

## **Urgent Item**

**General Meeting of the Council: 10 March 2022.**

**Support to Ukrainian Refugees.**

**Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To consider participation in the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Council is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

That, on 6 March 2022, the UK Government announced the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine.

#### **2.2.**

That no detail has been given on the numbers of refugees from Ukraine who are likely to seek assistance in the UK at this time.

#### **2.3.**

That the Council participated in the Syrian Resettlement Scheme between 2017 and 2021, which was extremely resource intensive.

#### **2.4.**

That, in October 2021, the Council agreed to participate in the Afghan Resettlement Scheme, by seeking two properties from the private sector to house Afghan households.

#### **2.5.**

That there is currently extremely high pressure on housing in Orkney and challenges for the Council in meeting its statutory duties in relation to homelessness.

#### **2.6.**

Options for participating in the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine, as detailed in section 7 of this report, with the preferred option being Option 3, namely that the Council should seek to identify two private sector properties which can be leased directly to Ukrainian households, under a private

residential tenancy, as this would not impact on those who are homeless or otherwise on the waiting list.

**It is recommended:**

## **2.7.**

That the Council participates in the UK Government's Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine but emphasises the challenges and therefore engages in the resettlement process as follows:

- Two properties be sought from the private rented sector to house Ukrainian households.
- In the event that no suitable properties are obtained from the private rented sector, the Council, working where possible in partnership with Orkney Housing Association Ltd, should seek to re-house two Ukrainian households.
- That the remit of the multi-agency operational group already established to undertake the relevant preparatory work to support the Afghan Resettlement Scheme should be extended to encompass the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine.
- Subject to funding being made available by the UK Government.

## **3. Introduction**

### **3.1.**

In March 2022, the UK Government launched the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine in response to the war with Russia which has displaced Ukrainian nationals and their families.

### **3.2.**

The Ukrainian Family Scheme allows family members of British nationals, UK settled persons and certain others to come to or extend their stay in the UK.

#### **3.2.1.**

In order to be eligible for the scheme, participants must:

- Be applying to join or accompany a UK based family member.
- Be Ukrainian or the immediate family member of a Ukrainian national who is applying to the scheme.
- Have been residing in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 (including those who have now left Ukraine).

#### **3.2.2.**

Those applying for a visa under this scheme will be able to live, work and study in the UK and access public funds for a period of three years.

### **3.3.**

The Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine is for Ukrainians without any family ties to the UK. The scheme allows sponsors such as communities, private sponsors or local authorities, to bring those forced to flee Ukraine to the UK.

#### **3.3.1.**

Those who come under this scheme will be granted leave to remain for an initial period of 12 months and able to work and access public services.

### **3.4.**

Further details are not known at this time as information on both schemes will be published soon by the UK Government.

### **3.5.**

It is not clear whether there will be any funding available to local authorities to assist with the development and planning required to assist their relocation.

## **4. Similarities to Syrian Resettlement Scheme**

### **4.1.**

The Council participated in the Syrian Resettlement Scheme, resettling four families between 2017 and 2021.

### **4.2.**

Prior to Orkney taking part in the Syrian Resettlement Programme, significant preparatory planning was undertaken involving various Council services, a broad range of agencies across the statutory and third sectors and two separate multi-agency groups, one strategic and one operational. The strategic group included elected members and the local MSP.

### **4.3.**

Significant development and planning was undertaken to ensure that everything the Syrian households may require to assist with their resettlement was considered and plans were set in place to provide services as far as was reasonably practicable.

### **4.4.**

The Council worked jointly with COSLA and the Home Office to ensure that information was given to any families considering resettlement in Orkney to ensure, as far as possible, that they understood there were limitations in relation to a relative lack of cultural diversity, lack of a mosque and limited access to halal food etc. All families who were ultimately resettled in Orkney accepted this situation prior to arrival.

#### **4.5.**

The programme was significantly resource intensive both in relation to existing staff, specifically employed staff and financial cost, although funding was made available by the Home Office in excess of the standard provision. Recruitment to specialist posts was challenging and staff retention also proved problematic.

#### **4.6.**

Ultimately all Syrian families left Orkney citing issues including lack of a cultural network and diversity as some of the reasons they felt unable to settle in Orkney.

### **5. Differences from the Syrian Resettlement Scheme**

#### **5.1.**

Given the lack of detail around the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine, it is unclear, at this time, on the timescales for providing accommodation and therefore it is difficult to plan to ensure all the structures and processes required to ensure successful resettlement is in place.

#### **5.2.**

The households concerned are likely to speak either Ukrainian or Russian as opposed to Arabic. Therefore, written translations will be required for all documentation.

#### **5.3.**

Whilst there may be family members resident already in Orkney who would be able to interpret on behalf of their family member, it is not appropriate to allow one member of a household to interpret for other household members as this may place them in a potentially vulnerable position. From a professional perspective, interpretation services must be used to ensure that the information conveyed is translated literally and independently from internal family matters. Therefore, interpretation services will require to be in place. It is not ideal to do this through telephone interpretation when they first arrive and so there may require to be a contract entered into for a period of time.

#### **5.4.**

The level of Housing Support requirements is significant when households first arrive and this includes setting up bank accounts, assistance with processes such as registering with the Job Centre Plus and obtaining a National Insurance number, registering for medical provision and enrolling with schools etc.

#### **5.5.**

There may be high levels of trauma and distress that may require medical intervention.

## **6. The Route Forward**

### **6.1.**

While the Council may wish to participate in the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine from a humanitarian perspective, Orkney's experiences of the Syrian Resettlement Programme may raise questions as to whether Orkney can offer a suitable resettlement option in the longer term.

### **6.2.**

In October 2021 the Council agreed to participate in the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and work is still ongoing in this respect.

### **6.3.**

Currently there is significant pressure on housing. The level of homeless households in temporary accommodation is significantly higher than the level prior to the COVID-19 pandemic at around 65 households and the Council's waiting list has risen to around 900 households, 277 of which can evidence a priority entitlement at this point in time.

### **6.4.**

Any properties which are normally available to the Council but used for purposes unrelated to addressing its waiting list, such as those used for student accommodation or to house probationary teachers, have already been taken to assist in temporarily housing homeless households throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, unless otherwise occupied. Therefore, there is not any available resource of vacant accommodation from within the Council's stock.

### **6.5.**

The Housing Service would not currently have the staffing resource to be able to progress the Ukraine Schemes alongside the Afghan Resettlement Scheme without significant additional staffing enhancement. Accordingly, requirements for temporary additional staffing to support the Ukraine Schemes and Afghan Resettlement Scheme will be investigated.

## **7. Options Appraisal**

### **7.1.**

Four options in respect of housing households through the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine have been considered, as detailed in the following sections.

## **7.2.**

**Option 1:** The Council should seek to identify two family sized properties, from within the Council portfolio, on mainland Orkney, ideally Kirkwall or Stromness, to house two Ukrainian families. This would require a process of matching to ensure an appropriately sized family house was saved in each case.

## **7.3.**

**Option 2:** The Council working in partnership with Orkney Housing Association Ltd with the aim of sharing the responsibility for housing two Ukrainian households.

### **7.3.1.**

Options 1 and 2 would allow access to appropriate services and jobs readily.

### **7.3.2.**

Kirkwall, however, has high demand for housing as does Stromness and Mainland Orkney and these options would result in two families, in housing need in Orkney, having to wait longer for a house while two families from out with Orkney would be housed more swiftly.

## **7.4.**

**Option 3:** The Council should seek to identify two private sector properties which can be leased directly to Ukrainian households, under a private residential tenancy.

### **7.4.1.**

This has the advantage of bringing additional housing stock into the equation and consequently does not impact on families who are either homeless or otherwise on the housing waiting list.

### **7.4.2.**

Current legislation surrounding private sector lets allows a household to obtain what is effectively a secure tenancy in the private sector – a private residential tenancy.

### **7.4.3.**

Properties used would be expected to meet appropriate letting standards and documentation would require to be provided in the relevant language/format required. However, the Council could provide some assistance with this.

### **7.4.4.**

Given that there is high demand for housing in Orkney, it may be difficult to source properties at all, therefore there may be a need for an alternative option should this situation arise.

## **7.5.**

The preferred option, in the first instance, is Option 3, namely that the Council should seek to identify two private sector properties which can be leased directly to Ukrainian households, under a private residential tenancy, as this would not impact on those who are homeless or otherwise on the waiting list.

## **7.6.**

Should there be no success in delivering Option 3, Option 2 should be used instead with the Council ideally working in partnership with Orkney Housing Association Ltd with the aim of sharing the responsibility for housing two Ukrainian households.

# **8. Human Resource Implications**

## **8.1.**

It is proposed that assistance would be required with project management and delivery. Also, significant specialist housing support and the provision of translation/ interpretation services would be required in order to support the two families.

## **8.2.**

There are potential challenges in respect of determining the required skills base and recruiting. In addition, the posts would require to exist specifically for the planning and delivery of the project and support of Ukrainian and would no longer be required if there was a situation where no Ukrainians were housed in Orkney.

## **8.3.**

The Chief Executive has delegated authority to approve additional staffing for up to 2 years in duration. Thereafter, if necessary, the committee process could be used to formalise the process and establish any relevant post on a longer-term basis.

## **8.4.**

Due to the specialist nature of this employment, it may be an alternative option to seek to contract this provision in from an external provider, perhaps using the local voluntary sector.

# **9. Equalities Impact**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

# **10. Links to Council Plan**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority theme of Quality of Life.

## **11. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority of Community Wellbeing.

## **12. Financial Implications**

### **12.1.**

The recommendation to participate in the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine is subject to funding being made available by the UK Government. No detail of any funding has been supplied for these two schemes at this time.

### **12.2.**

Initial participation in the Syrian Resettlement Programme required Home Office funding significantly above the levels of the standard award which was agreed as an exception prior to arrival. It is highly likely that the Council would again incur costs in respect of support, interpretation, planning, etc.

### **12.3.**

On 22 February 2022, when considering the budget and Council Tax levels for 2022/23, the Policy and Resources Committee recommended that the policy of presumption against new commitments be reaffirmed with the following conditions:

- Exceptions might be considered for new commitments which are 100% funded by external bodies – proposals involving the Council in partnership funding shall require compensatory savings to be identified.
- The Council should consider undertaking new statutory duties or any case where it was considered that statutory duties were not being fulfilled, however, such duties having financial implications should first be reported to the relevant Committee(s) for approval.
- The Council should consider new commitments where compensatory savings could be identified – any Committee considering such recommendations should, in the first instance, seek to identify savings from within its revenue budget.

### **12.4.**

The recommendation at section 12.3 above is due to be considered at the General Meeting of the Council to be held on 10 March 2022.

## **13. Legal Aspects**

Section 20(1) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended, requires that, in selecting tenants for their houses, all local authorities and Registered Social Landlords must give reasonable preference to the following groups:



- Persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Persons who are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- Tenants of houses which are held by a social landlord and which the social landlord considers to be under-occupied.

## **14. Contact Officers**

James Wylie, Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2436, Email [james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk)

Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, extension 2177, Email [frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk)

Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), extension 2174, Email [lesley.mulraine@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:lesley.mulraine@orkney.gov.uk)

## **15. Appendix**

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment.



## Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

| <b>1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.   | Ukraine Family Scheme and Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine  |
| Service / service area responsible.  | Housing Services  |
| Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.  | Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation)<br>Ext 2174 E-mail <a href="mailto:lesley.mulraine@orkney.gov.uk">lesley.mulraine@orkney.gov.uk</a> |
| Date of assessment.  | 8 March 2022  |
| Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly). | New   |

| <b>2. Initial Screening</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?             | To consider resettling two families under the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine in Orkney to allow a humanitarian approach and improved demographic profile for Orkney. |
| Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?                    | Those who require assistance through the Ukraine Family Scheme and Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine.  |
| State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how. | Anyone who is at risk of homelessness or who may become at risk of homelessness in the future.  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?</p>   | <p>Given the very short timescales it has not been possible to have an initial meeting.</p>  |
| <p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise.<br/>E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p> | <p>Various reports have been produced around the area of other resettlement schemes which have some similarities.<br/>Currently research is underway nationally around housing and homelessness equality and specifically around the area of housing as a human right.</p>   |
| <p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise.<br/>E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See <a href="#">The Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance for Public Bodies</a> for further information.</p>        | <p>Many of the reports outlined above have at least some focus on the area of socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities.<br/>There is significant research around homeless households suffering socio-economic disadvantage. The provision of housing or lack of it is recognised as being intrinsically linked to a range of indicators related to health, wealth and educational achievement.<br/><br/>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced a range of research focussing on poverty and disadvantage and the links between this and housing and homelessness. Research such as this relates directly to the introduction of the Fairer Scotland Duty.</p> |
| <p>Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?</p>   | <p>(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).</p>  |
| <p>1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.</p>  | <p>Yes. Any families being resettled would come from Ukraine and therefore there will be a slight impact as a consequence. There may be some, limited, related impact on those from other ethnic groups who are applying for housing if Council provision is to be used.</p>   |
| <p>2. Sex: a man or a woman.</p>  | <p>No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.</p>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes. | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.   | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 5. Pregnancy and maternity.  | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 6. Age: people of different ages.  | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).   | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 8. Caring responsibilities.  | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 9. Care experienced.   | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.   | No specific impact identified. They may come from any group within society.   |
| 11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).  | (Includes physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, mental health)   |
| 12. Socio-economic disadvantage.   | Socio-economic disadvantage may well be a factor at least for the initial period of resettlement while households become establish and seek employment. |

### 3. Impact Assessment

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?       | Not specifically. The intention in resettling people through the Ukraine Family Scheme and/or Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukraine is to introduce Ukraine nationals. |
| How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?                            | N/A   |
| Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require? | Yes   |

#### 4. Conclusions and Planned Action

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Is further work required?                               | Yes/No. |
| What action is to be taken?                             | N/A     |
| Who will undertake it?                                  | N/A     |
| When will it be done?                                   | N/A     |
| How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans). | N/A     |

Signature:



Date: 8 March 2022

Name: Lesley Mulraine

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at [hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk)