

APPENDIX B – UKRAINE RESPONSE
REPORT OF THE CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
TASK AND FINISH GROUP
FULL EVIDENCE PACK

1. BACKGROUND

Context

- 1.1. In March 2022, at the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Birmingham City Council stood up an emergency response which quickly enabled a cross-service response to the Ukraine crisis. This meant that external stakeholders such as Birmingham's Voluntary Service Centre (BVSC) and core partners such as the police and local National Health Service were engaged.
- 1.2. The initial focus of this work was the reception, housing and treatment of a group of medical evacuees comprising Ukrainian child cancer patients and their families. Within a month, the emergency powers were stood down and governance arrangements were stood up in the Council. This comprised of a cross-service senior governance group supported by a small number of working groups to develop and lead different areas of work.
- 1.3. Following the emergency response, BVSC wanted to continue to support the Council and convened an engagement group – Engage for Ukraine – which was an open invitation to community organisations and partners within the city to discuss what was happening on the ground and emerging issues.
- 1.4. There were three meetings held over three months (March, April and June 2022) and this flagged a range of issues from establishing communication channels, signposting services, lack of awareness and support to the family visa scheme. Whilst this forum was a useful way of engaging the community organisations and understanding issues, there was not a supporting framework or set of resources that could drive through any actions that arose. Birmingham's Voluntary Service Centre were a helpful and trusted convenor; however, they were not formally contracted to deliver on the Ukraine Response.
- 1.5. Reflecting on the range of partners at the meetings and the issues being surfaced, there could have been greater focus on how this platform could have been more formally constituted and purposed to stand over and support in designing the response and implementing actions. A smaller, sharper focused Strategic Group with some underpinning financial resources would potentially have been stronger in cutting through the range of issues and would have enabled partners to support the resolution of issues. This lesson has been learned in the Cost-of-Living programme, where the Strategic Response Group which directs resource includes formal membership by Birmingham's Voluntary Service Centre and the NHS Integrated Care Partnership.

- 1.6. This would have allowed a clearer distinction between information sharing with partners, and more action-focused partnership work. Again, this lesson has been learned in the Cost-of-Living programme, where the Strategic Response Group is supplemented by a wider partnership group whose focus is information sharing.
- 1.7. Building on this learning, towards the end of 2022 the Ukraine Response programme has constructed a more agile engagement approach that is drawing on a stakeholder community organisation group, comprised of key partner organisations that have been grant funded by the Council, to agree priorities and support the design of new developments.
- 1.8. There is a monthly meeting of the group which is now being supported by smaller task and finish groups. We currently have a task and finish group on housing move on support, which has driven the design and delivery of the Council's move on fund package; and a recent group on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), which is overseeing the commissioning of increased capacity for English language training – which has been identified as a priority by both the stakeholder group and hosts.

Critique

- 1.9. The information and evidence gathered indicates:
- 1.10. The Council clearly intended to engage with local community groups on the Ukraine Response and set up an initial forum, 'Engage for Ukraine' in April 2022. However, at this point there was already a lot of work being done by local community groups so the Council's response would have benefited from earlier engagement which may have helped to further shape the understanding of what was needed and how these requirements could be best met.
- 1.11. Ukrainian arrivals were being quickly supported by a range of large and small community groups and organisations, some of which were un-constituted. Whilst Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) was providing a means to engage with the sector, the Council should not have relied on this to such an extent. Not all groups would have been represented through this forum, and particularly with the Ukrainian response where there were also individuals working to provide support. This is not a criticism of BVSC, but it highlights the importance of the Council engaging directly with residents and community organisations.
- 1.12. In some parts of the Council there are good links to the voluntary and community sector. There needs to be a clearer or more established process which enables officers to understand how they can tap into these existing arrangements. The Council should also consider how it utilises the role of Councillors in identifying and involving local assets (individuals, groups, and organisations). Since the start of the Ukraine crisis the Council has established a Public Participation Team, which now provides significantly increased

capacity for such engagement and supports the much better level of current engagement with hosts and guests.

Recommendations

- i. The Council should have invested more time early in the programme in discovering and pro-actively engaging with community and voluntary sector groups and citizens. Whilst Birmingham Voluntary Service Council was involved in some of this outreach work, the Council should not solely outsource community engagement work of this kind.
- ii. The Council should consider, where appropriate, the role of Councillors in helping to proactively identify and engage with local community groups that may already be delivering or supporting the given area.
- iii. The Council should have more robustly considered how it utilised its learning from the Covid 19 pandemic response. Whilst some of the emergency structures were used early on in the Ukraine response, there was not sufficient learning from the Covid work in terms of community and partner engagement.
- iv. The convening role of Council was underestimated

2. Engagement with PwC & the Refugee Resettlement Solution (database)

Context:

- 2.1. In March 2022, PwC approached a number of local authority Chief Executives to offer six weeks pro bono work to support the Ukraine Response. This was an offer as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility given the scale and significance of the Ukraine crisis.
- 2.2. PwC met with Birmingham City Council's senior leadership team and discussed the offer of support, which they recognised could be flexible given the dynamic and unprecedented situation unfolding. They offered support in the following areas:
 - **Programme management and coordination:** Support in the design and mobilisation of the programme governance and programme structure
 - **Service Design:** Support in the definition of services to be designed, resourced, and mobilised to commence services to refugees.
 - **Business intelligence:** Support to design insight-led reporting which may include an approach to data capture and data management
- 2.3. After an initial discussion with a subset of the senior leadership team, (Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships and Director of Housing) it was agreed that the greatest area of benefit based on the capacity and capability of the Council would be support in looking at how information is being captured about those arriving and those supporting Ukrainian guests. PwC had supported the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in their recovery from the Grenfell

Tower disaster, and a key learning from the work was the careful management of data around the affected families.

- 2.4. There was an acute awareness that the Homes for Ukraine approach would have an impact on housing, and one of the key priorities would be avoiding homelessness presentations by Ukrainian guests. Therefore, knowing where Ukrainian guests were in the city and the stage they were at in their hosting arrangement would be key to anticipating and planning a more sustainable response, if the War did not abate quickly. PwC joined a meeting of the Ukrainian Strategic Response Group to outline initial plans which was endorsed by the group. They set out a six-week project plan with no expectation of paid for work following the conclusion of the pro bono phase.
- 2.5. Within the 6-week pro bono engagement, an initial online tool was developed to support the Council in managing the administration of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The tool was also used to form the basis of reporting to the Strategic Response Group, Corporate Leadership Team, and central government – the data is used to complete the quarterly reports needed for funding. The tool quickly provided a picture of the growing scale of the crisis and the areas of the city most affected. Alongside reporting, the tool provided a unique insight into needs, capabilities, and operating requirements. There was a clearer grip on when Ukraine arrivals were expected in the City, the suitability and onboarding of hosts and ensuring the arrivals early needs were being met through provision of cash and a phone (where relevant).
- 2.6. As the tool developed, it became increasingly important in capturing data and managing the response to arrivals. Services became engaged and were wanting to utilise this to help plan their response, for example the Education and Skills service wanted to understand where children were arriving so they could look at school capacity to support hosts/arrivals with school admissions. There were initial challenges being articulated by hosts about difficulties in getting children into school. Through engagement with PwC, the service was able to assuage fears because the evidence showed that there was sufficient capacity within schools, albeit not the closest ones to the host in all cases but were in reasonable distance. The benefit of the tool was becoming more apparent, and the Council's Strategic Group decided that it would be beneficial to approach PwC about whether they could build on this initial pro bono work for the following reasons:
 - BCC's Ukraine response was at a critical moment of transition, with Refugee Action being onboarded and taking on responsibility for delivery of sensitive services (including safety checks on refugee sponsors and support to hosting arrangements). Without access to data, the Council would be reliant on the provider's reporting capability which would create a high risk to the effective management of the contract and the service provided to families. It was determined the roll out of the tool would enable the Council to maintain oversight of the process and still have access to data that services could use to plan their response. The provider would also benefit from the automation that had been built in (i.e., generating

automatic emails) so would be able to focus resources more quickly onto the operation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

- The Ukraine response at the time was still spread across a range of services within the Council with checks still being maintained whilst being transitioned to Refugee Action. The tool enabled one central place for data to be stored, managed, and accessed. The tool was not yet embedded across all the relevant services and therefore to fully utilise the benefits of the pro bono work and help reduce the admin resource/costs of managing the Ukraine response, building on these requirements was key.
- The additional functionality that Phase 2 work would provide was the technical capability to refer new arrivals to Refugee Action and track progress of checks; provide enhancements to the 'guest' area of the tool so that access to services such as benefits, ESOL etc could be tracked alongside new features such as the free bus travel; automate sponsor payments; and finally develop additional reports that utilised the new features/information. Phase 2 also supported the training and technical roll out to Refugee Action, with the provision of support to fix any initial technical issues

2.7. The decision to undertake a direct award to PwC was made on the basis that:

- PwC had built up a unique cross-service understanding of the requirements for the Council's approach to the Ukraine response, particularly for the administration of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, which is subject to frequent changes and also carries safeguarding risks that need to be closely monitored.
- The policy for the Ukraine resettlement was at that time constantly evolving and PwC had the ability to flex quickly and update features that enabled the tool to remain fit for purpose. Any other provider would have required a period of time to build knowledge and agility. Key deadlines were approaching such as the end of the six-month minimum commitment by Homes for Ukraine hosts - after which alternative housing arrangements will be needed for Ukrainian guests.

2.8. Without the roll out and transition phase, there would not have been a single tool for maintaining the response. Given the services involved it would have meant greater administration in accurately capturing and sharing data.¹

2.9. The appropriate waiver was signed off by procurement, the s151 officer and Lead Member for Finance in line with the Council's constitution and financial procedures.

2.10. At the initial stage of trying to maintain and manage the data, a SharePoint system was developed within the Contact Centre. However, it became clear that given the scale and the amount of data and functionality required, this would begin to struggle.

¹ BCC now has the capacity to do this work internally through the Insight and Partnership team, who have responsibility for the recently launched Birmingham City Observatory

- 2.11. The timeline to tender and procure would have significantly slowed down the development of any tool as this was likely to have taken an average of 12 weeks to run a competitive tender and that the Council would not be able to respond as swiftly to emerging and changing policy developments, which would have rendered the existing tool 'not fit for purpose' in a short period of time.

Critique

- 2.12. The information and evidence gathered indicates:
- 2.13. There was no expectation the pro bono work for PwC would lead to a new contract. Officers led the discussions with PwC for subsequent work after seeing the benefits of the system that had been developed.
- 2.14. In any scenario where the Council wants to offer a contract to a supplier after a period of pro bono work, it should consider whether the work is needed and whether this can be provided by someone else. In this case, whilst this formed part of the Council's considerations, the pace at which the Ukraine response was moving and the length of time it would have taken to go through a procurement process would have meant significant delays.
- 2.15. The justification for awarding PwC the contract is clear although concerns have been raised around the necessity of the database contracted, and there was some rigour attached to the consideration of this through the contract waiver procedure².
- 2.16. However, unlike the case of Cabinet decisions, the rationale for these decisions ultimately are not easily understood by the public and it may help the Council going forward if this is more transparent so everyone can see why a decision has been made.
- 2.17. The Council now has much greater capability to develop dashboards and data management systems, which should allow greater internal development of similar systems in future rather than more expensive outsourcing.
- 2.18. During the award of the contract to PwC, the delivery landscape of the Ukraine response was changing, with the introduction of Refugee Action as the Council's provider. Whilst the Council wanted to confer the benefits of the system onto Refugee Action, this added additional administrative pressures on an organisation trying to mobilise in a fast-paced environment.

Recommendations

- v. It should always be clear that any pro-bono work for the council is done with no expectation of future paid work; pro-bono work should always meet clearly identified needs; and the council should always consider any advantage

² The Contract Waiver is defined in the Council's Constitution and sets out the procedure to be undertaken to consider whether a Waiver is granted to set aside a requirement or requirements as set out in the procurement rules.

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50068/how_the_council_works/283/the_city_council_s_constitution

conferred on a partner by carrying out such work in order to avoid unfairness. Pro-bono work should not normally lead to single-tender contracts with the provider.

- vi. There needs to be greater transparency of the 'waiver' process so where decisions are taken to go outside the process, everyone understands why such decisions have been made.
- vii. When the council develops data systems, it should consider inter-operability with its key providers and partners and seek to avoid creating additional work or costs for them, with a special awareness of data protection requirements.

3. Award of Refugee Action Contract

Context

- 3.1. While a crisis-led response was rapidly mobilised using existing resources within the council to conduct the relevant checks and settle guests in, this was unsustainable given that this relied on staff carrying out this work in addition to their full-time roles.
- 3.2. On the 26 April 2022 Cabinet were asked to approve a proposal to undertake a single tender negotiation for Refugee Action to deliver resettlement support for sponsors and Ukrainian guests on the basis that "insofar as is strictly necessary where, for reasons of extreme urgency brought about by events unforeseeable by the contracting authority, the time limits for the open or restricted procedures or competitive procedures with negotiation cannot be complied with". These grounds are covered in Regulation 32 of the Procurement and Contract Regulations 2015.
- 3.3. Due to the expedience and grounds set out in the Regulations, Refugee Action was selected based on them being a current and trusted provider of refugee resettlement support in the city, as well as their performance under previous and current commissioned services. Officers had had no concerns with the delivery or performance management of other contracts commissioned with Refugee Action or its sub-contractors. Whilst the Council were aware of a small number of community organisations beginning to deliver support to Ukrainian arrivals, there were not any suitable framework arrangements that existed, at that time, that would enable a contract award to these organisations instead of or alongside Refugee Action.
- 3.4. Cabinet delegated award of contract to the Director of Adult Social Care, Interim Director of Procurement, Director of Council Management and the interim city Solicitor and monitoring officer.
- 3.5. The BCC Single Contractor Negotiation Guidance at that time stated that approvals for using SCN can be granted where *'There is an unforeseen priority i.e. a situation where there is an overwhelming and immovable requirement to complete an item of work, such requirement could not have been foreseen*

within sufficient time to have allowed a competitive procurement, and the adverse consequences of delaying the completion of such work significantly outweigh the consequences of not securing effective competition’.

3.6. Key considerations whilst awarding the contract to Refugee Action were as follows:

- **QUALITY**: Contract management information previously has always been above satisfactory, demonstrating the organisations’ ability and capacity. Quality on previous contracts was measured through case studies supplied by the provider as feedback from those resettled.
- **EXPERIENCE**: The provider has experience of delivering services directly to people arriving in crisis and had provided on the ground humanitarian support during the Afghan crisis (at airports, hotels). It was felt the provider could utilise their considerable experience and learning from delivering other refugee resettlement programmes in Birmingham, to the benefit of guests arriving from Ukraine. The provider also had experience of supporting Ukraine medical evacuees and were able to step in to provide assistance utilising their existing processes for the broader response i.e., payment cards.
- **MODEL OF DELIVERY**: There was a recognition that the provider would not be able to deliver the contract entirely therefore the Commissioners identified the key deliverables within the service specification that would require specialist expertise and that should be sub-contracted. This included support to hosts as well as specialist welfare/benefits/ immigration support.
- **SOCIAL VALUE**: Refugee Action workforce model promotes the employment and development of diverse staff with direct experience of the asylum, humanitarian protection and refugee’s processes. We understood their subcontracting model would ensure local providers would benefit from increased investment and would provide a more diverse response.

3.7. Officers recognised and acknowledged in the Cabinet report (April 2022) that a reactive approach to providing services for refugees is not always in the interests of best value for money. Therefore, the Council has sought to put a Flexible Contracting Agreement (FCA) in place for support and integration services for refugees and sanctuary seekers who arrive in Birmingham through Government initiatives and polices, and who are entitled to local authority support. The FCA provides price transparency and an option for mini competitions in the future.

Critique

3.8. The information and evidence gathered indicates:

3.9. Due to the urgency of the crisis, the Council awarded a single contract to Refugee Action for a large and novel resettlement programme. Acknowledging the constraints of procurement options at that time, officers included a requirement for Refugee Action to subcontract elements of provision to increase flexibility and capacity to deliver at the pace and scale required.

- 3.10. It is recognised that the Council were constrained during this period by the need to respond quickly to have a service in place for the volume of arrivals into the city which limited procurement options available to commissioners. This necessitated the council having to work with an existing contracted provider.
- 3.11. However, given the unique and unprecedented nature of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the evolving policy and delivery landscape, the structure and the duration of the contract offered limited flexibility for the Council to respond in an agile way. It is understood that the duration of the contract award was in line with other refugee resettlement contracts to ensure equity to all those in receipt of support because it ensures the service is in place for at least 12 months after the last anticipated arrival.
- 3.12. The lessons of previous best practice and also the need to respond quickly to an emerging situation needs to be considered up front. Where the Council is entering into a single contract negotiation, there should be greater detail provided in the risk management section of the Cabinet report, so it is clear what the risks are, how these are being mitigated and what the trade-off of any decisions are. The Council has already reflected some of this learning into its work and has developed more flexible contracting arrangements for refugee resettlement and integration. This is a positive step in ensuring that the Council can be more agile and diverse in its approach to commissioning in a similar crisis. The Council should consider this more flexible approach more widely so this can apply across all services.

Recommendations

- viii. In future programmes or situations of this kind, the council should consider earlier diversification of its supply of capacity, thinking widely and flexibly across the range of partners and providers available.
- ix. Where possible, the council should develop a diverse ecosystem of 'pre vetted' providers that it can draw on quickly and flexibly, to avoid undue reliance on a single provider or the delays required by a full tendering process.
- x. Where Cabinet is presented with a single contract negotiation decision, particular care needs to be given to the assessment of risk, so this can help Cabinet to assess and advise on the appropriate mitigating actions that may need to be put in place to mitigate and/or reduce the risks.
- xi. Publishing a regular list of decisions taken under delegated and single award and officer name to encourage accountability and transparency.

4. Delivery of support - Refugee Action performance

Context

- 4.1. The specification sets out 41 key performance indicators across 10 different themes that range from the timeliness of administering processes, as well as the provision of guest and sponsor support. Performance was monitored

regularly during the mobilisation stage (June – Sept 2022) with weekly meetings between the commissioners and provider.

- 4.2. There was an initial mobilisation plan developed by the Council, which set clear expectations around the timeline and speed of deployment of the contract. The plan accounted for the transition of work from different areas of the Council to Refugee Action. Any delays to the plan meant that Council staff who had been managing the early parts of the programme on an interim basis would have to maintain this for longer in addition to their business-as-usual roles. The plan was also subject to government guidance, which was still emerging and being issued, necessitating ongoing revisions to the service specification, key performance indicators and delivery plans.
- 4.3. The mobilisation phase was from 1st June 2022 - 31 Aug 2022 and formed part of quarter one delivery.
- 4.4. The time period of the mobilisation plan set out the initial expectations and timeline for deployment of different parts of the contract. As the mobilisation period got underway, the plan became more agile to reflect the various changes to central government guidance and the delays to mobilising particular areas. Delivery expectations were adjusted throughout the period and the completion date column sets out the final date that the transition/mobilisation was achieved. Whilst the expectations were communicated, these were not met and led to timelines extended and revised. The protracted mobilisation resulted in delays to the support to guests and hosts.

Time period	Refugee Action activity		BCC activity	Completion date:
Phase 1: w/c 23 rd May	Arrange for RA dedicated administrator to be trained on Homes for Ukraine SharePoint site and to have full access to the site		<p>Organise training for Refugee Action Administrator with BCC Customer Services Team (CST) on using the whole HfU system including how to initiate DBC & CASS checks, check Guest arrival</p> <p>Organise follow on sessions with members of Refugee & Migration Team including start to end process of</p>	June 2022

			issuing pre-payment cards	
Phase 1: w/c 30 th May 2022 - Testing week/ dry run for data access	RA Administrator to take on full responsibility of issuing pre-payment cards from start to end of process within 10 days max of confirmation of arrival – To be reviewed at a later stage		BCC Refugee Migration Team (RMT) and Customer Services Team (CST) to be available for support if needed. Key BCC contacts to be provided to Ref Action	End of May 2022
	RA to fully access system and test ability to use current email templates to test communications with Guests/Sponsors		BCC CST to work with Ref Action Administrator to ensure support and full handover of all current processes	End of June 2022
	RA Activity: Existing Guests/sponsors	RA Activity: New Guests/Sponsors		
Phase 2: Week 1 w/c 6 th June 2022 – contract start date	Conduct post arrival well-being check to prioritise for households that have already arrived in order of need/vulnerability: -Unaccompanied children - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under		BCC has not been doing post-arrival well-being checks SharePoint to be enabled to record five checks as requested by DLUHC, if not already existing	August 2022
	Ensure Sponsor DBS checks are in progress and verify results	Initiate Sponsor DBS checks	CST to switch off booking DBS checks for new Guests from 5 th June 2022	July 2022
	Ensure Sponsor CASS referral	Initiate CASS referral checks	CST to switch off booking CASS	This is part of the final tasks

	information has been received and verify outcomes		referrals and to ensure SharePoint is adapted so that Ref Action can record outcomes of checks (if not already existing) BCC to provide CASS contacts to Ref Action for queries/pathway clarification.	that will be handed over to RA together with data cleansing tasks. 1 st proposed draft on these to be shared with BCC beginning of November 2022 and full takeover 1 st April 2023.
Phase 2: Week 2 w/c 13 th June 2022	Continue post arrival well-being check for households that have already arrived: Unaccompanied children - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under	To include new guests arriving with Unaccompanied children - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under	BCC has not been doing post-arrival well-being visits	August 2022
		Conduct pre-arrival accommodation checks	CST to switch off accommodation checks on 12 th June 2022	July 2022
	Commence making calls to other non-vulnerable guest families to check in on their current welfare benefits and plan to deliver support around this if needed			July 2022
Phase 2: Week 3 w/c 20 th June 2022	Continue post arrival well-being check for households that	To include new guests arriving with Unaccompanied children		August 2022

	<p>have already arrived: Unaccompanied children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under 		
		Initiate CASS referrals for new Sponsors	CST to switch off making CASS referrals for new Sponsors on 19 th June 2022	August 2022
	Spring Housing / RMC to commence making contact with hosts where the guests are deemed 'vulnerable', providing access to resources and advising steps for each host to take to be introduced to RMC support	Provide Sponsor Packs		End of July 2022
	Receive handover and training from BCC on rematching, where Sponsor/Guest relationship has failed, or accommodation has been deemed unsuitable		<p>CST to provide training on rematching</p> <p>CST/GR4 Officer to ensure Rematching/EOI list info off Foundry system is provided</p>	Started in September 2022 and full handover to RA, by 14 th October 2022.
Phase 2: Week 4 w/c 27 th June 2022	<p>Continue post arrival well-being check for households that have already arrived:</p> <p>Unaccompanied children</p>	<p>To include new guests arriving with</p> <p>Unaccompanied children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest identified as having special needs 		September 2022

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest identified as having special needs - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sponsor/Guest identified as 'of concern' by BCC -Guests with children 11 or under 		
	Continue making calls to other non-vulnerable guest families to check in on their current welfare benefits and plan to deliver support around this if needed			August 2022
	Initiate rematching activity			17 th October 2022
Phase 3: Week 5 w/c 4 th July 2022	Provider to take over delivery of scheme as specified by BCC			1 st April 2023
	Spring Housing Advice Service to commence			Beginning of August 2022
August 2022	Conduct post arrival well-being checks for all remaining households			Mid October 2022
Phase 4 October 2022	Provide emergency assistance in case of Sponsor/Guest relationship breakdown utilising the rematching process, provision of housing options and advice and utilising BCC Housing Solutions and Support	All providing information regarding concerns of breakdown. Re-matching being done by BCC. re-matching process flow chart to be developed. Spring providing housing and host checks. RA supporting move to re-match.		Started in September 2022 and full handover to RA, by 14 th October 2022.
Final Phase	Data cleansing and CASS referrals.			This is part of the final tasks that will be handed over to RA together with data

				cleansing tasks. 1st proposed draft on these to be shared with BCC beginning of November 2022 and full takeover 1st April 2023.
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- 4.5. From October 2022 monthly monitoring were in place and key performance indicator monitoring for quarters one and two in December 2022. Where concerns / issues are identified through monitoring of performance and/or raised by stakeholders, the issue is looked into by the commissioning team and, where relevant, actions are agreed and reported against in weekly/monthly meetings. In reporting their performance, Refugee Action set out the targets that have been met which are directly attributed to their delivery. The key themes and indicators are set out in the table below alongside a current assessment of performance.

KPI theme	Indicators	Assessment (Q2)
Data management:	3 indicators (GDPR, RRS tool updates, Verification)	<i>Good / Moderate performance against target.</i>
Validation Checks:	4 indicators: (in-person checks, pre-arrival checks, DBS, Multi-agency panels)	<i>Varied performance against KPIs related to backlog of arrivals inherited in Q1.</i>
Sponsor Support:	3 indicators: (Pre guest arrival / ongoing, sponsor information pack, platform for networking)	<i>Improved performance from Q2 against target. Stakeholder Concerns over quality and responsiveness of support provision</i>
Guest Support:	2 indicators: (Post arrival in person Wellbeing visit within 4 weeks of arrival, monthly contact and follow up visits)	<i>Moderate-Good performance against target. Mitigation due to backlog inherited and prioritisation of vulnerable groups. Concerns over quality of support.</i>
Financial:	6 indicators: initial /discretionary payment, benefit claims, BRP card, Sim card /phone	<i>Good performance across indicators. Mitigation for delays in benefits assessment in q1 due to volume of referrals. Took on additional responsibility for issuing of 3-</i>

		<i>month bus passes to new arrivals.</i>
Wellbeing Referrals:	7 indicators: local orientation, GP and health services safeguarding information, immigration advice and specialist services, emergency clothing/food	<i>Reasonable performance indicated by provider but unable to provide data across several indicators. Caseworkers refer as appropriate to relevant services.</i>
Education /employability:	4 indicators: Schools' admissions, Referrals to ESOL + Employment support, Nino applications	<i>Improved performance across 3 indicators from Q2.</i>
Housing:	3 indicators: Emergency assistance, 1/4ly Housing advice and options, information on move-on housing / benefits / tenancy support etc.	<i>Good performance overall against target. Concerns from stakeholders about quality of housing advice and support.</i>
Re-Matching:	6 indicators from Q2: Re-matching and re-checks on sponsors / accommodation and wellbeing visits in new accommodation, school places.	<i>Good Performance against targets for rematching.</i>
Integration:	3 indicators: Referrals to vol sector, events, and activities; referral to named providers and informing the grants programme.	<i>Self-assessed Performance from Q2 for all 3 indicators. Stakeholder concerns over timeliness / follow up of referrals.</i>

Contract value, Tariff and Payments:

- 4.6. The contract with Refugee Action sets out the maximum value they **could** receive for providing services for up to 1,000 guests (and their hosts) that arrive. It is based on a per person tariff, paid in arrears and in agreed stages.
- 4.7. The clauses within the standard contract stipulate that the contract value may be subject to significant reductions in available funds over the contract term which would include reductions in available grant funding, but that any such changes will be subject to agreement in accordance with relevant clauses. The council's contract with Refugee Action contains standard clauses in relation to the performance and financial mechanisms for recovery of sums, managing defaults, termination, and cancellation of the contract.
- 4.8. The tariff and staged payment mechanisms agreed in the payment schedule reflect the upfront investment (workforce, training, sub-contracting, infrastructure, equipment etc) the provider has been required to establish to deliver the service model. It is reflective of the variation in and complexity of

needs that guests and hosts may present with, over the duration of the contracted period, and the corresponding fluctuations in level of support that is required from the service for a period of no less than 12 months after a guest's arrival.

- 4.9. The tariff payable by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had been modelled on the resource allocation for year one of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and the year one of the Afghan resettlement scheme. The guidance issued by DLUHC at that time identified the support required for Ukraine guests that was comparable to the year one resettlement and co-ordination services of existing schemes. The guidance issued by DLUHC did not include a requirement (or funding) for local authorities to provide accommodation (as in other schemes) but did include a novel element, to provide host support. Commissioners assessed these differences when developing the service specification and to inform the contract type and tariff to be agreed with the provider.
- 4.10. The unit cost for delivery of the service (tariff) agreed was considered appropriate to reflect the complexity of the resettlement and novel elements of the service, as well as being comparable to existing schemes.
- 4.11. The tariff payable from Birmingham City Council to Refugee Action for quarter one was reduced to reflect the delays in the planned mobilisation period.
- 4.12. Prior to their contract being in place, Refugee Action supported the council to issue emergency financial payments to medical evacuees and homes for Ukraine guests that arrived between March and June 2022 at £200 per person. This was due to their established arrangements for issuing refugee resettlement funding in crisis.
- 4.13. Refugee Action do not receive funding in advance of guest arrival. A partial payment is released for each arrival, upon completion of required checks (stipulated by DLUHC) within specified timeframes. Where a guest arrives to Birmingham and is then re-hosted into another local authority – pro-rata tariff will follow the guest into the new local authority in line with DLUHC guidance. Guests on the Homes for Ukraine scheme have the freedom to move out of hosting arrangements and into settled accommodation, to study, to work as well as undertake international travel whilst continuing to retain the offer of support from the Homes for Ukraine scheme for a period of no less than 12 months after their arrival. Some guests have taken holidays, travelled back to Ukraine, and taken up temporary employment in other towns, whilst maintaining their arrangements with their host or accommodation in Birmingham. Payments to the provider are not reduced as guests continue to have the offer of a service.

Tariff payments to Refugee Action and work in progress

- 4.14. In total Refugee Action has been paid £1,935,926 by Birmingham City Council to date. This relates to payment for quarter one arrivals on a reduced tariff alongside a proportion of quarter two payments. A fuller breakdown of this payment is below.

Time period	Tariff	No. of Arrivals	Total value accrued	Amount paid to date
1st June-31 Aug 22 [Quarter 1]	£4,350 per arrival (Originally proposed as £7,251.03 per arrival)	320	£1,392,000	£696,000
1st Sept 22 – 28th Nov 22 [Quarter 2]	£7,251.03 per arrival	342	£2,479,852	£1,239,926
1st December – 28th Feb 23	£7,251.03 per arrival	tbc	tbc	tbc
		662	£3,871,852	£1,935,926

- 4.15. For both quarters, Refugee Action have been paid 50% of the tariff for the families that arrived in this period. It should be noted that the quarter one tariff was reduced to reflect the delayed mobilisation which means there is a reduction in fee for quarter one of £928,329. It should also be noted that some of these funds will be paid by Refugee Action to their subcontractors
- 4.16. The Council is required to submit detailed quarterly claims to DLUHC demonstrating all the checks undertaken against the guests that have arrived (home assessment, initial check, 2nd wellbeing check, DBS issued, thank you payments issued etc). The Refugee Resettlement Solution tool enables the Council to provide evidence to DLUHC and to validate invoice payments to Refugee Action.
- 4.17. In December 2022, the government announced a reduction in the tariff available to local authorities for delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The tariff was reduced from £10,500 to £5,900 per person for arrivals after the 1st of January 2023. In accordance with the relevant contract clause, the reduced DLUHC grant funding will be reflected in the tariff payable to Refugee Action.
- 4.18. The reduction in government funding will necessitate revisions to the service model to minimise impact on guests and hosts.
- 4.19. DLUHC have authorised local authorities to carry over any underspend from 2022 into 2023. Birmingham City Council's approach to refugee resettlement has always been to maximise the value of grant funding. As a result, officers had modelled its estimated grant to be spent over a 24-month period. Within the modelling, a notional contingency budget (for +/-100 guests) was set aside

to allow flexibility in response to changes in tariff, numbers arriving and departing from the scheme. This now enables Birmingham City Council to continue to meet the emerging needs of guests and hosts during 2023-24.

Critique

4.20. The information and evidence gathered indicates:

4.21. Many of the hosts and sponsored guests who arrived at the start of the crisis, felt that the support available to them from Refugee Action at that time did not meet their needs and expectations, and they turned to local community groups for support instead.

4.22. Refugee Action acknowledge that the contract at the early stage was not delivered in the way it should have been and this meant that support was not provided in the manner that was needed.

4.23. Refugee Action did not have the staff in place required to deliver their contract, and recruitment and on-boarding did not proceed as quickly as they anticipated. The impact of this was a lack of support for Homes for Ukraine host and guests early in the programme. This was a likely consequence given the limited number of providers the Council could directly award to at the start of the response.

4.24. The Council did recognise the deficiencies in support being provided and worked closely with Refugee Action to prioritise support whilst capacity was being built up. Due to the delays in mobilisation and the large number of guests that had arrived before the contract had been awarded (up to 300), council officers had agreed for Refugee Action to focus on issuing initial payments to all guests, as well as contacting guests and hosts flagged as a priority (families with young children, unaccompanied children or where initial checks had flagged early intervention).

4.25. The level of available support was not communicated effectively to community groups and organisations that were then providing support to guests and hosts. Alongside the delays, there have been misconceptions about the value of the contract awarded to Refugee Action that does not reflect the actual value over the duration of the contracted period and has been conflated with expectations of the provider and their subcontractors.

Recommendations

- xii. When awarding direct contracts through a single contract negotiation, the Council should consider limiting the initial duration of the contract, for example up to a maximum of 12 months to maintain flexibility.
- xiii. The Council should continually engage and communicate with service users around changes to provision and the nature of support on offer. This will help to ensure that there is a common understanding of what is being delivered and why, which can help to manage expectations and improve partnership working.

5. Delivery of support - guests, hosts, and community organisations

Context

5.1. Support is delivered to guests and hosts via a range of ways:

- Through BCC's main funded voluntary sector provider, Refugee Action alongside their funded providers Spring Housing and the Refugee and Migrant Centre
- Community organisation hubs and informal groups that have self-mobilised, and
- Through Birmingham City Council and BVSC Engage for Ukraine grant recipient voluntary and community organisations. The following support has been grant funded through the BCC Homes for Ukraine funding in partnership with BVSC.

Community Organisation	Purpose of Grant Funding
Ashley Community and Housing Ltd	Support Ukraine nationals looking to create a business in the UK. Focus on entrepreneurship support
Aston University - Centre for Applied Linguistics	Is developing and running training with service providers on ways to conduct successful Interpreter-mediated interactions .
Aston University - Centre for Growth	Developing and delivering a bespoke programme of support which will meet the business and employability needs of the people
Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies (BCAT)	Provision of creative mental health support through art-based activities
Bosnia Herzegovina UK Network	Will offer a help line, community newsletters and mail outs, running cultural, social and sports events to bring people together. Will also hire out local sports facilities so young Ukrainians can engage whilst playing team sports

Polish Expats Association CIC	<p>Polish Expats have been awarded funding for the following 5 contracts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide direct community engagement through face-to-face advice and information services on existing services and drop-in sessions covering areas of welfare benefits, housing, education, migrant rights, responsibilities, family - Expansion of an Arts Council funded art programme and social events/opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. They are launching a month-long Ukrainian Film Programme. - Providing sponsor support on the Homes for Ukraine - Will create a final written report by a commissioned researcher with a summary of services provided, impact and policy recommendations - Will provide a dedicated Mental Health community officer will be able to signpost and create links. Also plan to offer group and individual support sessions; collective creative activities as coping mechanisms and promotion of wellbeing, women focussed activities and deliver training in mental health to community members
Czech & Slovak Club UK CIC	Support to Ukrainian families in providing Ukrainian education and social opportunities
Moseley Community Development Trust	Provides support to hosts and guests (Drop-in sessions, ESOL , sponsor support and ad hoc activities)
North Birmingham 4 Ukraine (New Heights Warren Farm Community Project)	Provides practical information, advice and support to guests and sponsors to reduce anxiety , and ensure sponsors feel confident in their role and guests feel welcome and empowered .
People for People	Provides a mixture of therapy, information and advice, employability service and deliver cultural training that will seek to address the long-term needs of the Ukrainian community

5.2. In addition to the areas of support, the Council has held a number of engagement events with hosts to discuss the challenges, issues and priorities in supporting guests and hosts. The outcome of these discussions has inputted into a priority action plan which included the development of the move on package. Regular updates on progress alongside key updates are provided in a Birmingham City Council weekly newsletter. The Council's engagement with hosts will continue throughout the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and will evolve in line with the maturity of the scheme and the needs of host.

5.3. Over the course of arrivals there have been a range of issues raised and the following sets out how the Council alongside any partners have sought to address these:

AREA OF FEEDBACK / CONCERN	ISSUE	RESPONSE
Guest/ Host contact/safeguarding	<p>There have been a number of reports regarding the caseworker model within Refugee Action and the lack of face-to-face contact.</p> <p>First concerns were raised in October 2022.</p> <p>In January 2023, two issues around safeguarding were raised</p>	<p>In response to the concerns about the caseworker model, a deep dive has been undertaken through December and January 2022, and the Council are reviewing this aspect of contracted provision.</p> <p>Individual complaints/issues around safeguarding are investigated by the commissioning team manager. These are taken forward on a case-by-case basis.</p>
DBS Checks	<p>There were a few complaints received at the early stage of the process regarding the length of time taken for some DBS check results to be returned</p>	<p>There were issues nationally regarding the speed of processing some results by the Disclosure and Barring Service.</p> <p>However, to ensure that checks were being set up quickly for hosts, when Refugee Action took over the work in July 2022, they pivoted to online applications where verification can take place. Checks are now routinely processed in a timely manner. The timeline for initiating checks and the results are all entered into the Refugee Resettlement Solution so there is a 'live' view of the throughput of all checks. Refugee Action have established a safeguarding panel so</p>

		<p>where there are any questions that arise from DBS checks, these are escalated and considered by a Panel. These are held on a weekly basis or as and when needed. The results of the Panel and checks has meant that there have been a number of proposed sponsors that have been declined.</p>
Speed of support payments	<p>The first guest arrivals in the scheme at the beginning of April 22 suffered a delay in receiving emergency cash payments.</p>	<p>The Council did not have a payment mechanism available to quickly transfer £200 per person support payments to guests. This led to delays during this period with emergency payments being made at approx. 10 days after arrival.</p> <p>Refugee Action, through the mechanism of an existing contract, commenced payments to guests and reduced the wait time from 10 days to within 48 hours of arrival.</p>
Access to ESOL	<p>In July 2022, access to ESOL was identified as an issue by community hub organisations.</p> <p>In December 2022, through a series of engagements with hosts and community organisations, concerns around the provision and availability of ESOL were being voiced. The concerns varied in terms of the availability of ESOL to suit learners of different levels, access to fast-track</p>	<p>In response to these concerns, Birmingham Adult Education Services shared details of classroom, online and conversational ESOL provision around the city and established mechanisms for referring guests with community hub organisations (i.e., Mosely hive).</p> <p>Due to the approaching summer holidays many ESOL classes were near capacity or winding down.</p>

	learning, greater breadth of learning options	<p>Further development of ESOL provision is a priority action now being driven forward with our stakeholder community organisation group. A task and finish group has been established and is undertaking the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of the ESOL hub to better communicate existing provision. - Mapping less formal provision and getting them added to the ESOL hub - Supporting needs analysis being undertaken by DWP.
Support to 'move on'	<p>This has been cited as an ongoing priority through hosts and community organisations and was particularly acute prior to the government's decision to extend the period of host payments.</p> <p>The core issues identified relate to access to affordable accommodation in preferred parts of the city, access to funds to pay the initial deposit and resources to furnish the home.</p>	<p>There has been ongoing focus on how guests will move on to independent living since early Autumn 2022.</p> <p>This has included: delaying 'move on' through better support to our hosts. Sponsor payments were increased by the Council ahead of central government on the 1st November 22 to try to sustain sponsorship arrangements beyond six months. Approx. 85 % sponsorships were retained.</p> <p>Financial aid to move on: Following a trial in late December, a move on fund was launched in January 23 – providing a financial envelope of £3-</p>

		<p>4k to guest households to support with the initial outlay of securing independent accommodation.</p> <p>Additional plans now include providing some additional funding to develop a volunteer 'move on support' network so which can provide practical support to guests such as support in arranging and attending viewings of properties. There will also be a concerted effort to look at how new hosts can be attracted to the scheme to support with 12 sponsorship arrangements coming to an end.</p> <p>The Refugee Action service model is being reviewed to reflect the need for greater move on support, as the current contractual provisions, which are set out below, did not anticipate the need for more practical support.</p>
Availability of school places	At the early stage of Guests arrival there were concerns raised by some hosts about availability of school places, which were in closest proximity to host accommodation.	<p>At the early stage there were concerns / queries by hosts about the challenges of enrolling Ukrainian arrivals into local schools. There were expectations by some hosts that Ukrainian children should be fast tracked into schools.</p> <p>The Council's Education and Skills team undertook a briefing to</p>

		<p>schools to increase awareness and to remind schools of the admission policies. In May 2022 BCC mapping had identified that based on arrivals there was sufficient capacity in schools.</p> <p>Two colleagues were involved in the direct resolution of any issues presented. They were also keen that hosts were directed to Education and Skills who could broker with schools directly rather than community representatives.</p> <p>There is, however, a constraint on the availability of places in popular schools, and not all guest children will be able to attend their first-choice school.</p>
Access to higher / further education	There has been one individual concern related to access to higher education. This has not been a prevalent concern raised by many hosts or community organisations	Education and skills alongside the Refugee Action Education hub team are responding to any issues identified with higher/further education on a case-by-case basis.
Advice and guidance on benefits and council tax	There have been a few concerns by hosts regarding understanding benefit entitlement. There have been two individual queries on Council Tax	<p>The Council recognised that benefit advice is a specialist area therefore as part of the contracting arrangements, ensured that there would be specialist provision.</p> <p>This is currently provided by Refugee and Migration Centre as part of sub-contracted arrangements with Refugee Action. The</p>

		<p>feedback on their support has been positive.</p> <p>We are aware there are challenges around understanding Universal Credit and we are engaging with DWP to see how they can strengthen the advice and support.</p>
Employment support	<p>Aligned to the challenges raised with move on and ESOL, there have been issues raised about access to meaningful employment.</p>	<p>The Council's grant scheme administered by BVSC specified the inclusion of employment support as a specific grant award category.</p> <p>This ensured that there have been grants awarded to community organisations that are focused on building entrepreneurial and employability skills.</p> <p>DWP have piloted an initiative to work in Community Organisations HUBS to help train and passport guests into employment within education. The pilot encountered some challenges, and this was stopped. DWP are looking at commencing another pilot but looking at this alongside ESOL provision, which will address some of the earlier challenges.</p>
Recognition of equivalent qualifications	<p>This was raised at an early stage in the programme by one lead representative</p>	<p>This has not been prioritised against the scale and challenge of other issues.</p>

Housing contractual responsibilities

5.4. The contractual responsibilities for the provider 'Refugee Action' to support with the move on arrangements under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is as follows:

Housing support and Homelessness assistance

- I. There may be some cases where the Sponsor/Guest relationship breaks down and the Guest is homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Provider will provide assistance in case of Sponsor/Guest relationship breakdown utilising the rematching policy to find alternative Sponsors. In an emergency, the Council's statutory homelessness duties will apply, including in respect of the provision of any emergency accommodation. See Schedule 13 for further information on statutory homelessness guidance

KPI - *Provide emergency assistance in case of Sponsor/Guest relationship breakdown utilising the rematching process, provision of housing options and advice using BCC Housing Solutions and Support wherever the Provider decides that homelessness support is required. [Within 2 weeks of the notification of breakdown or sooner depending on urgency of the issue depending on the individual circumstances]*

- II. Following any Local Authority provision of suitable emergency accommodation, the Provider will ensure rematching of Guests where appropriate in case of Sponsor/Guest relationship breakdown using available Sponsor data held by the Council.

KPI - *Provide housing advice and options and tenancy support (if required) throughout the period of support in readiness of move on from Sponsor accommodation*

- III. The Provider will ensure access to regular housing options advice throughout the period as and when required by the Guest and assist Guests with making housing applications when required including ensuring the provision of move-on support.

KPI - *Providing housing advice and tenancy support ensuring Guests have:*

- *Had all suitable housing options explained to them as well as how they can be supported to move*
- *Tenancy support*
- *Welfare/benefits in place*
- *GP registration*
- *Access to school places*

[Before Guests move on and up to 4 weeks after a move]

Temporary Accommodation

- 5.5. From March 2022 up to 24th February 2023, there have been 13 Homes for Ukraine households placed in temporary accommodation alongside 4 medical evacuee households. As of the 24th February, 9 Homes for Ukraine households remain in temporary accommodation alongside the 4 medical evacuee households. The length and time for those in temporary accommodation varies due to the different requirements of the guest, there are some that have made it clear they do not want to enter into another sponsorship arrangement, others that have requirements around location based on school and/or existing support network. All guests have an assigned housing officer, who will be supporting them with a plan towards moving on to more permanent accommodation.
- 5.6. NB: The Medical evacuees did not arrive under the homes for Ukraine scheme but have been supported by service providers regardless. Their duration in temporary accommodation reflects a level of need for self-contained accommodation within a very specific location that cannot be supported by a live-in hosting arrangement. The families have been offered longer term accommodation which has been rejected due to distance from the hospital where their children are being cared for. They are prioritised for receiving move on funding support.

Summary of support

- 5.7. Whilst trying to ensure issues are anticipated and dealt with there have been challenges about managing expectations in terms of the resolution of issues. There is a very wide range of expectations from hosts and guests about the support that should be available to them – some expect very little, some expect more than we are able to provide. Birmingham City Council's overall level of support in the Ukraine programme far exceeds that which is available to other refugee groups in Birmingham, and we believe is more generous than other core cities are offering (see annexe). Birmingham City Council are trying to be as responsive as possible, within the resources available, in providing services specifically for this group. Other authorities have taken a completely different approach where they expect hosts and guests to use existing mainstream services and have used the funding to bolster their core service budgets rather than provide additional support.
- 5.8. DLUHC guidance to sponsors (hosts) had articulated the expectations on them as hosts to assist their guests, with the local authority and its commissioned providers stepping in where this was not possible. Many hosts have experienced for the first time the challenges and disjointedness of services for refugees and speakers of other languages. We value the role of hosts as powerful and committed advocates for their guests.

Critique

- 5.9. The information and evidence gathered indicates:
- 5.10. Hosts and community organisations have provided extraordinary support to Ukrainian families to settle in the city. Their generosity and the warm welcome they have offered has been truly overwhelming and is a positive reflection on Birmingham City as a City of Sanctuary.
- 5.11. Hosts were very proactive in supporting Ukrainian families to navigate their way in getting some of the immediate and basic needs met. Local community groups became a key source of support for both hosts and guests particularly in helping to create networks and share information.
- 5.12. There was a very wide range of expectations within the guest community about the support that would be available to them. Some expected a high level of support, whilst others assumed they would need to be highly independent.
- 5.13. Hosts in particular did not receive sufficient communication early in the programme, and this left them unsure about what support was available and reliant on other networks. This situation has subsequently improved significantly and there is now regular engagement and communication with hosts.
- 5.14. With hosts having to navigate some of the early support for guests, they begun to see some of the structural and process challenges that exist for refugees arriving in the country and more broadly for citizens who need access to welfare and public services.
- 5.15. There have been considerable challenges in accessing school places and English classes. Many of the challenges are reflective of broader issues for refugees related to ESOL provision, benefits, housing supply and affordability. Despite their circumstances and pre-existing capacity challenges, Ukrainian families (like other refugee groups) are expected to go through the same processes as all residents. Additional funding from central government, on its own, has not been successful in unlocking sufficient capacity and/or increasing provision to meet the early needs of the Ukrainian families.
- 5.16. The key priority at the moment for Ukrainian arrivals and their hosts is how they transition from their host accommodation and move on to independent living. The Council has recognised this through the development and launch of a move on package. However, whilst this has addressed a significant need, challenges still exist for Ukrainian families in trying to navigate the housing landscape, particularly the private rented sector. At the start of the response, the housing requirements were not fully anticipated by the Council so the contract with the Provider focused on the provision of housing advice. More practical hands-on support is currently needed.
- 5.17. Some guests have been placed in temporary accommodation and this has been seen as a failure of the service. However, it is acknowledged that

temporary accommodation placements in Birmingham are relatively low and, in some circumstances, has been unavoidable and short term. The nature of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme provides an alternative housing pathway instead of homelessness for Ukrainian families, therefore there should be an emphasis on moving guests to a new hosting arrangement (re-matching). However, it is noted that this is reliant on the Council having in place a large pool of available hosts.

Recommendations

- xiv. The government provided additional school place funding to support Homes for Ukraine children – which is not available for Ukrainian children here under the Family Visa scheme or other Ukraine visa schemes. Despite this, many guests still struggled to secure the school place they wanted for their child or children, and this is disappointing. The council should consider what more it could do in similar situations to encourage and enable schools to accept refugee children. We welcome comment from schools to know what additional support/help is needed to enable them to offer more places.
- xv. The Ukraine crisis has created significant additional needs for housing when guests move on from their hosts, in a context of a very challenging wider housing environment in the city. BCC has developed, in partnership with stakeholders and hosts, an innovative and well-received 'move on' scheme that provides direct financial support to guests moving into the private rented sector. However, there is a specific challenge with guests who are dependent on Universal Credit and require rent guarantees – the council should explore and support solutions for this group of guests.
- xvi. Many Ukrainian guests require more intensive and flexible English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision. Many are highly skilled and seeking work. With English skills they would be able to secure higher-paid employment opportunities and independent incomes. However, there is a shortage of such provision in the city, and steps should be taken to expand this provision for Ukrainian guests and all refugees in the city

6. Overall level of support by Birmingham City Council

Context

- 6.1. The Council's overall level of support through its Ukraine Response far exceeds that which is available to other refugee groups in Birmingham. The Council has tried to be as responsive as possible, within the resources available, in providing services specifically for this group. It has pioneered new initiatives and partnerships that can be extended to other refugee groups, as well as put in place innovative approaches to some of the more systemic challenges that have arisen for example, through the provision of a move on funding package.

Funding / Resource envelope

6.2. A paper was taken to the September 2022 Cabinet meeting which set out the broad outline of work that would be needed alongside the anticipated costs. The costs/budget were profiled for between 12-24 months. These were proposed costs and as the response has developed, alongside changes of funding by Central Government, the budget has been reprofiled. However, for ease, the Cabinet table has been annotated to highlight how the funding has been utilised up to this point, with a description of whether the funds have been drawn down.

Ukraine Response - Resource requirements

AREA	REQUIREMENTS WHERE RESOURCES ARE NEEDED	DURATION	PROPOSED GRADE AND NUMBER	ANNUAL COST <i>Based on top of the pay scale rates</i>	TOTAL COST	NOTES ON SPEND
RESOURCES COSTS						
Core Programme Team	To oversee the programme of work, supporting the Strategic Response Group. Driving and tracking delivery as well as undertaking core asks	18 months (See outline below) *	1 FTE x GR7 1 FTE x GR5 1 FTE x GR3	£114k £66k £40k	£330k	Funding from programme not utilised 1 FTE Programme Manager from 1 st April New 0.5 FTE - Project support from 1 st November 2022 (both costs apportioned against a different BCC budget)

Adult Social Care Refugee & Migration Team	Administer the Homes for Ukraine process and contract manage Refugee Action	2 years	1 x GR5 FTE 2 x GR4 FTE	£66k £104k	£340k	New FTE staff appointed. GR5 onboarded in December. 1 GR4 onboarded in November and 1 GR4 in December following successful recruitment
Birmingham Children's Trust	Maintain the ability to conduct CASS checks on sponsors thereby identifying any risks	18 months	2 FTE x GR5 2 FTE x GR3	£132k £80k	£212k	No appointees made BCT have provided staff from within their existing budget
Education & Skills	Admissions teams To support the school admissions and early years process by liaising with schools and brokering places	18 months	2 FTE x GR4	£104k	£156k	No appointees made Subsequent decision made that Refugee Action would appoint 2 education support officers and this is funded from their tariff
Housing	Funding to meet the additional pressure upon service of Ukraine arrivals including operational demands and oversight and reporting.	18 months	1 FTE x GR5 (oversight and coordination)	£66k	£99k	Appointed new housing officer who is supporting on the prevention pathway

Digital	Maintain a Contact Centre function to initiate engagement with sponsors and continue with an inbound call function	9 months	2FTE x GR4	£104k	£78k	Contact Centre staff assigned to programme from previous COVID track and trace temps from July 2022 and have maintained initial sponsor contact.
			3FTE x GR3	£120k	£90k	
	Continued development support for the case management and reporting tool that has been developed by the Contact Centre and PwC. Enables data to be shared efficiently and supports the administration of the process to enable checks, payments, and support to sponsors and guests.	3 months	PwC extension for 12 weeks max.		£330k	
		18 months	1FTE x GR5	£66k	£99k	IT Digital have appointed new resource to maintain development up to 31 st March 2023.
TOTAL RESOURCE COSTS					£1.734m	
COMMISSIONED/ CONTRACTED ACTIVITY COSTS						
Commissioned Resettlement provider (Refugee Action)	All immediate checks/resettlement and re-matching support to all arrivals	Commences: 6 th June 2022 2 years (12 months after the last arrival)	Refugee Action contract	£7,251 per guest (est @ 1,000 guests)	£7.251m	Refugee Action onboarded. Contract value adjusted.

Grants programme	Provision of funding grants to Community groups within Birmingham City that are supporting on Ukraine Settlement that can support and provide services to disseminate information & advice to Ukrainian families and residents; help with supporting and building sponsorship networks and also support on rematching.	9 months (for allocation and 12 months to spend)	Up to 25 organisations plus additional funding for food parch	Up to £20k per organisation	£500k	£270k awarded to 9 organisations.
Temporary Accommodation	Provision of emergency temporary accommodation and move on incentives	2 years	£240 x 50 households over 14 weeks	Temporary Accommodation x 50 households at 14 weeks x £240/wk = £168k; incentives to enable move-on £32k; total	£200k	Budget being utilised to cover TA costs.

Move on – Accommodation	To be commissioned subject to assessment of need. Housing provision for Guest move-on support	2 years	£1,578 x 350 households	Based on previous commissioned activity costs - £1578 Based on number of estimated households	£552k	Reprofiled so approx. over £800k which covers the move on funding. Additional funding also profiled to cover sponsor top up payments.
ESOL Provision	To be Commissioned Support delivery of ESOL to adults through funding BAES provision or community-based activity	2 years	£50,000 per 100 adults	Based on £50k pa paid to BEEAS who deliver extra ESOL to Syrians and Afghans - £50k/100 persons (average no of beneficiaries) x 350 households = £175k	£175k	Needs analysis and initial consultation being led through a task and finish. To be spent on increased provision by end of April 2023.
Mental Health Support	To be commissioned subject to assessment of need. Access to mental health and wellbeing services for adults and children -	2 years	£1,000 per refugee	Based on £50k for 50 refugee beneficiaries on current treatment therapies delivered by Beacon Counselling and Bham Community Arts Therapy. For 300 refugees x £1,000	£300k	Profiled for 23-24. To be commissioned via the new Flexible Contracting arrangements from April 2023.

Employment support	To be commissioned subject to assessment of need Support access to job market	2 years	£600 per adult	Based on £150k Y2-5 contract/250 Syrians = 600x350 Ukrainian adults = 210	£210k	Profiled for 23-24. To be commissioned via the new Flexible Contracting arrangements from April 2023.
Contingency	To respond to any additional pressures related to the administration, delivery, or commissioning of Homes for Ukraine.	£2 years	£500K		£1m	Has been subsumed by reduction in spending by Central Government.

Positive issues

6.3. Some of the positive issues that have arisen out of the programme include:

- Greater community/citizen engagement within the refugee and migration arena which is positively seeking to influence service delivery and support.
- Innovative approaches to some of the more systemic challenges that have arisen for example, through the approach to move on funding. Creating a discrete pot of funding for each household to support them to move on, this comes with a streamlined application that can provide funding very quickly.
- Pioneering new initiatives and partnerships that can be extended to other refugee groups such as the introduction of a 12-week free bus pass for all guests that arrive in the city – with the costs met by contribution from the partner.
- Ability of the Council to draw in resources across services to deliver 'vetting' capacity at scale.
- The importance of the role of the Council and its partners as a city of Sanctuary and its work in creating a warm welcome for new arrivals.
- A sponsorship model that can be adapted to offer support to other refugee groups.

Lessons Learnt about commissioning programmes:

6.4. Importance of early, regular, and appropriate communication and engagement with key stakeholders including the public and local community organisations. This is informing the approach of the new Public Participation Team which will help develop good practice across the Council and has centrally informed the Cost-of-Living Response programme.

6.5. Importance of having flexible and agile commissioning arrangements. The Council did not have the contractual mechanisms in place during this time to be able to respond to the unprecedented challenge of a humanitarian crisis of this scale. Without formal emergency powers being invoked it was not possible to engage strategic partners and commission emergency provision outside of existing contractual arrangements. The lessons learned have been used to inform the development of flexible contracting arrangements for refugee resettlement. Ensuring we have a sufficiently flexible and responsive contractual mechanism to commission appropriate refugee resettlement support for any future crisis, from a wide range of organisations. The Ukraine War was unprecedented in scale and challenge. The new Refugee Flexible Contracting Agreement (FCA) has been informed by the learning from the Homes for Ukraine programme and will enable the ability to commission more quickly from a wider pool of service providers. It will also enable new emerging providers to join the FCA thus increasing the breadth of suitable providers.

6.6. The importance of having accurate, detailed information on issue context, service delivery and performance, available in a form that is accessible, insightful, and able to drive decision making and accountability. This is reflected

in the work of both the City Observatory and developing digital capability within the Council.

Lesson learnt from other local authorities

- 6.7. BCC has engaged 5 core cities local authorities on how they are managing the delivery of the Ukraine Response. This information will be built upon following further discussions with other local authorities.

Key findings

- 6.8. The majority of the local authorities are managing the delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in-house, which includes the provision of host and guest support.
- 6.9. There is generally an expectation that the host will proactively support the guests in a range of ways, including supporting with their early needs such as setting up bank accounts, registering at GPs, enrolling children in school etc. There have been different methods applied to reaffirm and communicate this such as introductory meetings that set out all the tasks that the host should support on (Manchester; Sheffield); regular communication material to sign post services (Manchester; Leeds); drop-in sessions and ad hoc support. One authority has commissioned a provider to provide support to guests but only where it has been identified that the guest has more complex needs and/or the host is unable to provide the level of support required (Liverpool).
- 6.10. The majority have not provided any additional top ups to 'Thank you' payments outside of the recent increase by Central Government.
- 6.11. Similar to Birmingham City, all local authorities started with emergency arrangements, and it has taken a while to build more stable and consistent arrangements. At least half the authorities are still seeking to increase their resources to support their Ukraine Response.
- 6.12. In all cases the voluntary and community sector plays an active role in providing wider support to guests, particularly in helping to navigate the city and access social/cultural opportunities. Not all have invested additional funding into the sector.
- 6.13. The majority rely on mainstream services to support Ukrainian guests within their existing capacity. The two areas where a couple of authorities have provided additional funding is on ESOL and trauma support.
- 6.14. The biggest concern for all the local authorities was the transition of Ukrainian guests to independent living. Most have not devised a move on approach/strategy and highlight this as the biggest risk to the delivery of their response. There was also an acknowledgement that by focussing on the operational elements, they were finding it difficult to look at the broader strategic elements. Manchester is the exception as they have been able to manage the operational elements and have a really clear strategic approach to ensure that they divert guests away from homelessness.
- 6.15. A table of the responses can be seen overleaf:

Local Authority: Nottingham City Number of arrived guests: 326					
Delivery of Scheme	Commissioned provider/additional service	Guest / Host support	Voluntary and Community Sector engagement	Free bus travel	Key challenges / concerns
Run in house – Team of 7 (looking to resource up again) that oversee checks and updating central govt data.	No provider Provided funding to ESOL to provide English language learning sessions.	Welcome pack provided at beginning. Host support: Deal with ad hoc queries. Majority of hosts are self-sufficient and provide majority of support to the guests including application for BRP applications, set up of bank accounts, benefits applications etc. No sponsor top up thank you payment provided	Provide a bespoke Ukraine centre (run by local Ukraine community centre) – H4U scheme provide funds to bolster the services offered by the centre (including representation from DWP to provide advice on benefits at weekly drop in). Ukraine centre run weekly drop-in sessions for guests and hosts (which the Nottingham H4U scheme attend and support). The also offer befriending services which help with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating the city • Integrating into the city • School administration • Signposting hosts. 	Provide a 5-day free bus pass (as part of welcome pack).	They are considering commissioning a service provider . They are concerned with being able to support guests and have no plan for move on . Move on their greatest concern.

Local Authority: Sheffield Number of arrived guests: 583					
Delivery of Scheme	Commissioned provider/additional service	Guest / Host support	Voluntary and Community Sector engagement	Free bus travel	Key challenges / concerns
Run in house. 3 housing service officers (accommodation focused) 3 business support officers – focusing on education and payments. They carry out all administration, the welfare checks and keep in touch visits with hosts and guests.	Partly – Spring Housing provide support to guests (non-housing) on an ad hoc basis.	<p>Contact all hosts within a month of guest arrival, understand support needs, develop plans and next steps.</p> <p>Look to hosts to provide majority of support to guests. Discretionary payments have been made to hosts that are struggling but no increase across the board on thank you payments.</p> <p>The inhouse team then support guests if there is an emergency. Provide a drop-in meeting for housing advice.</p> <p>Move on support– will be offering a council bond whereby if tenants go into default, Sheffield as a local authority will pay.</p>	<p>Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (host meetings) for guests.</p> <p>Funding has been provided to the Refugee Council to offer a bespoke mental health service (trauma focused).</p> <p>Citizens Advice Bureau provide a video portal to support Ukrainians with benefits, immigration advice.</p>	<p>No free bus travel.</p> <p>Received lots of negative feedback on this.</p>	<p>Move on support is a key concern as they have no confirmed strategy</p>

Local Authority: Leeds Number of arrived guests: 710					
Delivery of Scheme	Commissioned provider/additional service	Guest / Host support	Voluntary and Community Sector engagement	Free bus travel	Key challenges / concerns
Run in house with 3 full time members of staff. Seeking to move to a team of 7. Currently conducting all admin, visits, and support.	Housing Options provide housing support to guests.	<p>Sponsors provide the support to guests.</p> <p>Local authority provides support to sponsors by signposting to services.</p> <p>No top up to thank you payments provided.</p>	<p>Ukrainian Centre has been providing additional support to guests. Familiarisation and social opportunities.</p> <p>Migration Yorkshire have been providing support to hosts.</p> <p>Not aware of any additional funding being provided to the sector including the above organisations.</p>	No free bus travel provided.	<p>Real concerns about being able to cope with arrival numbers within current structure.</p> <p>No move on approach and is concerned about a cliff edge.</p> <p>Maintaining the support in-house is impacting their ability to be strategic.</p>

Local Authority: Manchester City Number of arrived guests: 368					
Delivery of Scheme	Commissioned provider/additional service	Guest / Host support	Voluntary and Community Sector engagement	Free bus travel	Key challenges / concerns
Run in house – seconded from the homelessness team. 3 in core team supported by 10 support workers	<p>Commissioned additional ESOL.</p> <p>Commissioned a qualification conversion service to help support the conversion of Ukrainian qualifications.</p> <p>Looking to commission trauma support from Ukrainian speaking professionals.</p>	<p>Support worker provides support to both the guest and host. Fortnightly check ins. Host is seen as the main source of support to the guest. Expectations are communicated at the first meeting. Workers help to signpost to mainstream services.</p> <p>No top up to thank you payments.</p> <p>Their Private Rented Sector team are providing incentives to landlords (similar to Birmingham's Accommodation Finding Team) and guests are referred from month 4.</p>	<p>No additional support. VCS are extending the services they provide to Ukrainian guests.</p> <p>The Growth Company are supporting guests with looking for jobs. No additional funding has been provided.</p>	No free bus travel provided.	<p>Data system is not very reliable – maintaining on an excel spreadsheet.</p> <p>No significant concerns.</p>

Local Authority: Liverpool Number of arrived guests: 266					
Delivery of Scheme	Commissioned provider/additional service	Guest / Host support	Voluntary and Community Sector engagement	Free bus travel	Key challenges / concerns
In house. Team of 5 which includes – 2 Refugee host coordinators and 1 admin support.	Commission Refugee Action to manage a limited number of guests based on need. RA support kicks in where it is identified the host cannot provide this and/or guests has complex needs. Small proportion of guests and they capped to a maximum number. They are currently reviewing this.	Pre arrival meeting with hosts to set out expectations and signpost to toolkits. 2 nd visit is a welfare visit conducted with guest and host and talk through a checklist. Provided heating allowance for sponsors from Nov-March. Tapered based on number of guests being supported. Run monthly information sessions for sponsors and separate drop-in sessions for guests.	They are looking to develop a grants programme.	No free bus travel provided.	Concerned they do not have a proactive move-on approach. No additional move on. Struggling to attract new sponsors and have a very small of sponsors that can be used for rematching. Funding is being held to support emergency accommodation which they are concerned is too reactive.

Critique

6.16. The information and evidence gathered indicates:

6.17. Birmingham City Council provides a relatively generous range of services and support for Homes for Ukraine hosts and guests compared to most other local authorities' H4U arrangements. In addition to providing a specific package of contracted support, it has also provided grants to local community organisations, administered free 12-week bus passes, and developed a funding package provided to Ukrainian households to support them move onto independent living.

6.18. The majority of core cities have relied more than Birmingham on their existing mainstream services to support Ukrainian guests within their existing capacity. By contrast, Birmingham City Council has utilised its funding to introduce new initiatives to pioneer different approaches to meeting the needs of Ukrainian arrivals, with the view to looking at how this approach can evolve to support Ukrainian families outside of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and other refugee groups.

6.19. The support available to Ukrainian arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme is much more generous than that available for other refugees and asylum seekers. There is also no similar package of funding and data available to the council in respect of Ukrainian arrivals under the Family Visa scheme.

Recommendations

- xvii. The Council applies the lessons of the Ukraine Response and now considers what can be applied to other groups in a coherent and equitable approach that will provide support for all refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers.

APPENDIX 1: GUEST, HOST & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS EVIDENCE SESSION NOTE

Session: Guests, Hosts and Community Organisations

Date: Friday 10th March

Time: 15:00 – 18:00

Summary headlines:

- Hosts and community organisations have provided significant support to Ukraine arrivals particularly with the early arrivals
- Refugee Action (RA) support came quite late for early arrivals as much of the guests' early needs had been met with support from their hosts. Initial RA contact/support appeared to emerge in October 2022.
- General feedback on caseworker support is a lack of empathy displayed towards guests.
- There are sign of improvements with RA support for new arrivals with initial contact being made more swiftly although there is a question of consistency/follow up.
- Housing support provided by Spring Housing (SH) does not appear to address need. There is a question about application of the move on funding and whether all SH caseworkers are consistently /applying the guidance
- Positive feedback provided on the move on funding and the impact this will have on supporting guests to independent living
- Current priorities and areas where there should be increased focus: increase the provision of ESOL to support the drive towards employment; increase access to mental health/trauma support and maintain focus on housing.

GUEST 1 and HOST 1

GUEST 1

1. Arrived on 8th August 2022 with primary age son. Moved to independent accommodation in January 2023 and has a 6-month tenancy agreement in Durham.
2. Was equipped with understanding some of the things that needed to be done. However, had a lot of support from the host who guided the guest step by step through the various processes.
3. Key challenge was finding and moving into own accommodation. Main issue related to finances and meeting the affordability criteria required by letting agents. Works part time to manage childcare arrangements. Move on funding was really beneficial as it helped with the rent advance.
4. RA were unhelpful with housing support. Referred to another organisation who provided information that the guest already had.
5. RA's first contact was in mid-October 2022.

HOST 1

6. Finding a school initially was a challenge. Submitted 12 applications which were all rejected. One came back, just at the start of term with a place.
7. RA support came too late as most of the work had been done within the first 6 weeks. Would have benefitted from earlier contact.
8. Felt happy to support but found it a bit frustrating that there was a service being paid to deliver support.
9. Local community organisations such as North Birmingham 4 Ukraine have provided invaluable support and provided key support in successfully finding accommodation.

GUEST 2

10. Arrived in June 2022 with children and moved into sponsor's self-contained accommodation. Spouse arrived later. Has now entered into a formal rent agreement with sponsor.
11. Key challenge was finding a school place. Had more than one child which made the admission process galling.
12. Was self-sufficient as has good English. This helped to ask questions which meant solutions could be found more easily.
13. Had limited contact with Birmingham City Council – only had contact with education officer. RA contacted in Sept/Oct 2022.
14. Found RA caseworker really helpful, for example, caseworker contacted on the 5th November to highlight fireworks night, explain what would be happening but to also to check that the guest would be ok. RA caseworker is also helping her husband look for English courses. At present, have only been able to enrol for courses in Sept 2023
15. See key priorities / areas to look at: Guide to NHS (health system different in Ukraine) and schools admission process. Also thinks schools can do more through activities to support children adjust and integrate.

COMMUNITY ORG / HOST 2

16. Hosted a Ukrainian arrival. Guest arrived on the 29th March 2022, so was one of the first arrivals. They moved out in December 2022 and host has acted as guarantor to help them make that first step towards independent living.
17. There was little support for guests/hosts at the early stage which prompted the set up a local voluntary organisation.
18. Experience of RA has not been positive. Reluctance for RA to engage directly with the community organisation when they are advocating and/or supporting guests even when the organisation had the guest's consent to consult with RA.
19. Caseworker model relies on a lot of texts/WhatsApp messages and not a lot of empathy. Example of caseworker sending a text to a guest to tell them to make a homelessness application; not supporting a guest to move to temporary accommodation late at night in a new area and guest arriving at a temporary accommodation with the basics such as bed sheets not being provided for.

20. Housing support is not consistent and also just advice and no practical support. Two officers came and did not engage with guests – appeared reluctant to do so.
21. At times has had to escalate specific guest issues to Birmingham City Council to enable them to be progressed.
22. Has not seen much evidence of sponsor support and does not understand why some of the simple things such as social events were and still not being done.
23. Recent experience of working with Birmingham City Council has been positive to develop areas on housing / move on. This has been extremely beneficial.

HOST 3

24. Has had 3 sets of guests. First guests came towards the end of April 2022 and who have moved onto independent accommodation 2 weeks ago. Hosted another guest for 6 weeks who moved onto independent accommodation last Sunday. Current guest has just arrived.
25. 1st guests arrived at end of July. Host supported with all arrangements. RA contacted in October 2022 and had a 5 min conversation with no further sponsor check ins. RA had initial face to face visit with guests in October 2022 and then a follow up.
26. Works in procurement and wanted clarity regarding RA role given his initial experience and sent in FOI to Birmingham City Council. Response was late and did not provide detail but was aware of the motion and petition so did not follow up.
27. Guest 2 was temporarily displaced - had been previous hosted and this broke down. Greater engagement from RA. However, helped to join up RA and SH as they appeared to both want to engage caseworkers separately and were not communicating with each other to support the guest.
28. With current guest, host was able to get key things done in 2 days (apply for Universal Credit, National Insurance, help set up bank account). RA contacted guest within 3-4 days and took on responsibility for remaining tasks that needed to be done, such as registering with GPs and actioned.
29. In summary, initial RA support came too late but has seen improvements and feels more confident with recent experience.
30. Main areas to look at: Hosts have mixed level of capability and support from RA should be tailored accordingly. Council should focus on and fund extra ESOL as this is needed right from the start and at an appropriate level of intensity because that will help with employment and integration.

HOST 4

31. Central government has set up a fund strong scheme so Ukraine response should have been treated in a similar way to Covid emergency. Support mobilised from volunteers/voluntary groups, community organisations and providers. A mixed economy of support.
32. Voluntary groups mobilised really quickly in March/April 2022. BVSC / Birmingham City Council had a group to engage voluntary and community

sector but no real action/outputs being driven. From an early-stage priorities around housing, trauma support and language were being articulated by those on the ground.

33. Experience of RA has been a tick box /dashboard approach. Universal feedback is there is very little empathy shown by caseworkers towards guests. It has taken 9 months for RA to put info on their website. Reticence to bring caseworkers into hubs.
34. Personal experience as host was no support from RA, received two phone calls.
35. Main areas to look at: Housing – not quite sure whether it's linked to funding or skills, but Spring Housing support is limited. Spring Housing would benefit from a letting agent being seconded to help with practical advice. Conversion of Ukrainian qualifications and accreditation would really help with employability of arrivals, many skilled professionals are having to accept non-professional roles. Review RA contractual arrangements to ensure that financial support is more equitably distributed to those that have and are still providing support to guests and hosts.

COMMUNITY ORG 2

36. Presented a quick survey undertaken with guests. Responses were still being collated. However, from 16 responses some clear priorities are coming through – housing, language support and employment with a focus on suitable jobs that can be based around childcare
37. Mental Health is also becoming a more prevalent issue.
38. New practical issues emerging, such as many Ukrainian arrivals that arrived with cars are having to send them back because of the cost of registration.
39. Have had Spring Housing at their organisation and found that they provide advice but no practical support. Also, advice is a bit inconsistent and unclear.
40. Community Org offered their personal experience of RA as Ukrainian arrivals. One declined any future engagement with RA as had specifically asked not to be spoken to or have Russian translation and this was not adhered to. Found it insensitive and no longer wants to engage. Arrived in August and had that initial engagement.
41. Another met with RA two months after arrival and had one other visit. The guest is highly capable so had already been self-sufficient in finding work.
42. Final arrival came to Birmingham in November 2022 from another local authority. Had one contact from RA in December and had no follow up despite a range of outstanding questions. However, experience of Birmingham was much better than the previous local authority. Mentioned move on funding as one of the positives.

APPENDIX 2: REFUGEE ACTION EVIDENCE SESSION NOTE

Session: Refugee Action

Date: Monday 20th March

Time: 10:00 – 12:00

The Chair welcomed Refugee Action and explained the purpose of the task and finish group. Refugee Action were invited to provide an overview of their journey and experience in delivering the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The RA officer set out the history and structure of Refugee Action and spoke specifically about the work that had been done to date on the Homes for Ukraine programme. Headlines were as follows:

- RA started in 1981 with a focus on supporting Vietnamese refugees. Refugee resettlement is their main area of specialism.
- Ukraine response aligns with their portfolio of work although this scheme had novel elements particularly with the decision to have members of the public offer their homes to arrivals. The dynamic of hosts being the first port of call for Ukraine arrivals is a new and sometimes challenging element of the programme.
- Ukraine response was happening in an already saturated housing market and also challenges around ESOL provision with existing refugee/migrant communities. There were existing systemic/structural issues and the Ukraine Response needed to be delivered in this context. Hosts were new to this environment.
- RA have established a caseworker model. 2/3rds of caseworkers live in Birmingham and 40% have lived experience of forced migration.
- They have a model of 39 guests per caseworker which equates to approximately 15 households. A caseworker produces a Personal Integration Plan (PIP) with the family which looks at 6 core themes such as benefits/finance, housing etc.
- The caseworker model is built with safeguarding as the priority. Different levels of need exist amongst arrivals so there are different levels of intervention/support provided. Cases are structured into low, medium, high need with those in the high need tier requiring the most intense level of support as there are significant concerns.
- Positive elements of the Ukraine response have been the administration of the check and also the approach to safeguarding.
- The main challenges have derived from their caseworker approach particularly in the decision to fragment the host and guest support. This was

done on the basis that there may be a need for confidentiality. RA are moving away from this approach to developing a response aligned to the stage of the family's journey i.e., focus on new arrivals, housing 'move on' needs and then broader settlement when the guest has moved on from hosted accommodation.

- The RA resettlement caseworker set out the nature of the caseworker role and gave some specific examples of cases that had required support. Clients' needs, abilities and aspirations determine the level of support provided, with in-person visits regularly arranged where needed.

Councillors thanked RA for the detail that had been covered. A focused discussion begun around the following areas:

Mobilisation and Capacity

1. Councillors wanted to better understand Refugee Action's capacity or assessment of its capacity to deliver the Homes for Ukraine as part of the single contract negotiation. Evidence presented has shown there were delays in mobilising the contract which could be seen with the delays in RA contacting guests and hosts. BCC entered into a single contract negotiation with Refugee Action on the premise that RA could deliver, what caused the delays or challenges to mobilising – how much was due to staff?
2. The RA officer highlighted that from the 5th April internal discussions begun within RA about how to resource and this included looking at bringing in 2 other partner organisations to boost capability. Their approach and model of how to scale up was based on what had worked successfully with previous resettlement schemes, notably on what had been achieved with scaling for the Afghan scheme in 2021.
3. RA at the time had 30 Refugee Resettlement Programme staff with 22 focused on the West Midlands and 11 in Birmingham. They knew they would have to increase staff numbers for the Homes for Ukraine response and had developed an initial resource profile. However, this profile was being baselined against a rapidly changing climate with numbers of arrivals increasing at least four-fold from April to May.
4. RA started an initial recruitment exercise on 22nd April for administrative staff and caseworkers. They had considered using agency/temps but were concerned about quality and also did not want to risk high staff turnover as this could compromise delivery.
5. They factored into their resource profile the redeployment of staff in May 2022 from their Afghan scheme work.
6. Early into the recruitment process they encountered recruitment bottlenecks in both the management and administrative areas. There were a number of internal promotions and/or moves into the Ukraine scheme which left roles to backfill.

7. On reflection, RA had a model on the Afghan scheme where the resettlement case load was split 50/50 with their partners, the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC). They did not follow this model with the Ukraine contract and split the work according to specialist areas so subcontracted RMC to provide immigration/benefits advice and Spring Housing to provide housing advice.
8. The Councillors wanted to know when the contract started on the 6th June 2022, were BCC given assurances that there was sufficient capacity in place. There are some questions for BCC officers about their awareness of the recruitment issues and impact on mobilisation. However, Councillors wanted to know how confident were RA as an organisation at being able to deliver at the scale and pace? The contract value also represented a significant jump in turnover based on previous years.
9. The RA officer recognised RA needed to almost double its caseworker numbers but felt this was achievable from previous experience. The RA officer explained that BCC was kept up to date and it was on this basis that priority areas were agreed as part of the mobilisation plan.
10. Whilst the contract value was significant, £7m was the maximum that could be awarded to RA as the tariff was attached to number of arrivals. It was not a given and will actually work out less. The model of funding aligned with the support being provided by RA for 24 months, means that funding spans over 2 ½ years the total contract award does equate to an annual turnover period.
11. Councillors probed on the recruitment approach and whether it would have been more effective to have brought in sufficient numbers up front because this meant RA were on the backfoot from the start. Therefore, the low numbers of staff compounded by low recruitment had a considerable impact on their ability to mobilise.
12. The RA officer highlighted that RA always had projected to undertake multiple recruitments in order to scale up to meet the numbers they anticipated. If they had received the number of appointable applicants, they would have appointed more up front. Although this approach would have created a financial risk they were willing to accept this. Their projected versus actual numbers recruited looked as follows:

Month	Projected recruited numbers (cumulative)	Actual numbers (cumulative)
June	11	6
July	13	7
August	14	11 1/2
Sept / Oct	16	-
December	17	-
January	-	17

13. Councillors probed as to why the role of the voluntary and community sector not considered as part of the solution/mitigation to building capacity to meet Ukrainian needs. Was there any consideration to how they could provide support?
14. The RA officer expressed that this would have been a new level of partnerships which would have been challenging whilst already trying to shape the service delivery within the existing partnership they had just formed.
15. Councillors queried why this had to be a contractual relationship and whether the dialogue could have extended to how to work alongside the community groups that were already formed and offering support. The RA officer acknowledged this point and confirmed it had not been a consideration at that time.
16. Councillors asked for RA's overall assessment of delivery especially given the mobilisation challenges in quarter 1.
17. The RA officer set out the impact of the delayed mobilisation meant that Ukraine arrivals did not get the support they should have received. This has been recognised with the tariff reduction applied by Birmingham City Council which he felt was the right approach. From Oct/Nov 22 the partnership has got the right model and approach in place. Q3 has seen improvements. Referrals are happening straight away with contact and visits being made within a couple of days
18. However, the RA officer wanted to flag that there was a perception of failure of the contract based on expectations that were always going to be difficult to meet. They have also suffered from some of the messaging linked to the period when they were not in contract and not responsible for delivering.
19. Councillors acknowledged there were some lessons to be learnt on the start-up for both Birmingham City Council and RA.

Admin and Database

20. The RA officer set out that the process elements of the contracts key performance indicators (KPIs) has been a challenge. There is a dialogue ongoing with Birmingham City Council on the KPIs. The way that they are drafted does not factor in that delivery of some of the components can be done elsewhere. They are not outcome driven so it does not capture all the work – the range/complexity.
21. They can drive perverse incentives, for example requiring a face-to-face wellbeing visit for all guests once a quarter, where this may not be needed because of the capability or requirement of the guest. It does not support a model of caseworkers adapting their approach to the needs and complexity of cases.

22. Councillors wanted to know how the database designed by PwC has been utilised by RA. How has it supported the delivery of the contract and what benefits have they derived from it
23. The RA officer set out that RA started to fully use the database in the Autumn 2022. Prior to this they had never used an external database and had their own system in place. An external database creates challenges around confidentiality of personal data. The introduction of the database created huge challenges internally and at one point they developed some management paralysis on how they could integrate / use both systems.
24. RA resorted to recording data on both systems which was a huge admin effort. They wanted to maintain safeguarding so felt it vital they use their own systems that could record detail notes.
25. Councillors questioned the extent of RA's involvement in the design of the system.
26. The RA officer responded that they were brought fully into the design. Overall, he thinks a shared database is needed as it supported working across organisations and would benefit on future resettlement schemes. It was just the initial challenge of adjusting to this new requirement.

Housing and Temporary Accommodation

27. Councillors wanted to gain a greater understanding of the homelessness and temporary accommodation context.
28. The RA officer outlined that the design and construct of the Homes for Ukraine scheme inherently sets about increasing the risk of homelessness. Central Govt devised a scheme where the arrangement was to secure six months accommodation for Ukraine arrivals with a presumption that at the end of this period, the war would end and it would be safe for families to return to Ukraine, or hosting arrangements would be extended. This was baked into the design of the scheme and if any of those presumptions did not materialise, families end up homeless.
29. In comparison to other resettlement schemes, the numbers of Ukrainian families in temporary accommodation in Birmingham is low.
30. RA are managing live risks through a 'move on' group that consists of RA, Spring Housing and Birmingham City Council. Focus on moving to private rented accommodation and also rematching.
31. The RA officer acknowledged that rematching has been constrained by their ability to onboard new hosts and process 'Expression of Interests from Birmingham City residents. To do this they have to prioritise and pivot resources which will mean they will not be able to deliver other elements in the same way.
32. RA have also used their partnership with Air BnB to support those at risk of homelessness. They have spent approximately £30K in Birmingham.

33. The RA resettlement caseworker also added that RA act as mediator where there are signs of a sponsorship breakdown. If the arrangements break down, then rematching is a first port of call. However, this is dependent on the requirements and needs of the family. The RA caseworker provided an example of hosting arrangements that broke down because the guest had a child with disabilities that the host found difficult to accommodate. They successfully rematched but with a sponsor that had separate self-contained living arrangements.
34. The RA officer also highlighted that RA caseworkers then negotiate and support guests with their homelessness application for temporary accommodation as this is preferable than street homelessness. Based on the current demand for temporary accommodation, there is a real risk around street homelessness so it can take some time to negotiate.
35. Councillors wanted to understand what was the main barrier for RA not fully utilising the EOI list?
36. The RA officer explained that they have been contracted to provide tenancy advice/support. However, becoming homeless is a big risk area of the project and so they are looking at how they pivot resources to support in this area alongside the more practical elements of supporting guests to move on.

Lesson Learnt

37. Councillors highlighted they wanted to focus on lessons learnt so asked what they have done differently knowing what the programme entails.
38. The RA officer outlined he would have done the following:
- a. Established a mixed model of provision: professional services/advice (housing etc); lower level of support through community sector delivery. This would need to be brought together in a formalised way.
 - b. Developed a model and approach to housing – focus on the strategy beyond 6 months
 - c. Better communication with stakeholders to build a consensus and manage expectations which would have helped deep into delivery.
 - d. Outcome based KPIs

Other points

39. Through their evidence RA raised the impact and wellbeing of staff in the organisation hearing strong words as 'harassment' being used at a public (scrutiny) meeting when they had been working hard to support Ukrainian arrivals.

40. Many of the RA resettlement workers have had lived experience of forced migration and some Resettlement Workers have experienced direct racism from Ukraine arrivals which has impacted their wellbeing.
41. Ahead of the comments made at Scrutiny, RA had not received any formal complaints or direct approaches about 'harassment' and since the Committee meeting had tried to establish contact with the individual that made the statement about harassment to discuss the specific facts around the allegations made, however the individual has not responded to these requests. A separate complaint has been investigated.
42. Councillors expressed their apologies and empathy for RA staff that were impacted by the claims of harassment made at scrutiny. They also expressed their sorrow for the staff that had experienced racism.