

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **7 March 2024**

Title: **Home for Ukraine Scheme and Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme**

Portfolio Area: **Homes - Cllr Denise O'Callaghan**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained:

Date next steps can be taken: N/A (this report is for noting only)

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive NOTES:

- 1. the positive progress of the Council's participation in the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Afghan resettlement schemes; and**
- 2. Notes the conclusion of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF1 and 2) initiative, successfully delivering a total of 11 new properties at Sherford and Ivybridge.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council has been clear in making housing one of its top priorities and has made a commitment to both increase supply of affordable housing and make best use of stock in the adopted Council Plan.
- 1.2 In addition to supporting the needs of people locally, the Council is also committed to the national initiatives regarding supporting vulnerable groups who are fleeing conflict from Ukraine and Afghanistan. This report sets out the progress made, in parallel with a significant programme of work to address wider housing challenges. These include:

1.3 Resettlement

This report provides an overview of how the Council continues to respond to the needs of people escaping the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict in Afghanistan and the various resettlement schemes the council is currently delivering (Homes for Ukraine scheme, Afghan Relocations and Assistance Programme (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)) to assist people settling in the District.

1.4 To date 249 Ukrainians have been successfully relocated to South Hams in 121 family groups and a further 12 Afghan nationals in 3 family groups.

1.5 The team are currently supporting 54 Ukrainian households that reside with hosts, 28 households who have moved into the private rental sector and 3 Afghan households in leased accommodation.

1.6 A further 39 visas have been issued to Ukrainian nationals that have not yet travelled to South Hams, and the team are still welcoming new arrivals.

1.7 Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Rounds 1 & 2

The portfolio of properties acquired under both LAHF schemes were completed in December 2023, consisting of 8 properties at Sherford, and 3 properties in Ivybridge.

1.8 These properties will shortly be offered to the Home Office for Afghan refugees in accordance with original objectives of the scheme. A further 2 of the 3 properties purchased under LAHF 2 will also be offered. (With the Council immediately able to use the 3rd to meet local needs).

1.9 The total underspend compared with the approved business case across LAHF 1 and 2 (S106 contributions and SH capital receipts reserves) is approximately £99,000.

1.10 All properties are of a high quality with 10-year NHBC warranties and have at least a EPC 'B' rating. The Ivybridge properties achieve 'A' rating.

2. Background

2.1 It is almost 2 years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Responding to overwhelming public support the Government launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The scheme opened for applications on the 18th of March 2022. The scheme operates via sponsorship or individuals or households fleeing from Ukraine who had named people in the UK willing to sponsor them for a minimum of 6 months. This tended to be via people reaching out over social media, where willing sponsors could connect with potential guests and take the process through

the visa application together. There have been other schemes such as the family sponsor scheme which has also seen arrivals in South Hams, however the Council has had limited involvement in that specific scheme.

- 2.2 As of the 23 January 2024, 282,000 visas have been issued nationally to Ukrainians with 179,200 issued under the Homes For Ukraine scheme. There have been 2,104 arrivals in Devon under the Homes For Ukraine scheme.
- 2.3 Devon Districts and the County Council have worked together on the Homes for Ukraine scheme since its inception and continue to do so. Where other Councils have outsourced their support services, the Council has delivered an inhouse solution, working closely alongside other council services to offer a holistic service for both hosts and guests. The value for money the inhouse service has represented has meant that the Council could use Homes for Ukraine funding to contribute £660,000 to the purchase of properties under LAHF 1.
- 2.4 All Councils are concerned about placement breakdowns and the pressures this puts on housing advice teams with the availability of housing in acutely short supply. However, a further advantage of an inhouse service is the join up between resettlement and housing, and as a result very few Ukrainian households have had placement breakdowns that resulted in a requirement for temporary accommodation.
- 2.5 The work of our hosts – extraordinary residents of the South Hams, who opened their homes and shared their lives with people fleeing their country, leaving loved ones behind has been tireless and unwavering, without which the South Hams would not have been able to welcome so many guests. It is important that their contribution receives the recognition it deserves.
- 2.6 The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) is for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles and may include an offer of relocation to the UK for those deemed eligible by the Ministry of Defence and who are deemed suitable for relocation by the Home Office. Afghan citizens who are eligible for relocation to the UK under the ARAP may relocate with a partner, dependent children and additional family members who are also deemed eligible for relocation under the ARAP by the Ministry of Defence and suitable for relocation by the Home Office. The ARAP was launched on 1 April 2021 and remains open.
- 2.7 The UK formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 6 January 2022. The scheme 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; and vulnerable people, including women and

girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)

- 2.8 We have welcomed Afghan families to the South Hams, and because of our established Homes for Ukraine resettlement team were able to support the arrivals rapidly and appropriately.

3. Support implemented

- 3.1 Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, each individual arriving between the scheme launch and 31st December 2022 received funding of £10,500. The County retained £4,200 of this money with the remaining £6,300 available to District Authorities to fund activity to support the scheme. From 1st January 2023 the funding reduced to £5,900 per individual with County retaining £590 and £5,310 being made available to districts. This funding has so far been used to fund staff resource to undertake welcome visits and property checks, welcome payments, leisure passes and individual items such as car seats and transport, rent in advance, deposits, furniture, and employment support. The fund has also been used to support the Councils match funding of the properties purchased under the Local Authority Housing Fund 1 & 2.
- 3.2 The Council is responsible for issuing monthly payments to hosts for the support they provide to Ukrainian guests in our area. To ensure quick and efficient payment we have utilised systems deployed for the business support grants and automate the host thank you payment each month. This has assisted our hosts in accessing their payment without an overly bureaucratic process.
- 3.3 The team have provided support to individuals in claiming benefits, obtaining employment, sourcing childcare, support with education, and immigration enquiries.
- 3.4 The Afghan nationals arriving under the ARAP and ACRS schemes are eligible for funding of £20,520 over 3 years (or less if they relocate in that time). This funding is to include but not limited to support integration into UK life and the local communities including furnishings, employment support, English speaking lessons, support to claim income, register and attend medical appointments.
- 3.5 Children aged between 3 and 18 attract financial support for educational purposes in their first year that will be claimed by and given to the schools or colleges that support our guests.
- 3.6 The local NHS services can also claim additional support due to the guests in our areas and we will work with them to ensure they receive everything that is due.

4. Challenges

- 4.1 Hosts who signed up to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme were asked to commit to a period of at least 6 months. Placement breakdown is a significant risk, and it is important that the team remain vigilant and responsive to hosts and guests asking for help. We continue to avoid the need for temporary accommodation wherever possible and support to access other housing options prior to planned move ons.
- 4.2 A further challenge is around supporting guests into suitable accommodation. Along with the standard issues regarding finding accommodation our Ukrainian guests do not have credit histories, guarantors or references from previous landlords. The team work with landlords and agents to support our guests into the private rental sector.
- 4.3 Supporting guests into employment that matches their qualifications, experience and knowledge. South Hams is an expensive area to reside in with high rents. The team work with outside organisation Odils to support guests with qualification recognition, job applications, interview training and ongoing job specific English language support.
- 4.4 Whilst initial arrivals have slowed, we still have a significant number of arrivals outstanding and continue to receive new guest notifications regularly that we will be required to support for at least 3 years from arrival – until 2027.
- 4.5 The first guests arrived in March 2022 and their stay in the UK was for an initial 3 year period. There is currently no information about what will happen to the scheme for those arrivals from March 2025 when their Visas will expire.

5 LAHF 1 & 2 (Local Authority Housing Fund)

- 5.1 The Executive in its meetings of 2nd March and 21st September 2023 approved participation in the Governments LAHF 1 and 2 schemes. These are designed to provide housing for Homes for Ukraine guests and Afghan families in bridging hotels in the first instance, and eventually for use to meet local needs. (LAHF 2 included an allocation of 1 property to be used for Temporary accommodation immediately on completion).
- 5.2 The initial funding model was for the acquisition of 7 properties at Sherford approved at the March Executive meeting. This was subsequently updated in September with approval to purchase an additional property under LAHF1 and 3 properties under LAHF2. Ivybridge was identified as a preferred location for this scheme due to proximity of amenities, availability of public transport and opportunities for jobs and training.

5.3 The mix across the portfolio is as follows:

LAHF 1 - Sherford:

2 x 2-bed houses

4 x 3-bed houses

2 x 4-bed houses

LAHF 2 - Ivybridge

x 3-bed houses

5.4 On both developments commercial discounts were secured through negotiation, together with the inclusion of optional extras within the budget. These include carpet and vinyl throughout, free standing kitchen appliances and provision of EV cabling infrastructure to every property from the consumer unit to external box. In addition, charge units were provided and installed on several of the properties providing immediate capacity to charge electric vehicles. The properties are built to a good quality standard, backed by a 10-year NHBC warranty and achieving high EPC ratings. Of particular note are the houses at Ivybridge that have in-built solar panels and an EPC 'A' rating. These high standards will provide good thermal insulation and lower energy bills for residents.

5.5 All properties were completed and handed over in December 2023, meeting the LAHF 1 deadline and 3 months ahead of the LAHF 2 deadline.

5.6 Subject to minor adjustments for estimates of furniture costs, in aggregate the combined LAHF programme has been delivered £99,000 under-budget.

6 LAHF 1 & 2 Funding

6.1 The expenditure incurred on both schemes was as set out in the Executive reports of March and September 2023. The total underspend on funding required from the Council's s106 receipts for match funding under LAHF1 was £83,722 of which £49,007 was allocated to LAHF 2 leaving a residual underspend of £34,715 from the s106 receipts.

6.2 The Council's match funding under LAHF 2 was allocated from the £475,000 capital receipts reserve, with the approved model including £49,007 from LAHF 1 and a £21,207 contingency. The actual funding required from capital reserves, including the allocated underspend from LAHF 1 is £64,288 under budget.

7 Options available and consideration of risk

7.1 That the Council continues to resource appropriately the Resettlement team and continues to take early intervention to prevent placement breakdown wherever possible and provide integration support to our arrivals.

7.2 That we continue to work as part of Team Devon on holistic solutions to placement breakdowns on a large scale for Ukrainian nationals.

8 Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	<p>The Council has made a commitment to the Homes for Ukraine and the ARAP and ACRS schemes, and it is an expectation of Government that we adhere to the scheme framework, and that funding is used to resource the support required to manage the scheme successfully.</p> <p>The Council has statutory duties under homelessness legislation which has been amended to include specifically people who are residing in England under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		<p>The Council currently receive funding per guest as detailed above. It is expected that all expenditure associated with the schemes is accounted for through this funding.</p>
Risk		<p>The Council has declared a Housing Crisis and recognised the significant difficulty in finding accommodation in the District. It is therefore a significant risk that rematching opportunities will not be found for placements that breakdown and the Council may be required to place in temporary accommodation for significant periods of time. Whilst the cost of this is one factor, there are other concerns including the challenges with finding temporary accommodation or rematch placements close to where people may have their children in school, have work or training requirements or receive support. It should not be forgotten that these are people who have fled their Country because of the invasions and no doubt some will have significant trauma attached to this. A further placement breakdown may have further effects on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Whilst the Council will seek to avoid placements that might be deemed unsuitable it is inevitable that some people will be placed in temporary accommodation some distance from their support networks.</p>

Supporting Corporate Strategy		Homes Council Services Wellbeing
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		We will continue to monitor this impact
Safeguarding		We continue to work closely with our colleagues in children and adult services to address any safeguarding concerns
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		We will continue to monitor this impact
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		We will continue to monitor this impact
Other implications		

Approval and clearance of report

Appendices:

None

Background Documents:

None