

## **Update by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee entitled Housing Ukrainian Refugees**

Following the Local Government and Housing Committee's report on Housing Ukrainian Refugees in Wales in March 2023, the Welsh Government provided a response which can be found [here](#). In advance of the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip attending Committee on 5 October, the following update against recommendations is provided.

### **Recommendation 1**

*The Committee recommends that:*

*The Welsh Government should continue its efforts to persuade the UK Government to increase the monthly payment to all hosts to £500 or, if this is not possible, consider funding bridging payments for hosts in Wales to ensure all receive a monthly payment of £500.*

**Response: Accept**

**Progress: Achieved**

Although the Welsh Government continued to urge the UK Government to increase monthly host 'thank you' payments to £500, UK Ministers maintained their approach. This would have meant that for the first year that a Ukrainian arrival has been in the UK the 'thank you' payment would remain at £350, increasing to £500 only at the start of the second year.

We felt that it was essential to create equity in payments amongst our Welsh hosts and to encourage more hosting placements during a time of housing scarcity. The Welsh Government is utilising our 2023-24 Homes for Ukraine funding envelope to fund monthly top up payments of £150 to those that would otherwise only be eligible to receive £350 per month from UK Government. This will ensure that all hosts are eligible to receive £500 per month, regardless of how long those being hosted have been in the UK. This has led to one clear and consistent message for hosts in Wales and is the key message in our communications campaign to encourage more hosts to come forward.

We are currently asking UK Government to discuss the future of the Ukraine schemes with us, which will include arrangements for hosting payments during year 3 of Homes for Ukraine visas. No details are yet available from the UK Government. We are also exploring the feasibility of more hosts and guests converting appropriate placements into commercial lodging arrangements should 'thank you' payments not be available in year 3.

### **Recommendation 2**

*The Committee recommends that:*

*The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Senedd as a matter of urgency to clarify its position on Welcome Centres.*

**Response: Accept**

**Progress: Achieved**

Initial accommodation provided through our super sponsor route was only ever intended to provide temporary accommodation to those fleeing Ukraine and is not intended to serve as an indefinite solution. It is a priority to support arrivals into longer term accommodation solutions, so that they are able to settle and fully integrate themselves within our communities. However, this ambition must be considered in the context of wider housing pressures and the need to support all groups to secure long term, suitable housing in Wales.

The number of guests arriving through the Welsh Government Super Sponsor route started to significantly reduce towards the end of 2022 and currently there is, on average, less than 1 person

arriving through this route per week. The demand for initial accommodation from new arrivals has therefore reduced significantly, making it possible to focus on the rationalisation and closure of the initial accommodation estate as people move on to longer-term accommodation.

A long-term plan to rationalise and close the initial accommodation estate began in earnest in October 2022, developed in partnership with local authorities hosting initial accommodation. The aim was to provide Ukrainian guests in initial accommodation with support to help people to move on to longer-term accommodation at the earliest opportunity. Those guests unable to move on prior to closure of a site are relocated to other initial accommodation, ensuring all individuals continue to have an accommodation offer.

There were over 1750 guests in initial accommodation at the start of the closure process, supported across 40 sites, including 6 Welcome Centres, 3 universities, 29 hotels and 2 holiday parks. The more expensive and remote hotels, that were more difficult for local authorities to support, were prioritised for closure in the first instance. Those guests unable to move on prior to closure of a site were relocated to more affordable accommodation such as holiday parks and Welcome Centres. These types of accommodation also provide more independence as they often have more privacy and self-catering facilities.

The closure plan remains on track with 30 initial accommodation sites having closed, as of 4 September 2023. Approximately 470 people remain supported across 10 initial accommodation sites. The intention is that all remaining hotels will be closed by January 2024, with Wrexham Welcome Centre and Marine Holiday Park due to remain open until July and September 2024 respectively. Earlier closure of the remaining initial accommodation sites may be possible and is dependent on the ability to successfully support people to move people. Welsh Government has worked alongside local authorities to achieve this level of move-on and have continuously flexed and adapted the plan to attain the maximum move-on rate at each closure.

No guests will be left without accommodation resulting from the closure of an initial accommodation setting and no-one will be made street homeless by our plans to reduce capacity in our super sponsor initial accommodation.

### **Recommendation 3**

*The Committee recommends that:*

*The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Senedd on its intentions around the use of modular accommodation to provide homes for people from Ukraine. This should include detail of the Welsh Government's expectations on local authorities to develop such accommodation, the funding available to them and the longer-term intentions for its use.*

**Response: Accept**

**Progress: Achieved**

Over the course of the last three 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 36,000 people into temporary accommodation. However, the Ukraine humanitarian crisis is adding to an already extremely challenging situation with a huge demand for housing exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

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 on transitional and longer-term accommodation are being managed alongside the existing and growing pressures on housing and temporary accommodation services.

In response to the growing housing pressures and the need to reduce demands on temporary accommodation, the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) was set up to provide more good quality, longer term accommodation at pace to support everyone in housing need, including those from Ukraine.

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, acquisitions, and the use of modular accommodation on a meanwhile basis.

In its first year TACP provided £76.4 million funding to local authorities and registered social landlords, enabling 936 more homes to be brought forward. Building on this success, the scheme has just recently reopened for a second year to new applications.

Types of projects being supported with this funding include bringing empty properties back into use, remodelling and conversions, acquisitions, and the use of modular accommodation on a meanwhile use basis. Local authorities and RSLs decide which projects they bring forward for funding and how this transitional accommodation is then used based on their local needs and circumstances. We have encouraged collaboration and learning around innovative projects brought forward via our regular housing leadership Cymru meetings and joint meetings with Social Landlords in Wales

In terms of modular accommodation, Welsh Government also uses existing and well-established networks to facilitate the sharing of best practice around modular builds for transitional accommodation, such as the Innovative Housing Community of Practice which meets bi-monthly to share learning and best practice from schemes funded under the Innovative Housing.

Projects funded through TACP must meet the minimum standards set out in the TACP standards framework which is intended to ensure a flexible and responsive approach to bringing forward more good quality accommodation at pace.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*The Committee recommends that:*

*The Welsh Government should develop a long-term plan to ensure sufficient provision of suitable move-on accommodation for people from Ukraine.*

#### **Response: Accept**

#### **Progress: Achieved**

Supporting the move on of Ukrainians from initial accommodation into longer-term accommodation can be challenging and resource intensive for local authorities. Given wider housing pressures there is strong demand for affordable private rental properties coupled with concerns and reluctance of some people to move out of initial accommodation.

To support this, national communications in relation to move on have been disseminated, supported by detailed FAQs, a code of conduct and behavioural policies to set expectations of guests about behaviour. Where guests turn down multiple reasonable offers of move on accommodation, a refusals policy is in place with a Move On Accommodation Service charge levied to ensure the costs of sourcing additional accommodation offers can be partially met. Following feedback from local authorities this policy was recently reviewed and updated, seeking

to provide greater alignment of policies for Ukrainian households with that of other cohorts in housing need. Details of our behaviour and refusals policies can be found [here](#).

Alongside this, we have updated the population share originally agreed as part of the Framework for Accommodation<sup>1</sup> to provide a Team Wales approach to supporting Ukrainians in initial accommodation into longer term accommodations across Wales. This has enabled us to reflect the increased number of arrivals and to take wider housing pressures into account, including numbers of people in temporary accommodation and asylum dispersal. It also enabled all local authorities to reaffirm their commitment to the Team Wales approach.

Recognising the pressures on local authorities and the importance placed on move on to support longer term integration, the Welsh Government allocated £2 million from the Ukraine budget to support move on. £1.5 million is being provided as a grant to local authorities to support move on and make progress towards their individual population share. This funding is being used in a variety of ways for example to support access to private rental sector (PRS) through bonds, deposits, rent in advance and support with furnishings. It is complementary to the funding that local authorities receive to support other groups in housing need that provides similar support, so that there is a wide range of routes to support move on for everyone in need into longer term accommodation.

£0.5 million was allocated to provide national move on support and as part of this a 'National Move On Taskforce' has been established. The Taskforce is hosted by Blaenau Gwent drawing on their skills and operational experience from operating a Welcome Centre. The Taskforce works alongside local authorities' housing and resettlement teams to provide additional capacity and experience to expedite move on, including supporting those without initial accommodation to make progress towards their population share.

In addition, the Welsh Government-funded Housing Justice Cymru Ukraine hosting support project is supporting local authorities to offer targeted support to guests in initial accommodation to support with their move on. The service works with local authorities to encourage guests to consider host offers, and support guests to explore private rented sector options across Wales. They offer guests practical and emotional support through the move on process.

### **Recommendations 5 and 6**

*The Committee recommends that:*

*The Welsh Government should consider whether some of the £40 million it has allocated in its budget for 2023-24 to help local authorities to continue delivering services to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, could be used to make up the difference in the integration tariff; and that*

*The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Senedd on its discussions with the UK Government on obtaining clarity as to how much of the new £150 million funding for 2023-24 will be made available to Wales. The update should include details of how the funding will be allocated.*

**Response: Accept**

**Progress: Achieved**

Recommendations 5 and 6 are related in the sense that they relate to the outcome of UK Government funding decisions on the Homes for Ukraine Integration Tariff. The reduction in the integration tariff from £10,500 to £5,900 is significant and in the absence of year 2 integration and

education tariffs we are unable to make the same level of funding available to local authorities from our own resources which will sadly not stretch that far.

The Welsh Government is receiving £8.2m from UK Government in lieu of a year 2 tariff. This is a proportionate share of the UK £150m funding pot, based upon the number of Homes for Ukraine arrivals in each nation of the UK. £8.2m is far short of what local authorities would otherwise have received had the UK Government continued to provide tariffs for year two, in line with other refugee and resettlement schemes. The Afghan Schemes year two tariff is £6000 per person for year 2, which applied to the number of Homes for Ukraine arrivals in Wales would equate to £42.1m. I will continue to advocate for UK Government to return to the tried and tested Integration Tariff approach, which ensured adequate support was provided for Afghans, Syrians and others (through the UK Resettlement Scheme).

Nonetheless, whilst the UK Government has cut the vital funding needed by local authorities to levels far below what can be mitigated, we remain determined to support councils to help everyone who needs a home in Wales.

In advance of receiving a decision from the UK Government about the £8.2m allocation, we decided to allocate £3.85m to local authorities in Wales to help address funding gaps. Within this £3.85m, £2m was allocated to move on related activity (as mentioned above) and a further £1.95m was allocated to local authorities through a discretionary fund. The fund has been created to provide support to help with the integration and housing of Ukrainian arrivals. The intention is for these funds to be allocated to tackle fresh challenges within local authorities such as education, language lessons and employability programmes that will be created by the reduction in Integration Tariff funding from UK Government.

Additionally, and as discussed above, we are providing 'thank you' top-up funding to ensure hosts can receive the £500 per month in the first year, rather than the £350 provided by the UK Government, which helps prevent yet further strain on local authority homelessness services.

### **Wider Support for Ukrainians**

In terms of wider support, the Welsh Government has extended the existing Wales Sanctuary Service to provide help to Ukrainian arrivals with a range of queries or barriers in accessing support. This route to direct support for Ukrainians is useful where the capacity of statutory services is stretched. As well as advice and advocacy provision, the extension of the service includes a dedicated monthly virtual peer support forum for Ukrainians. Displaced People in Action coordinates this forum to help Ukrainians to connect with each other and discuss shared opportunities and challenges encountered in Wales. The service also includes immigration legal advice provided by Asylum Justice, where required.

The Welsh Government works closely with Working Wales, who support our Ukrainian guests to find work, including having qualifications recognised through ENIC or getting certificates translated. As well as offering individual support, Working Wales are involved with local authority move on support services and undertake informative group sessions at our initial accommodation settings where required.

In March this year, the UK Government announced funding for an intensive, online English Language and employment support for Ukrainians in the UK on humanitarian Visas. This will be a UK wide programme, known as 'STEP Ukraine', with Welsh Ministers agreeing that this be delivered in Wales on their behalf to help more Ukrainian arrivals integrate further into their communities and progress their careers here. Welsh Ministers' consent for this scheme is on the basis that it is a time-limited 'proof of concept' pilot to examine whether online intensive ESOL can more effectively support sanctuary seekers. Welsh Government officials were involved in the

procurement exercise, and the contract has been awarded to World Jewish Relief (WJR) in partnership with the British Council. It is anticipated that over 400 Ukrainians in Wales could benefit from this pilot.

We also continue to provide the Welcome Ticket scheme (free transport provision) to Ukrainians (and other sanctuary seeking cohorts) to help with community orientation and integration, as well as financial resilience.