

Evidence to Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee: Housing for Ukraine Refugees

Naomi Alleyne, Director, Social Services and Housing

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

-
- **Welsh local authorities preparedness to welcome Ukrainians under the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.**

All local authorities are involved in supporting people arriving in Wales from Ukraine. As soon as the UK Government announced the Home for Ukraine Scheme (H4U),



with a clear role for local authorities, councils started to have discussions and began to make preparations, based on the limited amount of information that was available at that time. The announcement of Welsh Government's 'super sponsor' scheme added another layer to factor into councils' planning but all authorities were prepared to support people who arrived in Wales fleeing the war in Ukraine.

In addition to the specific roles required of councils (as set out below), work involving councils has included establishing Welcome Centres for those arriving under the Welsh Government's scheme and setting up Arrival Hubs at key transport sites across Wales to provide advice and Support for ongoing travel arrangements and ensuring any emergency needs were identified and addressed.

It has been much more difficult for authorities to prepare or provide support for those arriving under the Family Visa Scheme (FVS) as there is no data or information shared with councils on those arriving in their areas under the FVS. There is no additional funding for councils either for those arriving under the FVS. The WLGA has written to the UK Government highlighting concerns about the differential support that is available for those arriving under the different schemes while recognising that similar support would be beneficial to all.

- **The role of local authorities and the third sector in supporting the operation of the Ukraine settlement schemes.**

There are a range of roles local authorities are undertaking at the local level in ensuring those arriving do so safely and with a warm welcome. Ideally prior to the issuing of visas and people arriving to join a host, councils undertake:

- A property check to ensure proposed accommodation is suitable and safe, meeting the needs of the People due to arrive
- A safeguarding check, arranging for DBS checks of hosts (all adults in the property) to be undertaken, with enhanced DBS where any Guests to arrive include children
- A follow up check post arrival to ensure arrangements are satisfactory and to make contact with guests (also ensuring they are aware of the support available)

Safeguarding in its broadest sense has been a significant concern for councils who have also been engaging with other partners and using local intelligence where appropriate to help inform their decisions.

Local authorities are also expected to provide £200 per person on people's arrival to help with any immediate financial concerns and to aid their settlement so they can buy anything they may need.

The WLGA has been meeting regularly with WCVA and Welsh Government to discuss the support available from the third sector (and to ensure duplication of effort is avoided) and five key areas have now been identified:



- Supporting Welcome Centres
- Safeguarding (women and children particularly)
- Accessing advice and advocacy
- Community activities
- Reconnecting and reuniting families

The WLGA is also working with the local authority third sector lead officers to keep them updated on the work being undertaken and so they can link with their local third sector partners to add value and additional support in helping people settle, learn about how life works in Wales/the UK and to help with integration, helping children access schools and people to access benefits and find jobs, including the provision of informal language support.

- **How the Welsh Government plans to source accommodation and support refugees in the longer-term (once they leave the welcome/reception centres).**

Along with the concern to ensure safeguarding is robust and people are protected from harm, the provision of suitable accommodation, in the short, medium and longer terms, is an equal challenge. Much of the focus of discussions and planning so far have been on the arrangements needed to support the arrival and initial settlement of people, meeting any urgent needs, undertaking assessments and health screening and establishing bank accounts, enrolling children in school for example.

Welsh Government is working with councils to identify and confirm with potential hosts their continued willingness to accommodate people from Ukraine, however, identifying appropriate additional properties for people will prove challenging given the current pressures on housing markets across Wales. Welsh Government has developed a rematching process ([Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation | GOV.WALES](#)), the key over-arching principles of which are:

- Local authorities who host Welcome Centres are not responsible for rehousing all Welcome Centre occupants, though we will expect a proportionate share of occupants to remain in the host local authority.
- The Welsh Government is responsible for determining the fair and proportionate 'distribution' of Welcome Centre occupants to local authorities across Wales.
- Local authorities are responsible for 'allocating' housing to individuals and families where placement breakdowns occur; when doing this local authorities must be mindful of the needs of all populations in housing need in their area, particularly those in temporary accommodation.
- Local authorities should consider community cohesion when rehousing people.
- Once people leave a Welcome Centre and arrive in a local authority area, the local authority in question will be responsible for their housing



needs in the same way as for other individuals eligible for homelessness services.

- Local authorities will be responsible for ensuring all hosts have been subject to necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local safeguarding checks and property inspections have taken place in all properties.
- All appropriate 'move-on' options should be considered for anyone whose initial placement (in Welcome Centres or with sponsors) has ended or broken down, including hosting, social housing and private rented sector accommodation.
- There needs to be a level of individual 'preference' taken into consideration, but it should be made clear that this is not the same as choice. Preference will be taken into account where possible, but it may not be possible.

In all schemes, council duties in relation to homelessness apply as they would to any other citizen (Ukrainian visa holders have a right to move and settle anywhere across the UK, so offers of accommodation may not necessarily be taken up).

The impact of responding to the housing needs of people from Ukraine (in short, medium and longer-term) should be noted alongside other housing and homelessness pressures. The number of homeless people in temporary accommodation stood at 7,779 (as at 31st March) and is steadily increasing. This is in part a consequence of the 'everyone in' policy introduced in response to Covid19 and maintained as policy since we have moved into recovery mode with the aim of eradicating homelessness in Wales. Local government has supported this policy however the lack of appropriate properties is a barrier to reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation as approximately 1,200 people become homeless and need emergency accommodation each month. In addition to their target to increase the number of social rented homes in Wales by 20,000 over the course of this administration, Welsh Government has recently announced a funding stream for 2022/23 of up to £60m to support a Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme which aims to increase housing supply capacity to respond rapidly to these multiple housing challenges.

- **The Welsh Government's discussions with the WLGA and Welsh local authorities on the operation of the Ukraine settlement schemes**

There have been regular and ongoing discussions between Welsh Government, WLGA and local authorities in developing and implementing all Ukraine settlement schemes, including the 'super sponsorship' scheme. Councils are working closely with Welsh Government and weekly meetings are held between local government officers, WLGA, WSMP and Welsh Government officials where regular updates are given and issues and concerns can be aired, experiences shared to help problem solving on individual situations and to help inform the development and review of policy and practice.



In terms of other support for councils, WSMP also convene weekly meetings of councils, health and Welsh Government as a forum to support the work in Welcome Centres. The WLGA are working closely with local authority third sector leads, to help coordinate voluntary and community groups support locally; and the Local Government Digital Team are working closely with Welsh Government and councils in developing a Case Management System that would better manage the information and sharing of data, as well as assisting in the financial information required for claims of funding to be made by councils.

- **The cost of providing support and services to Ukrainians arriving in Wales and how these costs will be met.**

Funding for local authorities will be received from both the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (the £350 per month thank you payment for hosts which councils will administer locally) and from Welsh Government (the £10,500 tariff; the funding for education; and any additional payments to hosts of guests who arrived through the super-sponsorship route).

It is difficult to assess at this time the actual costs of providing support and services to Ukrainians as it is relatively early in the process. It is of concern however that there is no funding available or expectations of councils in providing support to those arriving under the FVS, even though people will need to access support and public services similar to those arriving under the other sponsorship routes.

- **The level of funding provided by the UK and Welsh Governments to support local authorities in supporting Ukrainians.**

Councils have not yet received full written detail or Funding Instructions on the funding to be received, but based on discussions and available information the following is understood (but note funding only applies to the H4U and Welsh Government's scheme):

- A tariff of £10,500 per person arriving in a council area
- Funding on a per pupil basis for the 3 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 (SEND)
- £350 per month payments to hosts (once guests have arrived) for up to a year and administered via local authorities.
- £200 emergency payment on arrival

Additional funding is provided to some councils to cover costs of providing Welcome Centres and Arrivals Hubs. It should also be noted that funding has been confirmed only for a year, and it is not yet known what funding will be available in future years.



- **Issues and pressures resulting from other refugee resettlement schemes and whether lessons/best practice can be shared.**

The support being provided to those fleeing Ukraine and the likely impacts on councils and public services cannot be seen in isolation to other support councils provide to other migrants. There are a number of other asylum and refugee programmes and schemes that also require the active participation of local authorities, some of which have recently been amended by the Home Office and involvement has moved from voluntary to mandatory. These include:

- The **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** and the **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** for both interpreters and other Afghan citizens who met the criteria. To date, under both schemes, 327 people have been resettled across Wales. However, approximately 12,000 refugees remain in hotels (with 390 people accommodated in hotels in Wales) while longer-term accommodation can be found (which includes larger housing due to family sizes).
- The **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS)** which has accommodated 902 people across Wales. The original SVPRS evolved into a wider scheme UK Resettlement Scheme which was open to people also from the Middle East and North Africa.
- In November 2021, the Home Office mandated involvement of all councils the **National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)**. This means that all councils will be required to accept the transfer of UASC to their care on a rota basis (for Wales, this means 30 UASC are transferred to Welsh councils on each run of the rota). Since the revised NTS was launched in July 2021, over 42 children and young people have been transferred to the care of Welsh councils as children looked after (in addition to any children that arrive spontaneously within a council area).
- The Home Office wrote to Leaders in April to inform councils that they were moving to a policy of **full asylum dispersal**, in short, that they now require all council areas be involved in asylum dispersal and accommodating asylum seekers while their claims for asylum are considered. How this would operate in Wales is currently being considered, and the Home Office are also consulting councils on how best this policy is implemented.

The WLGA, along with WSMP is supporting councils in all these areas of work and links well with the LGA in keeping abreast of any new developments. While not without challenges, and the need to monitor local impacts, including community cohesion, the Welsh Government is keen that Welsh local government plays its part in meeting international and humanitarian legislation and obligations on the UK and



works closely with the WLGA, WSMP and councils in ensuring good quality services and support is provided for refugees and asylum seekers who arrive in Wales.