

**Decision Session – Executive Member for
Culture, Leisure and Communities**

19 April 2022

Report of the Assistant Director (Customer and Communities)

York’s welcome to Ukrainian refugees

Summary

1. This report sets out the city’s response to welcoming Ukrainian refugees to the city.

Recommendation

2. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - Note the actions currently being taken.
 - Agree the initial funding to City of Sanctuary set out in paragraph 16.
 - Agree the grant arrangements set out in paragraph 23.
 - Agree the arrangements with Migration Yorkshire as set out in paragraph 29.

Reason: To provide an effective and coordinated welcome to Ukrainians arriving in York.

Background

‘Homes for Ukraine’

3. The ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme opened for visa applications on Friday 18 March. Either a Guest or a Sponsor can complete the visa application; however, the form asks the person completing it to name both parties. Sponsors and guests find each other and match themselves externally: there is no central matching process.
4. The scheme is uncapped in terms of numbers. Guests can live and work in the UK for up to 3 years and access benefits, healthcare, employment and other support.
5. Sponsors must provide accommodation for a minimum of six months. Sponsors can also receive an optional ‘thank you’ payment

of £350 per month for up to the first 12 months of sponsorship. This payment is limited to one monthly payment per residential address, regardless of the number of individuals sponsored. Sponsors should not charge rent. They are not expected to cover the costs of food and living expenses.

6. The scheme is being rolled out in phases. In later phases organisations and community groups will be able to sponsor multiple guests.
7. Councils are expected to lead on the following:
 - a) **Reception arrangements:** Establish reception arrangements at particular ports of entry – not applicable to York.
 - b) **Data sharing:** Councils are receiving the necessary data from DLUHC about Sponsors and Guests who have applied for visas and when the visa is granted.
 - c) **Safeguarding checks:** In line with councils' statutory duty to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk they have the right to check in on Guests and inspect accommodation once they have arrived and the sponsor guidance makes this clear.
 - d) **Property checks:** Councils must visit the Sponsor household, preferably before the Guest has arrived, to confirm that the accommodation is suitable.
 - e) **DBS checks:** Councils must also undertake basic DBS checks on all adults in the sponsor household. In households where there are incoming arrivals who are children and/or vulnerable adults, an enhanced DBS check with barred lists check will be required for all adults in the sponsor household.
 - f) **Interim payment for Guest:** The council should provide an interim payment of £200 per guest for subsistence costs (from the funding allocation – see below). Councils also have discretion within the tariff to top-up or further support guests with interim or additional payments. Working age guests will be able to apply to receive Universal Credit and will be able to apply for advance payments where eligible. Pension age guests will have access to State Pension Credit and Housing Benefit provided they meet eligibility criteria.
 - g) **Provision of education:** Councils are required to provide school places for children of school age - funding set out below.

- h) **Service referrals:** Councils should provide advice and referrals to specialist public health services as appropriate e.g., mental health services, adult social care, and children's services.
- i) **Work and Benefits:** Councils should support guests to access local Jobcentre Plus appointments for benefit assessments and job-seeking.
- j) **Homelessness assistance:** It is recognised that, in some cases, the Sponsor / Guest relationship will break down and the Guest become at risk of homelessness. Councils' statutory homelessness duties will apply in this instance. There is an indication that a system may also be devised to refer people back into the system to find a new sponsor.
- k) **Community integration:** Councils are expected to play a key role in supporting the integration of Ukrainian families into their local communities. This will be particularly important in place like York that do not have strong links with the Ukrainian diaspora. Integration support might include the organisation of community events, the use of community champions and interfaith networks, increasing local authority contact / interaction with Ukrainians, access to translation services and working with local voluntary sector organisations and faith groups to help signpost advice and support.
- l) **Administering payments to sponsors:** Councils will administer the optional 'thank you' payments to sponsors of £350 per month, for up to 12 months. There is a maximum of one monthly payment per address paid in arrears, regardless of the number of guests being hosted. Payments must not be released to sponsors until property checks have been completed. This payment will be tax free and will not affect the sponsor's entitlement to benefits or council tax status.

Funding for councils

- 8. The council will receive £10,500 per person in the first year. This is not ring fenced. There will be extra government funding to cover the 'thank you' payments.
- 9. The Department for Education (DfE) will also allocate funding on a per pupil basis for the three phases of education at the following annual rates:

- Early years (ages 2 to 4) - £3,000
- Primary (ages 5 -11) - £6,580
- Secondary (ages 11-18) - £8,755

(These tariffs include support for children with special educational needs and disabilities).

Current Position

10. By the time of writing, i.e. 7 April, the portal showed 60 matches for York. The data does not, in all cases, show the children in the Guest group; however, the number of Guests involved is likely to be in the region of 150. A small number of visas had been granted and one group of five plus one individual had just arrived in the city. The position will be updated at the meeting.
11. Some additional capacity has been put in place in the Communities Team both to administer the scheme and to create a 'link worker' role to support Sponsors. Officers are in contact with potential Sponsors on the portal to:
 - Facilitate the DBS checks – York CVS has agreed to process these for Sponsors going forward.
 - Arrange for Housing officers to undertake the initial property inspection – the council is helping Sponsors with any issues that arise e.g. arranging gas safety checks where these have not been undertaken in the last 12 months, fitting carbon monoxide alarms.
 - Arrange a visit from the link worker who will support the guests and sponsors in all aspects as set out above.

The Next Stage

12. It is clear that there is a great will amongst York's residents and organisations to support people coming from Ukraine to the city. It is also clear that our efforts as a city need to be coordinated in order to ensure that the offers of help are mobilised to best effect and meet the needs of Guests.
13. To this end, the city's Refugee Coordination Group is currently meeting weekly to coordinate the city's response. This group brings together all the key agencies in the city who are interested in supporting this initiative and/or provide statutory services. A comprehensive guide on "Support for Ukrainian Refugees" has been produced by the group for all front-line services / agencies. The

group is ensuring the consistency of information provision by providing links to respective websites.

14. Current key issues:

15. **City of Sanctuary:** City of Sanctuary are taking the lead for the city in addressing some important areas of work:

a) Providing advice and guidance to those considering becoming Sponsors. Many people need the opportunity to think through the issues involved and to understand the requirements of being a Sponsor. For example, whilst many households have one spare room, it is clear that Guests are coming in family groups and therefore require houses with significant space. City of Sanctuary are able to advise people about how best they can help.

Furthermore, few York residents will know anyone fleeing Ukraine with whom they can complete a visa application. City of Sanctuary can link appropriate individuals who register with them, as well as on the national site, with the name of someone who has approached them from Ukraine (from where they are getting a number of contacts).

b) Creating a register of individuals interested in helping Ukrainians coming to York e.g. translators – they have several hundred people registered so far.

c) Helping the council to support Sponsors – it is envisaged that a peer support group will be just one of the mechanisms for this.

d) Creating a support group for existing Ukrainian residents in York in collaboration with the council's Minority Communities Officer. An event to celebrate Orthodox Easter is an example of an activity currently being planned.

16. City of Sanctuary have undertaken this work so far through their volunteer trustees. They now need to take on some staffing resource to continue to build this work. It is proposed to make an initial grant of £20k to City of Sanctuary, from the government funding provided to the council, to fund this work for the period April to September.

17. **Schools:** the council's link worker is liaising with the schools admissions team when children arrive. The school admissions team in turn work with the relevant school to ensure a smooth admission for the child. The council's "Fair Access" scheme is being

employed. This scheme is designed for more vulnerable admissions and allows us to make a placement even when a school is 'full' if it is in the child / young person's best interests.

18. Training is being developed for schools both using the regional provider, SOLACE, as well as a York-developed e-module.
19. A headteacher briefing has been held on the scheme.
20. The full government funding will be passported to the school when an admission takes place.
21. **Support to Guests:** It is recognised that Guests are likely to have a spectrum of needs arising from the experiences they have suffered. In anticipation of this a range of potential responses are being developed in partnership with organisations such as York Mind and SOLACE ranging from counselling to more intensive interventions. It is recognised that support may also be need by Sponsors over time.
22. **Support Sponsors:** A "took kit" has been provided for Sponsors. This will be followed up with more personalised support including training, a 'buddy' system and peer support arrangements. These will be developed with partners including Refugee Action York and City of Sanctuary.
23. **Community Organisations:** Many community organisations are mobilising to provide drop-ins and other social support to Guests. This will be invaluable in furthering integration and reducing the risk of isolation. Two Ridings Foundation are ready to support such initiatives. It is recommended that there is provision to make grants to such organisations where appropriate from the government funding to cover costs such as room bookings; authority to make grants to be delegated to the Director of Customer and Communities in consultation with the Executive Member.
24. **Volunteers:** City of Sanctuary are bringing together specific offers such as a group of translators. CVS are recruiting volunteers as required by voluntary organisations through the volunteer bureau and the council's minority communities officer is also coordinating a group of volunteers.
25. **English as a second language (ESOL):** York Learning are working to expand the city's ESOL capacity, as quickly as possible, working with all the partner agencies who deliver ESOL, to meet the needs of Ukrainian refugees. We will aim to incorporate Ukrainian

arrivals within our regular provision from September. Between now and September, we are setting up a "Welcome to York" ESOL programme specifically for Ukrainians. This will aim to equip the learners with the emergency English they will need to navigate life here. This will be hosted at York City Church (the Citadel) starting on Friday 29th April. It will enable the learners then to be placed in the most appropriate provision suitable to their needs.

26. **Migration Yorkshire:** Migration Yorkshire play an important regional role in the existing resettlement programmes, for example for the Syrian group. This includes regional coordination, advice and guidance and developing and sharing best practice. Whereas Migration Yorkshire is funded by government directly for those programmes, in this case it has been left to local authorities to decide whether to use their services. Migration Yorkshire has proposed to provide support to York on the same financial basis as the existing programmes, i.e. a 3.3% fee taken from each placement grant made by government to the council.
27. In return for this fee, Migration Yorkshire will work with government departments representing the region nationally and feeding the results of this back to the council. They will support the council as required and work with other key partners including health, police, VCS, etc. They will commission regional services where agreed such as mental health services and seek to flexibly deploy resources regionally within and outside of the programme where possible.
28. Additionally, they will provide a training programme across the region for key services and potentially for sponsors/hosts together with welcome information for Ukrainians. They will support complex cases and support the development of local and regional support services in response to the issue that emerge.
29. This expertise is likely to be very useful to York given the many unknowns we face as well as the ability to buy into regional services and programmes that would not readily be available in York alone. It is therefore recommended that we take up Migration Yorkshire's offer.
30. The Refugee Council also provide support for refugees on the current resettlement schemes and have indicated their willingness to work with the Ukrainian group. If the numbers grow to such a level that exceeds the capacity of current council staff to support them effectively it is recommended that, at that stage, the Refugee Council be commissioned to provide additional capacity.

Options

31. It is open to the Executive Member to agree the proposals / actions set out in this paper and/or to suggest additional or alternative ones.

Analysis

32. York's response to the Ukraine refugee crisis is consistent with its role as a City of Sanctuary. It follows on from its active participation in the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. It also follows on from the successful initiative taken between June 2020 and June 2021, when York supported the Home Office in their accommodation of asylum seekers at a temporarily repurposed hotel in York (as part of the Initial Accommodation programme). This was needed due to unprecedented pressures on the asylum accommodation system due to Covid. The report attached at Annex 1 provides an overview of the project together with lessons learned for the future.

The Family Visa Scheme

33. It should also be noted that a small number of Ukrainians are arriving in York on the Family Visa route. Unfortunately, there is no funding available to councils or schools for new arrivals by this route. Furthermore, there are a number of issues about this scheme:
34. The Family Visa Scheme is silent on the issue of accommodation. It is likely that some families coming over will not be able to fit into the accommodation of the relative who has facilitated their visa. There is therefore potential for individuals / families to present to the council as homeless.
35. The council will support Ukrainians arriving on this scheme as they would any other York resident. City of Sanctuary will also provide general befriending and peer support and are encouraging and coordinating offers of accommodation for this group. Where whole properties are offered, the Council will offer to manage those properties on behalf of the owners. Rents must be offered at or below the Local Housing Allowance rate to make this workable.
36. Representations are being made to government by many agencies about the lack of funding for this scheme.

Implications

37. **Financial:** All expenditure associated with the actions set out in this paper will be contained within the funding from government as set out in paragraph 8.

Council Plan

38. This initiative can support many of the aims of the Council Plan and especially Safe Communities and culture for all.

Risk Management

39. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations, which could in turn damage the Council's image and reputation. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at "Medium". This means that the risk level is acceptable but that regular active monitoring of progress against delivery of the scheme will be required.

Contact Details

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	Report Approved	✓	Date	7.4.22.
Wards Affected:				All ✓
For further information please contact the author of the report				

Annex:

Annex 1: Lessons Learnt Report - Hosting Asylum Seekers in a York hotel