

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2022
title: HOMES FOR UKRAINE UPDATE
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive information on the Homes for Ukraine initiative.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To address housing needs across the borough.
- Corporate Priorities – To ensure the Council is a well-run authority.
- Other Considerations – none.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will be familiar with the ongoing humanitarian crisis following the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. To provide assistance, the government announced the Homes for Ukraine scheme providing an opportunity to UK residents to help support Ukraine refugees fleeing conflict to move to the UK under a sponsorship arrangement.

2.2 There are two main schemes to support refugees – the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HFU); and the Ukraine Family Scheme. The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members or to extend an existing stay in the UK and is a different scheme to the HFU that the Council is assisting in delivering.

2.3 The HFU scheme was launched in March 2022 and is open to Ukraine nationals who were resident in the Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022, as well as their immediate family members (that is spouse/partner and children under 18) to be sponsored to come to the UK. The scheme allows UK residents to offer a home to people fleeing the Ukraine by becoming a sponsor. Sponsors can register to support someone known to them as a direct sponsor. Alternatively, they can register their willingness to support a family and will be matched with people seeking to leave the Ukraine.

2.4 The HFU scheme is uncapped in terms of the numbers but is dependent upon the capacity of sponsors who come forward. Guests who are being sponsored, are able to live and work in the UK for up to 3 years and can access benefits, health care, employment and other support. Guests coming to the UK need to meet standard security checks prior to being issued with a visa. Sponsors and all adults in sponsors' households will also be subject to police national computer, criminal records and warning index checks by the Home Office as part of the visa process. In addition, DBS checks are also undertaken as part of the safeguarding measures under the scheme, which the County Council on as the lead authority in the process is administering.

2.5 The District Council's role at present to assist in the delivery of the HFU scheme by undertaking checks on sponsor accommodation to ensure it is suitable. These checks are carried out by the Housing team following notification of sponsors' addresses by

the County Council. In addition, the Borough Council is administering the "Thank-you" grants the government has introduced of £350 which provides the option for sponsors to claim a monthly support payment for as long as they have guests living in their accommodation. The Housing team are dealing with the administration of this scheme. At present the numbers of sponsors coming forward in Ribble Valley is amongst the highest in the county, with many properties being offered. At the time of writing there were 37 of sponsorship properties.

- 2.6 The government has also provided funding to local authorities to help support the additional workloads generated by the scheme; the Council will receive a payment per guest (not household) to support the additional housing related workloads, together with a per guest payment to support activities to assist with community-based support and cohesion. The Council's Partnership Officer will be seeking to develop this area of work with local groups and communities, working with other agencies and local authorities as appropriate. Several community support groups have been established in the area to provide community-based support for families in the Ribble Valley area and are already providing a significant amount of support to those families who are now with sponsors.
- 2.7 A verbal update of the numbers of sponsors and guests arrived will be given at the meeting.
- 2.8 As the scheme progresses, it is anticipated that the focus of workloads will move from accommodation inspection to payment and community support depending upon the rate at which new sponsors continue to come forward. This will be monitored as housing resource is currently being diverted as a priority to implement the scheme. Consideration has already been given by Corporate Management Team to provide additional administrative support to sustain the scheme funded from the Government's Grant Initiative. It should be noted that there may also be increased demands on the Council's homelessness services as Ukrainians under the scheme will be able to claim housing support should they lose their accommodation or be at risk of homelessness. This may lead to increasing pressure to support refugees into housing as the Council will have a duty to assist under the government regulations.
- 2.9 Members will be kept informed of any issues arising out of the scheme, however present the Council is taking steps to support the government's initiative and to support refugees and their sponsors who are currently in Ribble Valley.



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