

# Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Ward(s) affected: All.

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Report Status: Open

## Update on the Borough Response to Refugees

### Executive Summary

Following the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 November 2022, the Committee has asked for an update as to the Borough's response to refugees.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about the support given to refugees and ask for comment on the services delivered.

The Council remains involved in supporting refugees through the following:

- Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme
- Asylum Seeking Bridging Hotel (where people have claimed asylum and are awaiting a decision as to whether they will be allowed to stay in the UK as a refugee)
- Community Sponsorship

Each of the above is a different scheme led by central government to support the refugee crisis within the UK. The Council's duty and involvement varies depending on the scheme.

For the VPRS and ARAP schemes, the Family Support Team within Community Services supports the refugee families to resettle in Guildford. The Home Office has provided funding to assist with this resettlement in the borough and we have supported

- 8 Syrian families under VPRS – 2 families remain within the five-year funded scheme, and both are in the final year - due to complete in October 2023.
- 2 Afghan families under ARAP – both families are in the second funding year out of the three-year government funding cycle - due to complete in 2024.

The Homes For Ukraine Scheme was launched by the Department of Levelling Up: Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in March 2022 to support the crisis caused by the Ukraine invasion. More than a year later, the scheme continues to facilitate Hosts in the UK to sponsor individuals or families – referred to as Guests- to live either with them or in a property owned by them.

Originally this Guest/Host arrangement was thought to last 6 months and to support the arrangement, Hosts would receive monthly 'thank you' payments to help cover costs. However, due to the invasion continuing for longer than expected and the nationwide shortage of affordable private rented housing available, the Guest/Host arrangement continues for many alongside the monthly thank you payments.

Central government have provided funding to local authorities to administer the Homes for Ukraine scheme and Guildford has been allocated £ 2,243,758 for the period of March 2022 to March 2025.

The scheme is coordinated through our Regulatory, Community and Housing teams and involves

- Housing compliance checks for Hosts
- Administration of welcome and thank you payments
- Safeguarding of Guests and Hosts
- Resettlement support within the wider community – help accessing Schools, GPs and Dentists
- Advice on housing options once Guest/Host arrangement
- Support with private rented deposits

Guildford under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme has to date

- 225 guest families – consisting of 502 people
- 96 families (191 people) still with host families
- 88 families (193 people) in private rented accommodation
- 14 families (21 people) rematched with new hosts

The Asylum-Seeking Bridging Hotel continues to be independently contracted by the Home Office to Clearsprings Ready Homes (CSRH). CSRH provide a variety of 'asylum-seeking housing' across the South-East that includes purposing hotels and purchasing housing to become homes of multiple occupation.

In East Guildford, a hotel continues to support people whilst asylum applications are considered. There are currently 150 people in the hotel and 45 are children under the age of 18. CSRH are looking to increase the capacity to 196 by changing double rooms into twin rooms to accommodate 2 individuals. One GP practice serves the hotel as well as the local area.

As a council we do not have a statutory obligations to support the hotel, but the situation is incredibly sensitive for both residents within the hotel and local residents in the area. The Community Services team continues to offer support to the hotel management team, statutory partners and local volunteers.

The plan to increase capacity in the hotel is of great concern and we have worked with the South- East Migration Partnership to feedback our concerns to the Home Office – but it is a Home Office decision.

Of further concern is that there is currently unprecedented demand of asylum seekers requiring support from wider services across the country. The result of this demand is due to efforts to clear a backlog of cases requiring a decision on asylum status. A particular pressure point for Guildford will be that if asylum status is granted the applicant is given a 21-to-28-day notice period to leave their bridging accommodation and find alternative housing. This inevitably means that local housing authorities are asked to support in finding accommodation and wider partnership services are needed to support wider health and wellbeing as well as education and employment needs. Housing provision and wider statutory services are already under incredible pressure, and it is unknown how any further demand will be manageable.

The Council continues to facilitate the Community Sponsorship Programme where a local community group can provide housing and wider support to Home Office registered refugee families from anywhere in the world in need of resettlement. We have had no further community sponsorships come forward in 2023 meaning that there continues to be two programmes in Guildford

- Resettle@Guildford
- Camino

## **2. Recommendation to Committee**

That Committee comments on the Council's support to refugees within the borough.

## **3. Reason for Recommendation**

- 3.1 To ensure Councillors are aware of this council's approach to supporting refugees in the borough.

## **4. Purpose of Report**

- 4.1 Following the Overview and Scrutiny Report presented to committee in October 2022, this report provides the requested update on the Borough's response to refugees.

4.2 The Committee is asked to comment on the Council's services and support provided to refugees.

## 5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 Supporting refugees within our Borough contributes to the strategic priority of supporting vulnerable people in our community.

## 6. Background

6.1 The definition of a refugee is someone who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war and persecution. They are unable to return home until conditions are safe for them again.

6.2 Refugees are protected by international law under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, of which the UK is a signatory.

6.3 Guildford Borough Council is supporting refugees (and those claiming asylum whilst their application to live in the UK as a refugee is considered) through the following schemes led by central government to support the refugee crisis within the UK.

- Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme
- Asylum Seeking Bridging Hotel
- Community Sponsorship

6.4 **The Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)** was launched by the Home Office in January 2014 (working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) to identify those most at risk from the war in Syria and bring them to the UK. The greatest need included people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk.

6.5 The scheme was intended to provide sanctuary nationwide to several hundred vulnerable Syrians over three years. In July 2017, the Home

Office expanded the scope of the scheme to include other refugees who fled the conflict in Syria but did not have Syrian nationality.

- 6.6 Guildford has welcomed Eight Syrian families comprising of 47 individuals (16 adults and 31 children) under the VPRS from 2016 – 2018.
- 6.7 Upon arrival, central government provided a 5-year funding stream to the Council to support the families. The funding was split as follows
- Year 1 £8250 per person
  - Year 2 £5000 per person
  - Year 3 £3700 per person
  - Year 4 £2300 per person
  - Year 5 £1000 per person
- 6.8 The support we have offered to all families is to ensure that families have access to private housing, health, education and community support and interaction. The Family Support Team have provided intensive support to help families acclimatise to life in the UK so that they can achieve independence and financial stability.
- 6.9 We have three families who remain under the five-year programme, and they are due to leave the scheme in October 2023. We are working with the families to ensure their leave to remain documentation and decision is complete by the Home Office.
- 6.10 **The Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** launched on 1 April 2021 to offer relocation or other assistance to former Locally Employed Staff who helped the British government and Armed Forces and were now deemed at risk due to the changing political dynamics within Afghanistan.
- 6.11 To support ARAP the council in 2021 secured the lease on two Ministry of Defence properties in Pirbright for up to five years to offer to families fleeing Afghanistan. Two families moved into the properties in January and February of 2022.

6.12 In accordance with Home Office guidelines, the council will provide three years of support to these two families with the following funding arrangements

- Year 1 £10,500 per person
- Year 2 £6000 per person
- Year 3 £4020 per person

6.13 These two families consist of 8 individuals – 4 adults and 4 children and both are in their second year of the programme. The Family Support Team assist them to help access health and education services as well as employment.

6.14 **The Homes For Ukraine Scheme** was launched by the Department of Levelling Up: Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in March 2022 to support the crisis caused by the Ukraine invasion.

6.15 The scheme facilitates Hosts in the UK to sponsor Ukrainian individuals or families who have been impacted by the war in Ukraine (referred to as Guests) to live either with them or in a separate identified property for a minimum of six months. All Hosts receive a monthly thank you payment to contribute towards costs.

Guildford under the Homes For Ukraine Scheme has to date

- 225 guest families – consisting of 502 people
- 96 families (191 people) still with host families
- 88 families (193 people) in private rented accommodation
- 14 families (21 people) rematched with new hosts

6.16 Due to the invasion continuing for longer than expected and the nationwide shortage of affordable private rented housing available, the Guest/Host arrangement continues for many alongside the monthly thank you payments. In many cases, this has placed intense pressure on both Host and Guest, and it is fair to say that many Hosts feel let down by the national scheme because they understood that greater access to accommodation, school places and health provision would be possible for their Guests after the original 6 months arrangement.

6.17 Likewise, Guests have expressed concern about the scheme and what they understood would be available to them. Lack of available affordable private accommodation (there was for many an expectation that they would receive social housing) has presented a challenge alongside school places and expectations of health care.

Many children of guests were originally placed in schools based on their host address. There is often no available accommodation in those areas and finding appropriate accommodation would mean either travelling an unmanageable distance as school transport is not provided or moving to a new school. It is the case for some guests that moving their children to a new school now that their children have established friendships is unpalatable. There is also the consideration that the closest school to any address may not have places or school transport available.

6.18 Guests have also mentioned how their understanding of NHS services available has been a challenge. Our NHS services do not cover all of the services guests are used to accessing in Ukraine.

6.19 Central government has provided funding to help local authorities administer the Homes for Ukraine scheme – acknowledging the severe challenges it presents at local level.

Guildford has been allocated £ 2,243,758 for the period of March 2022 to March 2025. The scheme is coordinated through our Regulatory, Community and Housing teams and the work involves

- Housing compliance checks for Hosts
- Administration of welcome and thank you payments
- Safeguarding of Guests and Hosts
- Resettlement support within the wider community – help accessing Schools, GPs and Dentists
- Advice on housing options if guest/host arrangement ends
- Assistance with rental deposits if appropriate

6.20 A breakdown of actual and forecast spend of this funding is as follows (please note – we are able to move the forecast funding between areas if needed)

<b>Service</b>	<b>2022-2023 Spend</b>	<b>2023-2024 Forecast</b>	<b>2024-2025 Forecast</b>
Initial reception (Ukraine mailbox, application processing and admin)	57,877.03	18,952.80	20,750.00
Data sharing (Foundry updates; returns etc.)	10,510.15	13,768.80	14,180.00
Safeguarding checks (including housing inspections)	49,246.73	103,641.60	99,592.70
Interim payment for guest (welcome payment cards)	13,496.32	7,822.38	7,750.00
Provision of education	3,000.00	12,000.00	12,000.00
Service referrals	401.36	3,099.90	187.50
Homelessness assistance (B&B costs)	22,157.61	129,663.39	125,658.50
Move on support, including supporting access to the private rented sector	41,057.48	516,692.00	200,000.00
Community integration	90,265.65	341,906.75	285,453.38
Administering payments to sponsors (TY payments)	7,816.06	10,627.50	12,500.00
Facilitating rematching	11,022.17	0.00	0.00
Supporting minors not travelling with or joining their parents in the UK	120.48	389.76	150.00
Annual Total	306,971.05	1,158,564.88	778,222.08
<b>Grant Spend Total 2022 – 2025</b>	<b>2,243,758</b>		

6.21 The Homes For Ukraine scheme continues to be a serious challenge for the council. The significant difficulties in ensuring Guests can access school places, doctors and dentists remain as does the lack of suitable and affordable housing provision.

6.22 Although the council is offering Housing Options support to any of the Guests who require help with securing more permanent

accommodation, we cannot offer immediate social housing. Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme continue to be encouraged to

- Extend their arrangement with their Hosts as long as is practicable
- Search for private housing
- Join the Housing Register

6.23 We continue to see a significant impact on the mental health of both Hosts and Guests within the scheme that cannot be underestimated. Not only are some Guests traumatised by what has happened to their country and their home, but Hosts are often trying to support their Guests to settle but the lack of 'next step' provision often means they cannot sustain helping and supporting people with the diverse and traumatic needs of people who have fled a war zone.

6.24 **The Asylum-seeking Bridging Hotel** is part of the Central Government response to the significant amount of people in the asylum accommodation system. The Home Office have commissioned in the South-East, ClearSprings Ready Homes (CSRH) to provide a variety of accommodation offers for those seeking asylum and applying to live in the UK as a refugee.

6.25 CSRH commissioned a hotel in the East of Guildford to function as a bridging hotel and the residents in the hotel are from all over the world and at various stages of their asylum application process. There is a CSRH management team present at the hotel who are to support the everyday needs of the residents.

6.26 There are currently 150 people in the hotel and 45 of those 150 are children under the age of 18. CSRH are looking to increase the capacity to accommodate 196 people by changing double rooms into twin rooms that house 2 individuals.

6.27 There continues to be severe mental and physical health needs amongst the residents – many of whom have experienced significant trauma – and this undoubtedly continues to place increasing pressure on the local GP services and wider health clinics. There is only one GP practice that serves the hotel and the wider local area.

- 6.28 As a council we do not have a statutory obligations to support the hotel, but the situation is incredibly sensitive for both residents within the hotel and local residents in the area. The Community Services team continues to offer support to the hotel management team, statutory partners and local volunteers to help as much as is possible with wider health and wellbeing activities and the local volunteer networks remain crucial in ensuring clothing and toiletries are provided to residents.
- 6.29 The plan to increase capacity in the hotel is of great concern and we have worked with the South-East Migration Partnership to feedback our concerns to the Home Office – but it is a Home Office decision.
- 6.30 Of further concern is the currently unprecedented demand of asylum seekers requiring support from wider services across the country and the impact this will have on already struggling local provision.

The result of this demand is due to efforts to clear a backlog of cases requiring a decision on asylum status. A particular pressure point for Guildford will be that if asylum status is granted, the applicant is given a 21-to-28-day notice period to leave their bridging accommodation and find alternative housing. This inevitably means that local housing authorities are asked to support in finding accommodation and wider partnership services are needed to support health and wellbeing as well as education and employment needs. Despite the Home Office providing a 24/7 Migrant Help phone line to support those in the system, it does not change how local housing provision and wider statutory services are already under incredible pressure. It is unknown how any further demand will be manageable.

- 6.31 **Community Sponsorship Programmes** were introduced by the Home Office in 2015 to facilitate a scheme whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities.

The programme is to complement the resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the VPRS and is designed to support refugee families resettle in the UK within a 5-year support window.

6.32 Guildford has had no new community sponsorship programmes since the last report. The two community sponsorship groups working in Guildford within the 5-year support window are

- Resettle@Guildford
- Camino

6.33 Both programmes provide housing for a refugee family alongside the wider support needed for the family to resettle in the UK. The council's involvement is to support the group with their safeguarding practices and to inspect the property to ensure it is compliant and safe for occupation.

6.34 The Home Office community sponsorship team undertake a rigorous application process and on completion require both the borough and county councils to support and approve the arrival of a family into the care of the sponsorship group.

## **7. Key Risks**

7.1 Refugee and resettlement support within the borough continues to be an extremely sensitive issue. Our teams work tirelessly to ensure all residents are treated with humanity and dignity. The challenges of local tensions around perceived favouritism of refugees when accessing housing and jobs remains as does profound upset around perceived illegal entry to the UK.

7.2 The funding we receive from central government is pivotal in ensuring the support we provide is sustainable. However, the risks around lack of housing provision and unprecedented pressure on our health, social care and education systems are not alleviated by resettlement funding pots and is not something volunteers or charities can alleviate.

7.3 If local authorities are expected to assist with the housing shortage this will inevitably raise the number of homeless cases presented to the borough and the costs associated with our obligation to assist.

- 7.4 It remains especially important that we have staffing resilience for this work, and we have ensured as much as is practical that a portion of the available government funding is used to support back office and staffing costs.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Funding has been provided for the resettlement schemes by central government and is managed accordingly with quarterly returns to the Home Office or Surrey County Council as appropriate.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from refugee support the council offers. We operate under agreed government guidance for all of the schemes and have ensured proper governance is in place for any support offered to Community Sponsorship groups.
- 9.2 Legal implications may arise around the issue of homelessness prevention should refugees present as homeless, and these cases would be assessed by the Housing Team and legal advice sought on a case-by-case basis.

## **10. Human Resource Implications**

- 10.1 We have resourced the VPRS and ARAP staffing within the Family Support Team with appropriate government funding and have used some of the Homes For Ukraine allocation to provide extra support to the Regulatory, Community and Housing teams.

## **11. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 11.1 Public authorities are required to have due regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) when making decisions and setting policies.

Any work with refugees would require consideration of protected characteristics of the individuals involved, and we are with the Equality Act 2010.

11.2 Surrey County Council as part of their process in supporting refugees will also have completed all the relevant assessments to ensure their statutory duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is fulfilled.

11.3 There are therefore no direct implications for this Council arising from the support offered to refugees.

## **12. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications**

12.1 There are no specific climate change/sustainability implications related or attributed to refugee support in the Borough.

## **13. Suggested issues for overview and scrutiny**

13.1 The Committee is asked to comment on the Council's support to refugees.

## **14. Conclusion**

14.1 The Council offers significant support to refugees within our communities through the

- Syrian Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme
- Asylum Seeking Bridging Hotel
- Community Sponsorship Programmes

14.2 Our corporate commitment to supporting vulnerable people across the borough means that we actively work with in the government schemes to ensure refugees are offered a safe place to live in Guildford with as much support as is possible to integrate into the community and live independent and financially stable lives.

## **15. Background Papers**

[VPRS \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme launches - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Apply for community sponsorship - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)  
[Supporting Ukraine - Guildford Borough Council](#)