

WRITTEN EVIDENCE

Welsh local authorities' preparedness to welcome Ukrainians under the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

1. Local authorities have a critical role to play in the support for people from Ukraine arriving in Wales. They are best placed to support their local communities to offer these people the warmest possible welcome on their arrival. I want to thank local authorities for their swift response to the Ukrainian humanitarian response as a result of Putin's invasion of Ukraine.
2. The UK Government Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family Schemes started at a point in time when there was already significant housing pressure across Wales. Local authorities continue to support our 'no one left out' approach to homelessness, providing temporary accommodation to all those who need it as they transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness. They were also supporting the resettlement of Afghan community members since the evacuation in August 2021, in addition to the widening of the asylum dispersal system by the UK Government.
3. Building on learning from previous resettlement schemes, local authorities acted swiftly and effectively to ensure Ukrainians received a warm welcome upon arrival in Wales. Local authority resettlement and resilience teams and local authority housing teams have played a central role in ensuring that services can be delivered across Wales, alongside the NHS and the third sector – a Team Wales approach.
4. The speed of stand-up and the sheer scale of the Homes for Ukraine scheme is far greater than any of the recent refugee support schemes which have operated in the UK. Building capacity at the pace required has been a challenge but local authorities have responded well. The Homes for Ukraine tariff is helpful in ensuring local authorities can provide support. However, delays by the UK Government in clarifying how funding can be used, together with lack of tariff for ESOL and Healthcare (in contrast to other resettlement schemes) remain problematic. We continue to lobby the UK Government to address this deficit.
5. The Ukraine Family Scheme has presented different challenges because data has not been made available by the Home Office to Welsh Government or Welsh local authorities to understand the scale, geographic distribution or contact information for those arriving in Wales. No funding tariff is being provided to support arrivals under this scheme which inevitably puts a strain on support which can be provided.

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

Local authorities

6. Local Authorities are the key delivery mechanism for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, including both the individual and Super Sponsor Schemes. The approach adopted is similar to previous resettlement programmes, and whilst not

all local authorities are involved in providing initial accommodation under the Super Sponsor Scheme (due to lack of suitable accommodation for Welcome Centres etc) all 22 local authority resettlement teams will be involved in supporting those arriving through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and matching arrivals through both schemes into longer-term accommodation across Wales.

7. The Welsh Government Homes for Ukraine Super Sponsor Scheme route opened on 26 March 2022 with an initial target of providing support to 1,000 people. Initially, five Welcome Centres were established with the support of local authorities to provide initial accommodation for a period of up to 3 months. Five Arrival Hubs were established at key transport nodes to welcome people to Wales, support any immediate health and welfare needs and facilitate onward travel plans to Welcome Centres. In addition, specific arrangements have been put in place to enable full provision of wrap around services and the implementation of overall resettlement processes.
8. A Contact Centre was also set-up that is responsible for making contact with people once they have been granted a visa, to support their travel plans. It also provides a 24-hour helpline for people arriving in Wales. The Contact Centre has evolved to include a function to check that Ukrainians arrive safely at their initial accommodation in Wales, and a Case Management Team to manage issues such as re-matching people between hosts in different local authorities.
9. When Welsh Government decided to support more than the initial 1,000 arrivals additional initial accommodation was needed. A far slower than anticipated move-on rate from Welcome Centres into longer term accommodation added further pressure on available capacity. Welsh Government Officials, local authorities and local health boards subsequently worked together to establish additional capacity in hotels, holiday parks and universities to meet the increasing demand. We do not publish the locations of initial accommodation sites in the interests of security and to maintain the privacy of arrivals.
10. For those arriving in Wales as part of the super sponsor scheme, the initial process, facilitated by the Contact Centre, is as follows:
 - Arrival in Wales and allocation into initial accommodation that has been set up across Wales by Welsh Government working in partnership with local authorities
 - local authority and partners including the NHS undertake initial triage on arrival to assess for any emergency needs
 - local authority resettlement partnerships work with Welcome Centres and arrivals to identify immediate and longer-term needs. This will see arrivals receive initial financial support, local information on services and the local area, support with staying in touch with friends and family, advice and support to access benefits and advice and support on accessing health and education services
 - arrivals can access ongoing support through local authority and Third Sector as required

Third Sector

11. Welsh Government has funded the following projects with third sector partners:

Housing Justice Cymru - £150,000 in 2022/23 to provide host information sessions, training sessions and host-peer support sessions for those supporting this scheme in Wales.

Wales Sanctuary Service - £222,017 (excluding VAT) for 2022/23 to provide support through an existing consortium led by the Welsh Refugee Council. This provides casework advice, advocacy and peer to peer support for Ukrainians.

British Red Cross - £246,000 in 2022/23 plus £54,000 from British Red Cross to support Ukrainians and their host families. This draws on expertise and approaches developed by British Red Cross supporting refugee family reunion to provide trauma-informed, preventative and holistic integration.

12. We are co-ordinating a group of third sector organisations including Ukrainian led Facebook and support groups which are collaborating to explore key issues and share information. The Minister for Social Justice has chaired some of these meetings which now occur monthly.
13. Officials are working with County Voluntary Councils to share experiences and discuss common challenges and priorities. Officials also meet regularly with some Facebook group administrators to identify emerging issues and ensure they can access and share the right information.
14. Welsh Government has made a £1m donation to enable Community Foundation Wales to establish the Nation of Sanctuary: Croeso Fund which provides grants to third sector organisations. Almost £500,000 has been awarded to date.

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

15. The Welsh Government proposed the Homes for Ukraine super sponsor route as a means of ensuring that:
 - a. Ukrainians did not need to know a UK-based household before applying;
 - b. Safeguarding risks could be significantly mitigated;
 - c. Wraparound support services could be delivered with economy of scale.
16. Accommodating people in Welcome Centres (and other types of initial accommodation) has ensured that Ukrainians did not need to find a UK-based household before applying for a visa and we are able to ensure all safeguarding checks are completed before the individuals are subsequently matched with a Wales-based household. This significantly mitigates the safeguarding risks inherent in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, for those sponsored by the Welsh Government.
17. The Welsh Government is working very closely with local authorities and wider partners to support the move on of Ukrainians in initial accommodation into longer term, more settled accommodation. There are three main strands to this work:

Continuing to expand potential hosts and develop host support

18. Many families and individuals across Wales have volunteered their homes to provide host accommodation. For some people looking to leave initial accommodation host arrangements can provide effective and flexible move on

accommodation particularly where families/ individuals want to stay in an area where affordable accommodation is limited.

19. To maximise the use of host accommodation, a national system has been established to share hosts' offers of accommodation with all Welsh local authorities to support effective matching and national contracts have been put in place to expedite DBS and property checks. Work is also ongoing with the UK Govt to support a national campaign to encourage more people to volunteer to become hosts. We also continue to lobby the UK Government to increase the £350 thank you payment hosts receive, to reflect cost of living pressures.
20. Welsh Government has grant funded Housing Justice Cymru to provide a support service for hosts (available in English and Welsh). This service is distinct from other support which is in place for guests.
21. The Host Support service provides expert and reliable information, training, advice and guidance for people hosting, or considering hosting which includes: a phone helpline, an email helpline and hosting workshops. Sessions include discussion of trauma, vicarious trauma, managing expectations, setting house rules, safeguarding and helping a Ukrainian guest to orientate to life in Wales.

Providing more higher quality transitional accommodation

22. Over the course of the last two and a half years we have worked with our partners through the pandemic and humanitarian crises to ensure accommodation is available for all those in need, successfully helping over 24,000 people into temporary accommodation. However, the Ukraine humanitarian crisis is exacerbating an already extremely challenging situation with a huge demand for housing.
23. It should be noted that only the initial accommodation in hotels and Welcome Centres and host offers are specific to the Ukraine response. All other demands for transitional and longer term accommodation are being managed alongside the existing and growing demand for temporary accommodation.
24. A £60m Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) has been set up to provide more good quality, longer term accommodation. This programme is supporting a range of initiatives by local authorities and registered social landlords such as bringing voids back into use, remodelling or conversion of buildings and the use of modular accommodation. This programme should bring more than 1,000 additional homes into use over the next 18 months almost half of which will be long term or permanent homes.

Policies and resources to support move on

25. Supporting the move on of Ukrainians from initial accommodation into longer term accommodation is challenging and resource intensive for local authorities. There is a lack of affordable private rental properties coupled with concerns and reluctance of people to move out of initial accommodation.
26. To support this, national communications in relation to move on have been developed, supported by detailed FAQs, a code of conduct and behavioural

policies are also being established to set expectations around expected behaviour and a policy to respond where people turn down multiple suitable offers of move on accommodation is being developed. It seeks to align policies for Ukrainian households more closely with that of other cohorts in housing need.

27. Work is currently ongoing to update the population shares agreed as part of the Accommodation Framework¹ at the start of the crisis. This provides an opportunity to reflect the increased number of arrivals and ensure that the formula takes account of the differing pressures local authorities are facing. Some groups of local authorities are looking to create regional solutions and are starting to coalesce into regional footprints to expedite move-on.

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

28. Engagement at every level of Local Government and Welsh Government, official and political, has been in play from the very beginning of the Ukraine crisis, as our local government partners are key to delivery of our humanitarian response. Over time the frequency of engagement has changed in response to the changing nature of the crisis, and has now settled into a formal rhythm: Ministers now meet local authority Leaders on a fortnightly basis to discuss a range of issues including the Ukraine response (standing agenda item); Welsh Government officials meet local authority officials in a formal Stakeholder meeting again on a fortnightly basis to discuss emerging policy and operational issues and to share good practice; the WLGA hosts a fortnightly meeting to discuss all matters Ukraine; and there are weekly meetings between Welsh Government officials and individual local authorities with Welcome Centres. Other regular meetings such as those with Local Resilience Fora, Chief Executives of local authorities and another, more operational meeting with local authorities – the 'Weekly Wash-up' - have now been stood down as the response settles down. We are working with local authorities to develop an approach to engagement at regional level, in part to support a more strategic approach to move-on.

29. Welsh Government officials also produce a weekly sit-rep with figures on visas granted, arrivals, local authority numbers etc which is shared with key people in local authorities and local health boards.

The cost of providing support and services to Ukrainians arriving in Wales and how these costs will be met / The level of funding provided by the UK and Welsh Governments to support local authorities in supporting Ukrainians

30. As noted above there is a range of support and services available to Ukrainians arriving in Wales under the Homes for Ukraine scheme (including the Welsh Government super sponsor route). This includes arrival hubs, the Contact Centre, and for those arriving under the super sponsor scheme, initial accommodation and wrap around services.

¹ The population share that was agreed was based on the initial parameters of the super sponsor scheme intended to support 1,000 Ukrainians and was developed based on the population of each local authority, along with the number of visas issued by the Home Office under the individual sponsor scheme that the local authority was already supporting. This was weighted on an 80:20 basis (current population shares provided at Annex A of the accommodation framework [Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)).

31. These services are in the main provided by local authorities, with some direct contracts with Welsh Government, for example initial accommodation provision and the data platform which holds information centrally. The NHS also has a critical role to play in screening on arrival and supporting ongoing health needs, including mental health.
32. The cost of supporting Ukrainians in Wales under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is met from a combination of funding from the UK Government, Welsh Government and local authorities' existing programme budgets in 2022-23.
33. No funding is available from the UK Government for the Ukraine Family Scheme. Any support given must be absorbed within Local Authority existing services. We continue to petition UKG for parity in this regard.
34. UK Government provides an integration tariff of £10,500 per person under the Homes for Ukraine scheme to support the provision of necessary public services for arrivals from Ukraine for the first year only.
35. UK Government provides an education tariff to local authorities determined by the age of the child (ranging from £3,000 to £8,755 for a full year) and the arrival date in the UK. This is for the first year only and pro rata by arrival date.
36. UK Government provides a host 'thank you' payment of £350 per calendar month for up to 12 months after arrival. We are calling on, alongside the Scottish Government, the UKG to increase these payments and some local authorities in Wales have recently decided to top them up using their own funds. We are considering a national approach to this issue.
37. We are also calling for an uplift in Local Housing Allowances from UKG to give more discretionary financial levers to local authorities to help secure access to the private rented sector for 'move on' accommodation and to help support those in housing need.
38. Welsh Government has invested other funds which cannot be reclaimed from the UK Government. This includes funding to establish and run the initial accommodation sites. Welsh Government retains a pro rata amount of the integration tariff to provide wraparound support services during a stay in initial accommodation, with the remainder passed on to the local authority when arrivals are moved to longer-term accommodation. However, the cost of procuring the venue, any associated capital costs and the cost of food are met by Welsh Government.
39. A Welsh Government funded free helpline on 0808 175 1508 or on +44 (0)204 542 5671 is available for people arriving in Wales from Ukraine and for people who are acting as sponsors to provide advice and guidance.
40. In the first supplementary budget for 2022-23, £20m was allocated to provide support for Ukrainian arrivals. A further £51m has subsequently been allocated taking the total allocated to £71m in 2022-23. It is expected that costs associated with our support through the Super Sponsor scheme will exceed these amounts by the year end. These costs are monitored closely, and reported on a monthly

basis. While further funding is being considered to support this pressure given the significantly constrained budgetary position this risks posing a significant opportunity cost to respond to other budget pressures across Welsh Government.

41. An indicative budget for 2023-24 was published in December 2021; this contained no provision for supporting individuals arriving from Ukraine as the budget pre-dated the crisis. Individuals from Ukraine have leave to remain in the UK for three years; there will therefore be costs associated with supporting them during this time. To date there is no commitment from the UK Government to provide funding beyond the first year of arrival. As part of the 2023-24 Draft Budget process, we are considering how support will be provided to arrivals during the 2023-24 financial year and the corresponding cost of this support.
42. As has been noted by the Minister for Finance and Local Government the heightened expectations for inflation mean that we are likely to see year on year real terms reductions in our Budget in both 2023-24 and 2024-25. This provides what may well be the most challenging context we have faced since devolution, outdoing even the most difficult periods of austerity.
43. Cabinet will consider this pressure alongside other pressures which include implications for delivery of PFG commitments, our response to the cost-of-living crisis, meeting inflationary pressures including public sector pay, and net zero plans. Noting this will likely require difficult choices.
44. All arrivals under the Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme will be able to access public funds, including Universal Credit and homelessness support, as well as Free School Meals if they do not have sufficient income. Despite the lack of UK Government funding for those under the Family Scheme, they too will continue to have access to our essential public services such as education and health services, including mental health.
45. In addition to the direct costs of supporting people on arrival and with initial accommodation it is important to note the longer term financial pressures arising from the additional pressures on longer term housing and related support services.

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

46. Approximately 700 Afghans have been supported in Wales under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) since August 2021. Most of these families have lived in temporary 'bridging accommodation' at hotels. A significant proportion of these people have now been dispersed to local authorities across Wales. A steady flow of arrivals continues to add to the number of residents in hotels with around 350 people currently in hotels.
47. Since the evacuation of Afghanistan, the Home Office has also opened a new tranche of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) meaning a continuous flow of arrivals into bridging accommodation. There are fortnightly flights from Islamabad of around 250 people per flight. There is no clear strategy from the Home Office on accommodation and move on.

48. Finding accommodation for larger families is also proving to be a challenge. Since the conflict in Ukraine however, the pledges for LAs to support Afghans has slowed with many LAs stating that they have fulfilled their original pledge to support Afghans and others and that a lack of accommodation in their area means they are unable to support ARAP or ACRS resettlement.
49. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has introduced a 'Find your own accommodation' policy which allows Afghan residents to find accommodation within the private rental sector. Welsh Government is currently considering how this policy could be introduced into Wales. Finding affordable private rental sector accommodation will prove to be challenging to Afghan families especially as they want to remain in the city areas of Wales.
50. A co-ordinator within the hotels has proved to be very successful in engaging with Afghans to help them understand their options and to advise on their housing options, often encouraging them to take the offers of accommodation provided. As a result, there have been few refusals to travel and some Afghans have formed communities together in areas they previously refused to travel. Learning from this is being shared with the Ukrainian super sponsor scheme.
51. The Home Office's full asylum dispersal which was introduced earlier this year will see its accommodation provider seek to procure accommodation across Wales expanding from the 4 current LAs to 22. The Home Office is also utilising contingency hotels across Wales although in practice this tends to be Cardiff-based. Onward dispersal is slow due to the lack of accommodation available.
52. In terms of lessons learned, Welsh Government's super sponsor scheme was developed on the basis both of our own and our local authority partners' experience of supporting Afghans and Syrians to settle in Wales, building on good practice and lessons learned. The Team Wales approach remains at the core of all this work.