Ext 37 4004

6.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal obligations arising from this report, which is for noting and comment only.

Jeremy Rainbow – Principal Lawyer (Litigation) - 371435

6.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions they have to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The Council also has an obligation to treat people in accordance with their Convention rights under The Human Rights Act, 1998. The report provides updated information on the Immigration, Migration and Asylum within the city with a focus on the Homes for Ukraine and Afghan schemes.

Local authorities have a critical role to play in the success of the schemes and are uniquely placed to support local communities to offer people a welcome to the UK. Having a dedicated team that will work closely with a range of partner agencies helping to make sure people have access to vital services and support including accommodation, safeguarding, healthcare, education, translation and employment should lead to positive impacts.

Considering risk management implications in making decisions and assessing the effectiveness of the controls/ mitigation actions for the risks identified in the report will support a robust approach to reducing the likelihood of disproportionate equality and human rights related risks, provided the mitigations/ controls themselves are compliant with the relevant legislation.

Equality Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4146

6.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report, as it is for information. More generally, as service delivery contributes to the council's carbon emissions, impacts can be managed through measures such as encouraging sustainable travel behaviours, using offices efficiently and following sustainable procurement guidance, as applicable to the project and activities that are carried out. Where this involves the use of housing and accommodation consideration should also be given where possible to ensuring and improving the energy efficiency of properties, which has the potential to improve housing conditions and reduce energy costs, alongside cutting carbon emissions.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

N/A

7. Background information and other papers:

N/A

8. Summary of appendices:

N/A

9. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

10. Is this a "key decision"? If so, why?

N/A – Update report.