

Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Services

Date: 30 September 2024

Report of Strategic Director of Housing, Communities & Environment

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Report Status: Open

Borough Response to Refugees

1 Executive Summary

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested information and an update on Guildford Borough Council's response to refugees. The purpose of this report is to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Services about the support given to refugees in Guildford and ask for comment on the services delivered.

1.2 The Council participates in supporting refugees through the following:

- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Community Sponsorship
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme

1.3 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.

- 1.4 For ARAP, the Family Support Team/resettlement team within Community Services supports the refugee families to resettle safely within local Guildford communities. The Home Office provided funding to assist with this resettlement and Guildford is currently supporting 3 Afghan families under the ARAP scheme.
- 1.5 The Council also facilitates 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. Guildford has two community sponsorship programmes.
- Resettle@Guildford
 - Camino
- 1.6 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. The scheme facilitates 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 for a minimum of 6 months. All Hosts receive a monthly thank you payment to contribute towards costs and on arrival the Guests are given a one-off welcome payment.
- 1.7 The scheme is coordinated through our Community, Regulatory and Housing teams, it 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 education, healthcare and employment.
 - Advice and support with housing options once Guest/Host arrangement ends.
- 1.8 Guildford under the Homes For Ukraine Scheme has to date:

- 74 Host families
- 156 Guests

1.9 The Committee will note that since the last report there have been two changes in our support to refugees.

- The support for Syrian families under the VPRS scheme has now ended and the families that we have supported for five years are now all integrated within the community and any further support needs are met by the wider network of statutory services.
- In December 2023, the Home Office closed the asylum-seeking bridging hotel located in the East of the borough as ‘asylum seeking housing’ and returned the hotel to its previous use.

1.10 The recent civil unrest across the country resulted in the Community Services team supporting the police with local intelligence to protect our refugee and resettled communities. Thankfully, we have not had any civil unrest in Guildford to date.

2 Recommendation to Committee

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

3 Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To ensure Councillors are aware of this council’s approach to supporting refugees within our local communities.

4 Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication?

No

5 Purpose of Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested information and an update on Guildford Borough Council's response to refugees. The purpose of this report is to inform this Committee about the support given to refugees within our communities.

The Committee is asked to comment on this council's services and support provided to refugees.

6 Strategic Priorities

Supporting Refugees resettle into communities contributes to our corporate strategy of being an inclusive borough. The council is committed to ensuring our most vulnerable are supported and empowered to live well with dignity and respect.

7 Background

7.1 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.

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

7.3 Guildford Borough Council is supporting refugees through the following schemes led by central government to support the refugee crisis within the UK.

- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Community Sponsorship
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme

7.4 Since the last report to this Committee, there have been two changes to our support of refugees.

- The Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) for Syrian Refugees has ended. The Government 5-year programme of

support for the 8 families we had in Guildford has been fulfilled and the families are now resettled in Guildford. Any further support the families may need is accessed through wider statutory services.

- The Asylum-Seeking Bridging Hotel independently contracted by the Home Office to Clearsprings Ready Homes (CSRH) in the East of Guildford was closed in December 2023 as 'asylum-seeking housing' and returned to its original use.

Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Programme (ARAP)

- 7.5 The 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.
- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 In February 2024, an additional family eligible under the ARAP scheme moved into large private property in Guildford sourced and managed by MEARS who are subcontracted by the MOD.
- 7.8 In accordance with Home Office guidelines, the council will provide three years of support to these three families with the following funding arrangements.
- Year 1 £10,500 per person
 - Year 2 £6000 per person
 - Year 3 £4020 per person
- 7.9 The first two families consist of 10 individuals – 4 adults and 6 children (two of which were born here in the UK), the third family is a family of 9 – 2 adults and 7 children. The Family Support Team are supporting these families to help the families access health,

education services, to learn English and to work towards employment so that they can become independent and thrive here in Guildford.

- 7.10 The Home Office have approached Guildford Borough Council to ask whether we are able and willing to support up to an additional 10 eligible families under the ARAP scheme with the housing being provided by the MOD on the Pirbright estate for three years. The housing management company Pinnacle will be the landlord and be responsible for managing the tenancy and completing any repairs on the properties.
- 7.11 As a council, we are often approached to ask whether we can support large families under ARAP where the housing has been sourced by MEARS in the private sector. MEARS are a housing provider who have been subcontracted by the MOD to source homes for the larger Afghan families who continue to reside in temporary accommodation. Most of the properties that have been found in Guildford have fallen through, but it is likely we will continue to receive requests for additional families.
- 7.12 The Home Office have also recently launched a scheme called 'Find Your Own Accommodation' where ARAP families currently in temporary accommodation can find their own private accommodation anywhere in the UK. We have recently received a request for a family wanting to move to Guildford. It is at the discretion of the council whether we agree to support the family for three years and receive the tariff funding outlined above.
- 7.13 We will be asking the Executive for a view regarding the offer of housing provided by Mears and also whether we will exercise our discretion for any ARAP family wanting to move to Guildford with appropriate funding support. We would welcome any comment from this committee to inform an Executive decision.
- 7.14 The biggest issues we as a council face in relation to ARAP families is that the tenancies they are given are typically for three years with no

guarantee they can remain in that property at the end of the lease. This places the responsibility the council to re-house them. Most families are benefit capped as soon as they arrive meaning they are left with little money to live on and finding employment is not easy. We do support families financially from the tariff funding within their first year of arriving so we can give them the best possible start.

Community Sponsorship Programmes

- 7.15 In 2015 the Home Office introduced a Community Sponsorship 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.
- 7.16 Guildford has two community sponsorship groups, Resettle@Guildford and Camino who both provide housing for one refugee family each alongside the wider support needed. The council's involvement is to support the groups with their safeguarding practices and to inspect the property to ensure it is compliant and safe for occupation.
- 7.17 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.

The Homes For Ukraine Scheme

- 7.18 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.
- 7.19 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 owned by the Host for a minimum of six months.

- 7.20 All Hosts receive a monthly thank you payment to contribute towards costs and on arrival the Guests are given a one-off welcome payment via a pre- payment card to help with start-up costs.
- 7.21 The council coordinates this through our Community, Regulatory 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 education, healthcare and employment.
 - Advice and support with housing options once Guest/Host arrangement ends.
- 7.22 Initially, £10,500 was given to Surrey County Council and Guildford council at a 50/50 split for each person who arrives. The money received by Surrey County Council dropped to £5,900 from January 2023. This money is now divided up between all district and boroughs within Surrey based on the number of guests arriving.
- 7.23 For the last financial year and for this financial year, Guildford received £375,000. This money provided is to help with the variety of resettlement support needed. Internally, the money is used to cover any staffing costs associated with administering the scheme and supporting Ukrainians to move into private rented accommodation. Alongside supporting community events, wellbeing, safeguarding and local organisations and charities who are supporting refugees.
- 7.24 Guildford under the Homes for Ukraine scheme has to date.

74 Host families

156 Guests 33 of which are children.

- 7.25 The Homes for Ukraine scheme is now in its second year. Fortunately, we have overcome many of the challenges we faced in the initial stages of this scheme. The scheme is fully staffed, and we have dedicated officers working solely on the scheme whereas in the first year, we were relying on pulling resources from other teams in order to fulfil our obligations.
- 7.26 There has become an increased awareness of what our role is as a local authority within this scheme, and we have been able to positively build relationships with Guests, Hosts and partnership agencies.
- 7.27 The council is offering advice and financial support to any of the Guests who require help with securing more permanent accommodation, but as with all our refugee support schemes, we cannot offer immediate social housing.
- 7.28 Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme are encouraged to explore a variety of options that include.
- Extending their arrangement with their Host
 - Looking for a Host re-match
 - Searching for private rent
 - Joining the Housing Register (if eligible)
- 7.29 We have supported many individuals and families to move into private rented accommodation, but it continues to be a challenging situation for some people, particularly those who have additional vulnerabilities due to their age, health needs or lack of employment. Finding affordable private accommodation is not easy in Guildford. There is a significant lack of private housing available at an affordable rent and many Guests find themselves in difficulty with the benefit gap and the need for a guarantor.
- 7.30 As a council we are offering financial assistance of one month's rent in advance and a deposit for those who find accommodation. In

some circumstances, the council is also assisting financially with a person's shortfall in rent for up to one year. This is fully funded by the government's tariff funding.

- 7.31 Guildford has had 205 households leave their Hosting environment under the Homes For Ukraine scheme. 47% of Guests moved into private accommodation and 24% have returned to Ukraine.
- 7.32 On average, we are seeing 10 new arrivals per month. Appetite to become a sponsor and Host is dwindling and most sponsors do not wish to continue with their sponsorship after a Guest has left. Some are requesting a break and after that they may consider taking another individual or family to live with them.
- 7.33 We continue to see an impact on the mental health of both Hosts and Guests within the scheme and this cannot be underestimated. Currently, we are in conversation with a Ukrainian speaking psychologist to deliver some one-to-one sessions with Guests and Hosts that may be struggling.
- 7.34 As part of our work to support the Ukrainian displaced community, we have worked in collaboration with Guildford Baptist Church, Mission Ukraine and a whole team of volunteers to set up a Ukrainian hub which takes place every Friday morning. This provides a space for Ukrainians to meet and to receive advice and support. We have also supported numerous community events and family days out.
- 7.35 In the coming quarter, our aim is to further expand our offer to the Ukrainian community through setting up a fund (from the government tariff) for those who are or who have been part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme to apply for financial assistance to help towards resettlement. The fund will support requests for training courses, driving lessons and household furniture and appliance requests.

7.36 We are also in the preliminary stages of communicating with St Marys Ukrainian School who are looking to set up a Saturday school in Guildford. We are keen to offer our support.

8 Case Studies and reflections

8.1 The impact of our support to refugees that come to resettle in Guildford is powerful.

because we collaborate with the community, refugees and partnership agencies to help change lives for the better in exceedingly difficult and tragic circumstances.

8.2 The provision of a Ukrainian hub in Guildford has been hugely successful and welcomed by the Ukrainian community, this was established in April 2022 along with Guildford Baptist Church and Mission Ukraine – this hub runs every Friday morning and is a safe space for Ukrainians to meet with free refreshments, access to food, English classes, clothing and toys.

A representative from Guildford’s resettlement team and housing officer attends weekly to Offer advice and support. A Host of volunteers also help to keep the hub running.

8.3 Volunteers also support with delivering food bank parcels, Hosting events, family days out, finding new Hosts and sourcing and delivering needed furniture items.

8.4 A group chat on Telegram has been established with around 400 members, this allows us easily to share information and updates. It also provides an easy way for Ukrainians to ask us queries which we can respond to quickly.

8.5 Recently, we have supported a bus trip to Brighton for Ukrainians and a family picnic day event. Feedback from such events is always positive and allows families and those who are isolated to come together.

8.6 Guildford supported a Ukrainian Saturday School which ran from The HIVE. The school helped children to keep up with the Ukrainian school curriculum but also allowed families to make positive connections with one another.

8.7 As a council, alongside our volunteers and partners, we have supported a huge number of Ukrainians to access benefits and employment. Almost all adult Ukrainians under the scheme living in Guildford are in some form of employment.

Case Study Homes For Ukraine

'N was under pressure as she had to leave her Hosts by a certain date and her seasonal job at the local garden centre did not allow her to live independently. Her CV was very weak and generic saying that she is willing to take any job. As she had a medical background from Ukraine, we discussed possible full-time jobs she could take. We agreed that she could try care homes and what changes should be made to her CV to reflect her relevant skills. I shared the contact details of a local employer with her and in 2 weeks she had a job. The housing team were able to offer her a flat in the area and now N* can provide for her family and afford living in private rented accommodation.'*

Case Study Homes For Ukraine

'The sponsor took a middle-aged couple to rural Scotland and tried to make them work from week 1 (they did not speak any English) and then just decided to bring them to the local authority in Scotland and leave them there. We quickly arranged their repatriation to Guildford and provided them a room in a B&B, some money and food for them and their cat. Both of them had certain health issues and this first month in the UK turned out to be really stressful for them. They did not have even their bank accounts or benefits set up, so we did everything from scratch. They received a warm welcome at the Hub, and everyone was willing to help. They were lucky to be offered a flat from our homelessness team pretty quickly. Together with our lovely volunteers we fully furnished it and supplied with the essential household items donated by the community. They have been studying

English and receiving appropriate healthcare so far. O has been training to start a job. They have made friends in the community and seem happy.'*

Case Study ARAP (Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Programme)

Family of 9 (7 children) arrived at Guildford in February 2024. None of which spoke particularly good English.

'When we had confirmation of their arrival, we decided to call them and find out more directly from them about their needs and wants. This was a challenge considering the lack of English the best English-speaking member, Homa, understood only part of what we were saying. We got one thing right – that they needed a crib for the youngest one.

We made a list of the most essential household items and groceries we brought to the house before their arrival. Together with some other colleagues from our family support team, we made the beds and made the house look habitable. On day 1 we had a meal together because it was their way to say thank you. The next day we started talking about the more serious issues – their benefits, their healthcare needs, education and their integration into the community. GP, nursery, school and college applications were the priority along with explaining how things work in this country.

What has worked best so far:

- *Visiting the Ukraine Hub where they could practice some English and contact some refugees speaking Urdu or other languages they could partially understand. They also appreciated free refreshments, food and clothes stalls.*
- *Contacting volunteers and Big Leaf, a charity running English classes and various activities for young refugees. The young members of the family really like going there.*
- *Private English lessons for the parents – fathers English is rapidly improving.*
- *Younger children are happy in their schools and nursery, and one of the children got into the school newspaper for his successful performance in the school cricket team.*
- *Overall, they appear happy. They have recently visited their relatives who live in the north of England. They are enjoying life here in the UK.*

- *It is a long way to go in terms of getting into employment for the parents. At the same time, we contacted Voluntary Action in order to facilitate the older children to try voluntary jobs, and one of them is now expecting training to start a paid job in care.'*

9 Key Risks

- 9.1 Refugee support within the borough is an extremely sensitive issue, particularly with the civil unrest that we have seen nationally in recent weeks. Our teams work tirelessly to ensure all our residents are treated with humanity and dignity often in the face of local tensions around perceived favouritism of refugees when accessing housing and jobs and perceived illegal entry to the UK.
- 9.2 The team have supported the Police with preventative measures around the civil unrest to ensure our refugee families are safe.
- 9.3 The funding provided under the refugee schemes helps the provision we offer remain sustainable. Our budget for all schemes is healthy. However, we do foresee that our ARAP families and Homes for Ukraine Guests will find it increasingly harder to find affordable private rent accommodation. We may need to increase our financial offer to support these individuals from our government tariff.

10 Financial Implications

Funding has been provided for the schemes by central government. There is an allocation per family as mentioned above. Since the arrival of our ARAP families into Guildford and as the Homes for Ukraine scheme has become more established, there is recognition that the funding awarded is able to cover the associated costs that the council incur.

11 Legal Implications

- 11.1 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.

- 11.2 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.

12 Human Resource Implications

- 12.1 We have resourced the 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 Community, Regulatory and Housing teams. However, there is an element of officer time and resource absorbed by the council within business as usual.
- 12.2 Since Dec 2023, Guildford and Waverley Borough Council have collaborated through having one single team leader for both resettlement teams. This has helped to share resources amongst the two teams and provide consistency to what support and advice is being offered across both boroughs.

13 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 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.
- 13.2 Any work with refugees would require consideration of protected characteristics of the individuals involved, and we are with the Equality Act 2010.
- 13.3 Surrey County Council as part of the process 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.

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

14 Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

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

15 Conclusion

15.1 The council offers significant support to refugees within our communities through the

- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Community Sponsorship Programme
- Homes For Ukraine Scheme

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

16 Consideration of Overview and Scrutiny

The committee is asked to provide any comments and recommendations about the borough's response to refugees.

17 Background Papers

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/afghan-relocation-and-assistance-policy)

['Homes for Ukraine' scheme launches - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-launches)

[Apply for community sponsorship - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/apply-for-community-sponsorship)

[Supporting Ukraine - Guildford Borough Council](#)

Finance	NA since last report	
Legal & Governance	NA since last report	
Human Resources	NA since last report	
Equalities	NA since last report	
Strategic Director	Julian Higson	August 2024