

UKRAINIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN ARGYLL AND BUTE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council along with partner agencies and our communities are working closely together to provide a warm welcome to those fleeing the war in Ukraine.
- 1.2 The Council supports both UK and Government sponsorship schemes and Ukrainian Displaced People arriving in our authority are offered support to rebuild their lives and recover from trauma.
- 1.3 This report provides elected members with an update on the national position and also provides an update on how the sponsorship schemes are operating within Argyll and Bute and the support available locally to Ukrainian Displaced Persons.
- 1.4 The recommendations within the report are as follows,
Elected members are invited to:
- Note the national position as set out in section 4 of this report and agree that the Council should, through CoSLA and other representative bodies, and on an individual basis if and when appropriate, make representations for improvements to the Ukrainian sponsorship schemes;
 - Consider the current position in relation to Argyll and Bute as set out in section 5 of this report.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The war in Ukraine has resulted in a humanitarian crisis with over 12 million Ukrainians having fled their homes. There are two sponsorship schemes operating to welcome and support Ukrainian Displaced People to gain safety and sanctuary and rebuild their lives in Scotland.
- 2.2 The UK Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme relies on individuals in the UK acting as a sponsor and matching with people displaced from Ukraine. The Ukrainian refugee matches with a sponsor before applying for a visa. This is known as private matching and the majority of those arriving in Argyll and Bute between May to July came through this scheme.
- 2.3 The Scottish Government's Super Sponsor scheme works within the UK Government's Ukraine sponsorship scheme and removes the need for applicants to be matched prior to being given permission travel to the UK. By acting as 'Super Sponsor', rather than waiting for the UK Government's matching process, Scotland could provide safety and sanctuary and welcome significant numbers. In Argyll and Bute we saw an increase in numbers arriving through this scheme in July, with it taking over as the predominant sponsorship scheme during August and into September.
- 2.4 Sponsors for both schemes are asked to provide accommodation for as long as they are able, and for a minimum of 6 months. Eligibility extends to Ukrainian nationals (or their immediate family) who were resident in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022. Those arriving under both schemes are able to live and work in the UK for up to three years, with full access to healthcare, benefits, employment and education.

- 2.5 This report provides elected members with an update on the challenges with the sponsorship scheme and the national review underway led by Scottish Government and CoSLA. This report also provides an update on how the sponsorship schemes are operating within Argyll and Bute and the support provided locally to Ukrainian Displaced Persons.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Elected members are invited to:

- 3.1 Note the national position as set out in section 4 of this report and agree that the Council should, through CoSLA and other representative bodies, and on an individual basis if and when appropriate, make representations for improvements to the Ukrainian sponsorship schemes.
- 3.2 Consider the current position in relation to Argyll and Bute as set out in section 5 of this report.

4.0 DETAIL

National picture

- 4.1 The Super Sponsor scheme in Scotland is highly accessible and places no requirement on Ukrainian Displaced People to seek out a private individual in the UK willing to sponsor them. The Welsh Government paused its equivalent Super Sponsor scheme on 10 June. By early July, Scotland had the highest number of applications, visas issued and arrivals per head of population of any of the four nations.
- 4.2 With the rapidly increasing rates of arrivals and against a backdrop of continued pressure on short-term accommodation, the Scottish Government announced a pause to new applications to ensure those arriving could continue to access suitable accommodation and support. This pause was for three months and did not mean an immediate reduction in arrivals. During July and August we experienced a significant increase in arrivals only slowing down when the availability of flights, and other public transport became more difficult to come by.
- 4.3 In light of this position and with a continued and increased reliance in short term hotel accommodation on 4 August the Scottish Government commenced a rapid review of Scotland's 'Super Sponsor' scheme with the aim of identifying improvements to the scheme, including interventions able to reduce the duration of stays in temporary accommodation.
- 4.4 The hotel temporary accommodation situation was placing all local authorities under significant pressure, particularly when combined with the other requirements of the scheme such as carrying out background and property checks for those expressing an interest in sponsoring, matching activity where a

suitable host is identified, plus ongoing resettlement and humanitarian work and with increased host/public/media queries, etc.

- 4.5 In Argyll and Bute there are further challenges due to our unique geography as we had a large number of potential sponsors. We also have Ukrainian Displaced People living with sponsors across the whole of the authority and are supporting four temporary hotels.
- 4.6 The rapid review is reaching its conclusion and the recommendations within the report look to address the policy themes of accommodation, empowerment, matching and housing. These policy recommendations will in turn be worked up, in partnership with local authorities, into a suite of operational documents.
- 4.7 However, there are concerns that the rapid review and its recommendations will not address all of the issues with the Super Sponsor scheme. It is becoming more evident that it is more challenging than originally anticipated to build a sponsorship scheme on a foundation of mobilising community capacity. And by the processes put in place without clear guidance, issues with the sharing of data, lack of matching policy, increased reliance on use of hotels and without a detailed understanding of the needs of the Ukrainian Displaced People arriving in Scotland, this could be stifling the generosity that our communities have been so keen to extend.
- 4.8 The rapid review also places a heavy reliance on a private rental sector for accommodation when the initial sponsorship is over or indeed as an alternative to sponsorship. This availability of both private rented and social housing for Ukrainian Displaced People has to be considered within the context of other refugee programmes, dispersed asylum, increased homeless presentations and, a cost of living crisis.
- 4.9 It is also worth noting that, not unsurprisingly, there is a great diversity across Ukrainian nationals arriving in Scotland through the Super Sponsor scheme and a blanket approach to the implementation of the Super Sponsor scheme can be disempowering for some and could miss the more complex needs of others.

5.0 ARGYLL AND BUTE POSITION

- 5.1 Within Argyll and Bute the council's Resettlement Team continue to support Ukrainian Displaced People and sponsors and will also ensure that local knowledge and experience informs the development of guidance and any policy changes at a national level.
- 5.2 The humanitarian support in Argyll and Bute is coordinated by the multi-agency Ukrainian Resettlement Group which meets fortnightly and includes council services, partner agencies and the third sector. We have increased the size of the Council's Resettlement Team to provide advice and support to those living with sponsors. To provide a wraparound support to those in temporary and social housing and to provide welfare support for those in hotels. Interpreters and translators have also been recruited to the team.

5.3 The number of arrivals of Ukrainian Displaced People (UDP) to Argyll and Bute in the past few months has increased.

In sponsorship arrangements we have:

111* UDPs with Homes for Ukraine visas where the sponsor and guest self-match before arrival.

64* UDPs with Super Sponsor visa where the UDP is matched with a sponsor or is allocated social housing after a temporary stay in a hotel.

In addition we have 57* UDPs with a Super Sponsor visa currently in temporary hotel accommodation in Argyll and Bute where matching discussions are in progress.

5.4 The number of UDPs in sponsorship and temporary hotel accommodation changes daily. As guests move out of the hotels when they are successfully matched and are quickly replaced by new guests arriving into Scotland allocated to temporary accommodation in the Argyll and Bute hotels. We also continue to see a number of arrivals each week through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

5.5 Supporting UDPs in hotels allows the Resettlement Team to progress local matching. We have had a total of 167* UDPs stay in the hotels since they became operational and we have been successful in finding matches for 93* persons who have moved out into sponsorship within Argyll and Bute or further afield.

5.6 Local matching is much more successful for Argyll and Bute than the national matching service. This is because we have built a relationship of trust with the UDPs and we know our area, our job market, our schools and our sponsors and can make informed decisions on what would be a good and sustainable match and what will not. The UDPs in the hotels, with a very small exception, are very happy in Argyll and Bute but they are also clear that they do not want to stay anywhere too remote.

5.7 In addition to hotel accommodation and sponsors properties the Registered Social Landlords have also made social housing available for the programme:

West Highland Housing Association	2 properties both now occupied
Fyne Homes	7 properties all now occupied
ACHA	5 properties being decorated, carpeted and furnished

5.8 We also provide ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and interest and uptake is high so we are currently recruiting more ESOL tutors.

* numbers accurate as on 21.09.2022

- 5.9 At the beginning of August we launched our 3 months free bus pass scheme for those who do not qualify for the national travel schemes for under 22s and over 60s. Our Argyll and Bute scheme has been put in place with the support of all of the local transport providers.
- 5.10 UDPs are very quickly securing employment and we have signed up our first cohort of Ukrainians education professionals on our career pathway. This will see them working in our schools initially in a support role to gain experience and knowledge of our curriculum. We intend in time for this to lead GTCS recognition or registration. The other benefit of this approach is this provides Ukrainian speakers in schools with Ukrainian pupils. We have 50 pupils in 14 settings across the authority.
- 5.11 In August we held two very successful Welcome Fayres in Dunoon and Oban where UDPs had the opportunity to engage with a wide range of council, partner services and community organisations. The fayres also gave an opportunity to meet with other Ukrainians living in their area and were very well attended. More fayres will be planned in the next few months.
- 5.12 We offer additional support to our sponsors through a peer support group which gives them the opportunity approximately once a month to meet the resettlement team and one another and ask questions about the scheme. These online sessions have been well attended by sponsors at all stages of their sponsorship journey.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 There are challenges with supporting the Ukrainian sponsorship schemes in Argyll and Bute and this report lays out these challenges. How sustainable the Super Sponsor scheme is in the longer term is still to be determined and our geography has certainly added to the challenges. However what is clear is that our sponsors and our communities are supportive, welcoming and safe and Argyll and Bute offers both a place to recover from the horror of war and to plan for the future whatever that may be.
- 6.2 The strength of partnership working in Argyll and Bute has also been integral to the success of Ukrainian resettlement so far and the commitment of council services, partner agencies and the third sector has made a real difference to the lives of those coming here.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Policy – No policy implications for Council.
- 7.2 Financial - Funding is received from both the UK and Scottish Government's and the current budget is fully committed with a contingency in place to

deal with unexpected costs. We are awaiting the detailed funding guidance from Scottish Government, a recommendation in the rapid review.

- 7.3 Legal – No implications.
- 7.4 HR - A number of posts have been created on a temporary basis to support the resettlement team and funded by government funding.
- 7.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: - No implications
 - 7.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics
 - 7.5.2 Socio-economic Duty
 - 7.5.3 Islands
- 7.6 Climate Change – No implications
- 7.7 Risk – No implications
- 7.8 Customer Service – Council services have access to interpreters and translators to ensure UDPs can access information and use local services.

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