

10th March, 2022

Agenda Item No. Urgent Item

Ukrainian Refugees

Report by: John Mills, Head of Housing Services

Wards Affected: All

Purpose

This report outlines the proposed commitment to welcome Ukrainian Refugees to Fife.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) Agree that Fife should welcome Ukrainian Refugees to Fife through the UK Government's extended visa scheme.
- b) Agree to make this commitment through CoSLA to the Scottish Government and UK Government.
- c) Note that the multi-agency response to support a range of vulnerable people, including Ukrainian Refugees coming to Fife will continue to be co-ordinated through the Resettlement Core Group.
- d) Delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Co-Leaders, the authority to make a specific commitment to COSLA in relation to the number of Ukrainian Refugees that Fife Council can support.

Resource Implications

Fife's participation in previous Refugee Resettlement schemes have been funded by the UK Government and cost neutral to the Council. There is no confirmation of funding arrangements or wider resourcing support at this stage.

Legal & Risk Implications

The UK Government announced in Parliament on 28th February and 1st March 2022 that it would extend visa opportunities for Ukrainian Refugees to come to the UK. Ukrainians already settled in the UK will be able to bring family members into this country. Routes currently enable leave to remain for 3 years, or 12 months, depending on the route taken.

Impact Assessment

Fife is currently experiencing significant pressures on housing and support services. Any pledge in relation to the Ukrainian situation would require to be fully impact assessed based on information available. A range of accommodation and support options are under active consideration by the Core Group.

Consultation

Specific Consultation has been completed with the Chief Executive, Co-Leaders, Convener and Vice-Convener of Community and Housing Services and CoSLA.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Fife has a positive reputation and experience in responding to significant humanitarian and other crises that date back to the original Afghan Relocation Programme in 2014.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that, at the Policy and Co-ordination meeting of 3rd March 2022, the Convener added the Council's voice to all those around the world condemning the Russian invasion. The Committee also agreed to write in the strongest of terms to the UK Government, the Russian Ambassador and the UN expressing the Council's disgust and condemnation of Russia's actions.
- 1.3 Fife's communities, charities and third sector organisations have been keen to offer support to the people of Ukraine. Across various collection points in Fife (including Polish shops), donations of clothing, medical and other supplies have been collected and transported to Glasgow, where larger shipments have made their way to the Polish / Ukrainian border.
- 1.4 However, due to logistical problems of transporting supplies to where they are needed, the Government has advised that cash donations are preferable and will make it easier to buy supplies and support people across the Ukraine border, or those who are crossing borders into neighbouring countries, such as Poland. Cash donations can be sent to the Disasters Emergency Committee where the UK Government will match public donations pound for pound.
- 1.5 Fife Voluntary Action already has supplies from previous donations which will be used as and when needed. They have also set up a webpage to post information on the various collections taking place across Fife which should be checked and added to for those supporting this cause. Those looking to donate items are urged to check with the collecting organisation or the FVA website to be sure about the specific items required.
- 1.6 As with previous disasters and relocation programmes, Housing Services awaits any communication about providing Council accommodation to those fleeing the Ukrainian crisis. The council is aware that many members of the public have made offers of support to host Ukrainian families in their homes once they arrive in Scotland. A list of offers of support will be maintained and used as and when necessary. The Council continues to do all it can to support the people of Ukraine.

2.0 The Current UK Government Position

- 2.1 Fife is currently engaged in providing Bridging accommodation to a current cohort of evacuees from Afghanistan and has made positive commitments to the ARAP Programme, Syrian Vulnerable Persons and assisting the dispersal of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People from the south east of England. The Fife Resettlement Core Group will utilise the expertise and experience

gathered during this time to respond positively to the current humanitarian crisis based on the approach set out in this report.

2.2 UK Government civil servants have been engaging with CoSLA and the Scottish Government. The UK Government has issued the following statement to all Local Authorities.

- UK Government has helped hundreds of British nationals and their family members resident in Ukraine to leave the country, with Home Office staff working around the clock to assist them.
- British nationals and any person settled in the UK can bring over immediate family members from Ukraine:
 - The Government established an expansive **Ukrainian Family Scheme** which is fee free and allows British nationals and Ukrainians settled in the UK to bring a wide group of family members to the UK, extending eligibility to include adult parents, grandparents, children over 18, siblings, and their immediate family members. The extended scheme opened on 4th March.
 - Through this route, Ukrainian nationals are granted 3 years leave and can access public funds.
- The Government has committed to establishing a **humanitarian sponsorship pathway**, whereby people from Ukraine who do not have family ties in the UK or do not meet the Family Scheme criteria can be sponsored to come to the UK by willing and able individuals, businesses, or community organisations.
- There will be no numerical limit on this scheme, Ukrainians who wish to come to the UK and who have matched sponsors will be welcomed.
- This pathway is not open yet. The wider policy approach is unclear however UK Government have indicated 1 year leave will be granted, access to public funds is currently unclear.
- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are leading on the pathway

The communication is also clear that this is a dynamic situation which is subject to change and development.

2.3 Information sessions are being arranged w/c 7th March but at the time of writing, the role of Local Government across the UK remains unclear and may develop at some pace due to escalation of events in Europe.

2.4 Based on information to date, those entering through the Family Scheme will not be assisted through a formal Resettlement programme. Individuals will be entitled to settle in a Local Authority area of their choosing. Through the entitlement to access public funds, local impact may occur in relation to accessing public services, including homelessness approaches.

2.5 Impact on wider services, such as health and education, may naturally occur but the general situation affecting local services remains unclear at this time.

3.0 The Fife Resettlement Core Group

- 3.1 The Resettlement Core Group is a multi-agency group of officers brought together to co-ordinate and support services to a range of vulnerable persons coming to Fife through a range of UK Government relocation and refugee resettlement schemes. The Group has successfully collaborated to bring Afghan families, Syrian Refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to Fife.
- 3.2 The Group has adapted to a range of situations and increased the scale and scope of operations to match the needs of vulnerable people. The response mobilised in response to the Afghan Evacuation is evidence of the commitment and dedication of Fife's various services to respond to the needs of vulnerable people.
- 3.3 Housing Services provides the co-ordination for the Group on the basis that good quality, secure housing is the basis on which vulnerable people can build their lives in a positive way. Fife's housing pressures are not insignificant and there needs to be a balance of meeting statutory duties and responding to a range of other priorities and pressures. It should be clear that as part of any housing approach, there would be no expectation that Fife residents would be asked to accommodate any refugee within their home although there have been early offers to do so. All offers are currently being recorded and acknowledged at this time.
- 3.4 Community Sponsorship is currently available through alternative Resettlement Schemes (UKRS and ACRS). Fife's Core Group recently begun exploring the process and will continue to develop understanding of this route. It's not yet clear if the Ukrainian sponsorship pathway will replicate existing operational and general requirements placed on local authorities as part of this approach.
- 3.5 The Group is leading research into the number of Ukrainians already resident in Fife. The best estimate is 124 which is assisting with modelling the number of family members who may seek to join them in Fife. It is currently not possible to provide a specific number of Ukrainian Refugees who could potentially come to Fife, but it could be several hundred depending on the rate of evacuation from Ukraine over the coming weeks and months.
- 3.6 The Group is continuing work to evaluate Fife's capacity to welcome a significant number of Ukrainian Refugees, including accommodation and support options, health and education requirements and other needs.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 Fife has a strong track record of positively assisting refugees and other displaced people through the Afghan Relocation and Syrian Vulnerable Person Schemes. The Core Group has the appropriate partners around the table and has the expertise to make the proposal a continuing success in terms of outcomes for the vulnerable people involved.

Background Papers

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1973:

None.

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