

Birmingham City Council

Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 27th January 2023



Subject: Ukraine Response

Report of: Councillor Cotton - Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community, Safety, and Equalities

Report author: Richard Brooks - Director for Strategy, Equality & Partnerships

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the delivery of the Ukraine Response, setting out the key issues and performance of the programme and its providers; to respond to the motion passed and petition raised at the 6th December 2022 City Council meeting.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the contents of the report and the review of programme delivery, and consider if there are any further issues for scrutiny to address in relation to the programme.

3 Any Finance Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications directly relating to this report. The overall financial envelope for the programme was agreed at Cabinet on the 6th September 2022, which accounted for the provision of services by providers.

4 Any Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly relating to this report. The Council's Ukraine response follows national guidance relating to the Homes for Ukraine programme, which is in addition to our statutory duties.

5 Any Equalities Implications

- 5.1 The Ukraine Response programme ensures the local authority can discharge its responsibilities under the Equality Act through the provision of resettlement support and co-ordination to arriving Ukrainian guests.

6 Appendices

6.1 Ukraine Response: Scrutiny Committee Report

APPENDIX

UKRAINE RESPONSE – SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

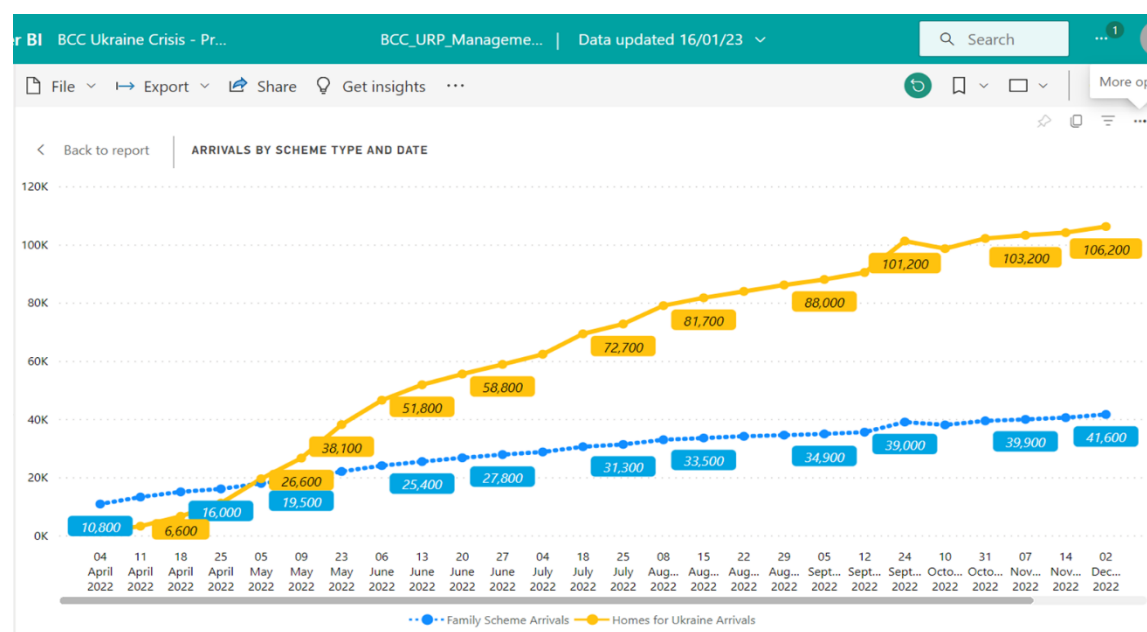
A. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

National Context

1. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the UK Government offered humanitarian support and sanctuary to Ukrainian families fleeing the war. The scale and approach to the Ukraine crisis was different to previous resettlement or other refugee schemes. The Government established visa entry routes into the UK for those fleeing the war which permitted Ukrainians a 3 year stay and the right to work, study and claim benefits in the UK. This was not the usual response to a humanitarian crisis, where typically refugee status would be granted.
2. The government established two main visa routes of entry into the country, the Family Visa Scheme, and the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme.
3. The Ukraine Family Visa Scheme allowed applicants to join their family members or extend an existing stay in the UK. The onus was strongly on the family being the primary source of support for guests. The nature of the Homes for Ukraine scheme is completely novel for the UK, with private citizens hosting refugees ('guests') in their own homes, and national government placing a wide range of new requirements upon local authorities to administer the scheme.
4. The Family Visa Scheme was launched on the 4th March and the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) was launched by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 14th March 2022.

- Initially, the Family Visa Scheme was the main route of entry for Ukraine arrivals into the UK, however within three months this was surpassed by the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This pattern has since been maintained so that Homes for Ukraine now accounts for the large majority of Ukraine arrivals: a total of 111,000 nationally as of 12th January 2023 compared to 44,500 for the Family Visa Scheme.

Chart: Arrivals by Visa Scheme; Homes for Ukraine (yellow) and Family Visas (blue)



Source: BCC Refugee Resettlement Solution Management Dashboard

Note: chart does not show January data

Birmingham Context

- Birmingham is a well-established City of Sanctuary, and a significant place of welcome to new arrivals and communities. Birmingham has a long history of supporting resettlement in response to a humanitarian crisis. Our UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Afghan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Schemes (ACRS) are currently in operation welcoming new citizens into Birmingham.
- Since 2015, Birmingham's approach to refugee resettlement has been to procure services to address the immediate needs of refugees fleeing war or persecution i.e. housing, health, welfare, orientation within the first year of the refugee's arrival. These are our Year 1 orientation, accommodation and support services that prepare individuals and families to integrate into Birmingham. From Year 2 onwards, smaller projects or additional services are commissioned over the lifetime of the resettlement scheme that address medium to longer term resettlement and integration goals utilising an approach that fosters settlement and promotes independence. These include employment, navigation, welfare /

Tenancy and Mental Health services. These services will be in place for the duration of the funding window. Grants programmes augment these services by addressing specific gaps in services dependent on the presenting needs of the refugee group and communities supporting them. This allows greater flexibility to develop community assets and bespoke community led solutions. Funding from Central Government will dictate the duration and scope of services commissioned whilst the grants programmes and services commissioned are administered in line with BCC procurement and contracting regulations.

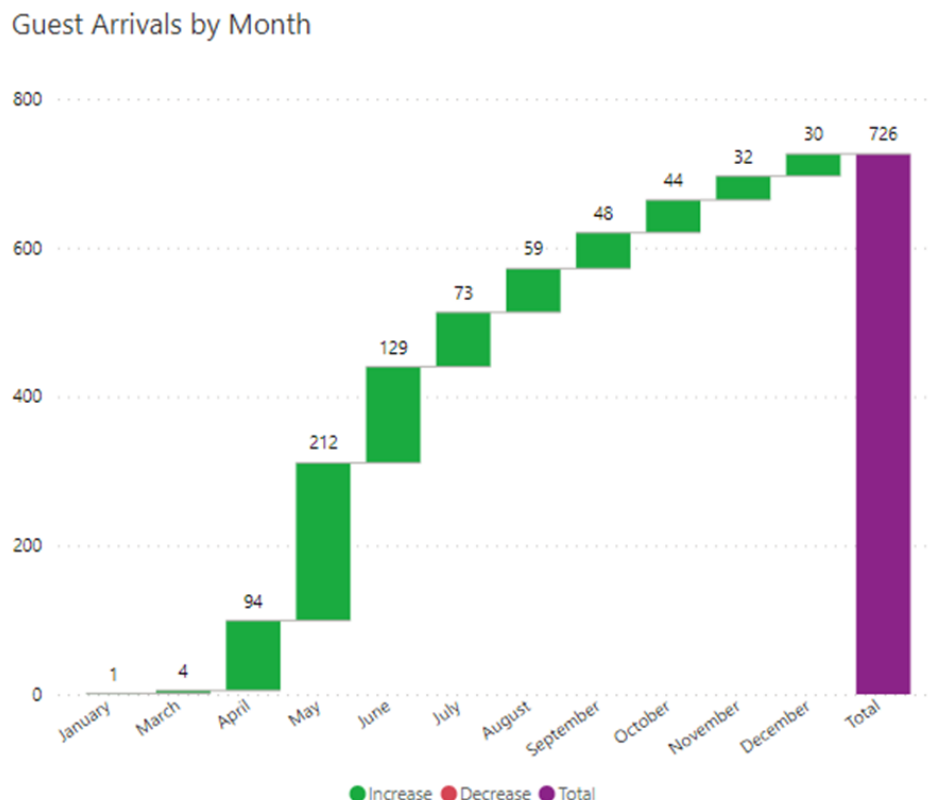
8. In 2021, nationally 1,587 people were granted protection through resettlement schemes¹. Within one month of the Ukraine visa scheme being established, 3,200 Ukrainian families had arrived in the country, which was double the annual number of arrivals across all resettlement schemes. The numbers gave a clear indication that, alongside its novel nature, local authorities would need to respond differently to the scale of the crisis. The total numbers of arrivals as set out above clearly indicate that the current crisis is far larger than other recent refugee programmes.
9. In March 2022 Birmingham City Council initiated its emergency procedures in response to the arrival at very short notice of a group of paediatric medical evacuees from Ukraine into the City. This drew in a multi-agency response which included Birmingham Children's Trust, early help teams and Refugee Action to provide the much-needed expertise and the immediate support these families needed (providing financial assistance, going shopping for clothes, shoes, and toys; access benefits and to get poorly children settled into hospital). Due to the confidential nature of the evacuation and sensitive nature of the arrivals (children requiring cancer treatment), the Council could only engage trusted partners and providers. Refugee Action was included in the support to these evacuees.
10. The early emergency response to the crisis was multifaceted in its approach and as well as supporting the urgent arrivals, it also looked at the following:
 - a. Communicating and providing support to BCC staff who were impacted by the crisis.
 - b. Communicating with residents - both in terms of support those directly affected and signposting to support as well as those that wanted to offer support to the large-scale humanitarian assistance.
 - c. Supporting the Government's approach by reviewing the Council's contracts and investments to check for those that had Russian economic interests.
11. By the end of March, more than 100 Ukrainian refugees had arrived in Birmingham under the Homes for Ukraine scheme – typically that would be the number the city would see over the course of a year from other schemes. The

¹ Home Office: National Statistics: [How many people do we grant asylum or protection to? - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to)

formal emergency procedures were stood down by the beginning of April, but the cross-service approach was used to inform the governance for an ongoing Ukraine Response programme. The programme drew on existing resources from several directorates including Birmingham Children's Trust, Adult Social Care, Housing, Education & Skills, the Contact Centre, finance, etc to help support the response.

12. By the end of June 2022, the City had seen over 400 arrivals which represents just under two-thirds of the total arrivals that have been received to date. This initial response was being provided in a highly uncertain policy and financial landscape, with little clear published guidance from Central Government as well as access to or clarity around funding. The policy development timeline is detailed in the following section to provide greater context of the level of local discretion and decision-making that was required.
13. Up to the 15th January 2023, the City has seen 730 Ukrainian guests arriving to 315 sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. There are also 242 Ukrainian nationals that have been matched to a Birmingham sponsor and have been issued with a Homes for Ukraine scheme and are yet to arrive. As the chart below shows, the largest month for Homes for Ukraine arrivals was May 2022, after which successive months have seen a gradual decline in the number arrivals – although guests continue to arrive (e.g. 30 in December 2022). We have much better data available on those arriving under this scheme than for Family Visa arrivals. At present we do not know the number of Family Visa arrivals in Birmingham, but we estimate (in line with the national numbers) that there may be approximately an additional 200 such persons.

Chart: Homes for Ukraine guest arrivals by month (2022)



Source: BCC Refugee Resettlement Solution Management Dashboard

Policy development timeline

14. In **April 22**, the Government issued the first version of its guidance to LAs which also provided access to the Home Office online portal (called 'Foundry') which allowed local authorities to review the data and records of individuals sponsored into Birmingham. The system was beset with glitches and anomalies which made working with it exceptionally difficult for officers. At the outset there were thousands of individual records on the Government portal with little or no guidance on its use or functionality. This system:

- Made it difficult to assess if Ukraine families were still in Ukraine or neighbouring countries or had already arrived in Birmingham.
- Didn't articulate the checks the Home Office and Border Force had undertaken before agreeing the match of guests to sponsors.
- Was slow and unresponsive – with delays in updating visa and travel dates.
- Many important guest or sponsor details were wrongly recorded or duplicated. For example, guests were assigned to the wrong local authority based on the location of their host.
- Some Hosts had multiple families or individuals registered to them.

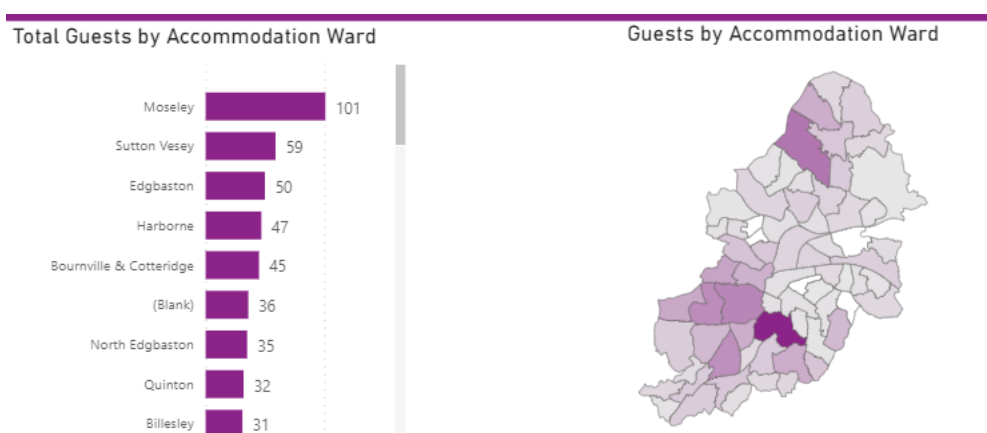
15. At the end of April, Government shared some information and guidance that would enable local authorities to plan effectively and set out the requirements for checks.
16. The **end of May** saw the release of more detailed guidance, which included further expectations on local authorities. At the **end of June 22** the Government issued guidance on the processes for alerting them of failed accommodation and safeguarding checks. Officers with access to the Foundry portal, had real concerns (that later materialised) of families arriving to unsafe situations or that an unaccompanied child would arrive without an appropriate guardian. Where these incidents materialised, the Council were able to intervene with the assistance of Border Force to ensure the safety of guests.
17. There were 12 updates to the guidance issued to local authorities between April – August 22, with further changes in policy related to unaccompanied children and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) requirements up until November 22, and most significantly funding changes in December which has meant an overall reduction in funds from what had previously been provided for arrivals in the earlier stages of the scheme.

B. PWC CONTRACT

18. One of the key challenges at the outset of the programme was the Council's role in safeguarding the arrival of vulnerable Ukrainian families. Upon receipt of Central Government's data through the Foundry system, it was clear that guests had arrived or were shortly arriving to their sponsored accommodation before local authorities had been able to take any action or carry out any checks. This created a significant risk to both the guest and sponsor families. However, Government explicitly recognised that this was a consequence of the scheme and considered that in the circumstances of a humanitarian crisis this was an acceptable risk. Birmingham City Council sought to minimise the risk and prioritised the safety of guests including children. Good management of the data was considered to be essential for this purpose and to the effective overall management of our response.
19. On 6th September 2022, Cabinet approved resource proposals for the Ukraine programme, including the allocation of £330,000 plus VAT of funding for PwC to further develop a case management and reporting system.
20. The paid work that PwC undertook built on substantial pro bono support they already provided to help the Council build a digital solution to capture, store and use data relating to Ukrainians guests and hosts. The purpose of the PwC work was to allow timely understanding by the Council of the situation in the City, facilitate effective decision making and to support contract management of service providers and delivery of services to hosts and guests, including safeguarding services.

21. The scale and volume of guests arriving and sponsors coming on board meant there was a significant amount of data that needed to be managed. Activity was initially spread across at least six different Council services (BCC contact centre, adult social care, finance, HR, Birmingham's Children's Trust). This meant data being maintained, shared, and updated in multiple places, increasing administrative resources and costs, and making the data harder to use. The tool that PwC started to develop through their pro bono engagement meant that the data could be securely contained in one place and accessed appropriately by the relevant services.
22. At the end of their six-week pro bono engagement, PwC had built up a unique cross-service understanding of the requirements for the Council's approach to the Ukraine response. From this they built the framework of a case management system and reporting tool, which now provides insights on how the Council is managing safeguarding risks, performing against Central Government requirements², as well as providing a 'live' view as to where Ukrainian families/individuals are arriving in Birmingham, and facilitating some key needs (e.g., access to immediate cash resources for guests on arrival, and regular thank you payments to hosts). This was seen as being the most cost effective and efficient means for the Council to be able to maintain its response to the Ukraine crisis.

Image: Dashboard excerpt showing arrived guests in Birmingham by ward (as of January 15th 2023)



23. The tool plays a key role in supporting safeguarding requirements, allowing a detailed view of progress with safeguarding checks³ and helping to ensure these are prioritised based on the arrival status of the guests and an assessment of risk. This has also enabled the Council to fail multiple sponsors that have not met these requirements, ahead of their Ukrainian guests arriving. It allows a mapping at local level of where checks are still outstanding, helping to focus attention on key risks to children and vulnerable adults.

² [Homes for Ukraine: guidance for councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils)

³ The safeguarding checks includes a Children's Advice and Support Service, Disclosure and Barring Check and pre arrival home check

24. The tool is also a key operational tool that is being used by Refugee Action and its partners. It manages and also monitors the distribution of the early support payment of £200 for every guest and signals where payments are outstanding. It similarly supports the monthly £350 thank you payment to hosts (now topped up with additional resources of at least £150 per month). Having this tool has also meant the Council has been able to swiftly automate new processes – such as the introduction of free three months travel passes to all guests on the Home for Ukraine Scheme. Within three weeks of the beginning of this we had distributed more than 300 bus passes.
25. PwC's contract finished on the 16th September 2022, and the work has transferred to the relevant Council teams. There are no related ongoing payments to PwC. The tool continues to generate value and provide an up-to-date view of key information relating to the programme of Ukraine work. Our intention is to build from this work with Ukrainian arrivals towards a better approach for all refugees in Birmingham.

C. REFUGEE ACTION (RA) CONTRACT

26. In the earliest stages of the Ukraine crisis, we used staff from within the Council to conduct safety checks and perform other essential roles. However, this was unsustainable given that this relied on staff carrying out this work in addition to their existing full-time roles. As such we chose to act at pace to award a contract to a service provider. We did this in line with our procurement processes, and on the 26th April 2022 Cabinet were asked to approve a proposal to undertake single contract negotiations with Refugee Action to deliver resettlement support for sponsors and Ukrainian guests.
27. The contract was awarded under Single Contract Negotiation and Refugee Action is the lead provider and contract holder, with 2 sub-contractors (Refugee Migrant Centre and Spring Housing). The scope of the contract is to deliver refugee resettlement and support services to a maximum of 1,000 Ukraine guests (and their hosts) arriving in Birmingham under the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. This Refugee Action contract ends on the 31st of March 2024.
28. The contract was awarded to Refugee Action on the 6th June although formally signed in October 2022. A mobilisation plan was agreed with Refugee Action in May 2022 to cover the negotiation period and this plan was monitored through weekly meetings.
29. The Adult Social Care refugee and migration commissioning team are responsible for contract monitoring which is in line with existing Refugee resettlement contract and performance monitoring. The Refugee Action contract is monitored against 11 Key Performance themes and 41 Indicators. Performance is measured and triangulated using data, information and case studies provided by Refugee Action against KPI's, data extracted from the

refugee resettlement tool, as well as intelligence from stakeholders, concerns, complaints and issues raised with BCC officers.

30. Across the themes and indicators, Refugee Action are performing well in conducting pre arrival checks in a timely manner, and before guests have arrived at their sponsored accommodation. This means that safeguarding risks are being managed and Refugee Action are identifying and addressing safeguarding concerns. They have adopted a multiagency approach to reviewing and responding to cases of concern, which has prevented unsuitable sponsor applicants from joining the scheme, and swift action has been taken where there have been pre and post arrival safeguarding concerns.
31. Whilst Refugee Action are performing well on the processes that support the onboarding of hosts onto the scheme, there has been mixed performance against the provision of guest and host support. The immediate support offered to guests through the distribution of pre-payment cards, bus passes and SIM cards are all being done within the first week of the guest arriving. To date Refugee Action have issued 686 pre-payment cards, 101 bus passes and 343 SIM cards. By the 30th November, they had established contact and conducted in person visits to 577 guests. Through their caseworker model they have focused on building relationships directly with guests so that they can assess and support guests with their immediate and ongoing needs. However, unlike with other resettlement schemes, this is proving more challenging because many guests have and continue to establish relationships of trust, dependency and support with their hosts. In many cases hosts have voluntarily played a very significant and effective role in providing support which might otherwise be provided by public agencies or their contractors. This dynamic is a very novel part of the scheme, of which none of the participants including Refugee Action had any prior experience.
32. Whilst Refugee Action's early priorities have been focused on supporting guests to settle, the pace of support to sponsors has been much slower to be implemented. From October 2022, Refugee Action started to put in place more structured support for sponsors, albeit after many sponsors had already self-organised and/or garnered support from community groups, individuals and organisations. All sponsors are now being offered support and have the opportunity to engage through WhatsApp and email, although there are also many self-organised community-led communication groups in addition to this. Refugee Action are now engaged with community organisations to bolster the support being offered by them with over 75 in-person outreach sessions delivered for sponsors and guests from community venues.
33. Through case studies supplied by Refugee Action and direct correspondence from hosts, there are elements of the quality of guest/host support that are being discussed at the formal and informal contract meetings. However, there is a focus on establishing a more structured approach to gathering direct feedback from guests and hosts to support contract monitoring meetings going forward.
34. Since November 2022 monthly formal and informal contract monitoring has been initiated with the first formal contract monitoring on 7th December 2022. Monthly monitoring meetings will continue up to the beginning of April 2023 and may then move to quarterly KPI reporting.

Contract Monitoring

35. A phased Implementation plan was agreed with Refugee Action to support mobilisation and to ensure a staged transition from BCC delivery, minimising risk to the programme and disruption to guests and hosts. This commenced from 23rd May 2022 and was expected to take 6 weeks. The over-riding priority was to ensure guests arriving from Ukraine into Birmingham did so into safe environments and their immediate needs were met.
36. Unforeseen challenges of this novel scheme resulted in a more protracted transition period. This has enabled Refugee Action to scale up its capacity and skills, whilst adapting their previously tested refugee support response to the new scheme and emerging guidance, to utilise a new refugee resettlement tool, onboard sub-contractors, undertake wellbeing checks and re-matching at scale and pace, and responding to the requirements and expectations of hosts.
37. During the mobilisation phase BCC officers from the Refugee and Migration Team and Ukraine Response programme have held weekly meetings with Refugee Action to oversee the mobilisation plan; monitor progress against the milestones; review concerns /risks or issues that would impact delivery; modify the plan in light of new guidance and implement corrective action where this was required. The mobilisation plan has been fluid to allow for safe handover of distinct programmes of delivery.
38. Acknowledging the lengthy mobilisation, BCC commissioners re-negotiated the contract delivery tariff with RA. **Tariff 1** applied to the arrivals between March – June 2022 where BCC had led the programme delivery and **Tariff 2** For arrivals after June 2022. The tariff did not reflect any changes to the level and quality of service provision but has enabled commissioners to cover additional resource costs that were required to support delivery; secure additional resources to invest into the Ukraine programme and to have further funds to commission services that respond to other emerging needs. This approach is in line with the BCC refugee resettlement model for Afghan, Syrian and other refugee schemes, as is the overall size of the payment per refugee / guest.

Funding Model and payments

39. Refugee Action will receive:
- a. Tariff 1 - £4350 pp for 1-320 arrivals (March to June 2022)
 - b. Tariff 2 - £7251 pp for 321 – 1,000 arrivals (to 31st March 2023)
 - c. 50% of the tariff is payable on guest arrival and completion of 5 initial checks.
 - d. 50% tariff is payable after 6 months.

Mobilisation

40. **Phase one and Two** would facilitate Refugee Action having access to sponsor and guest data. Refugee Action were initially onboarded to using Share-point database that had been developed internally by BCC to respond to the data anomalies within the DLUHC foundry portal. Due to GDPR they were only able to access some parts of the BCC database until a Homes for Ukraine Data Sharing Agreement was in place. As Refugee Action were an existing provider of existing refugee resettlement agreements, they were approved to cover the onboarding period. There were challenges with Refugee Action getting to grips with this live database whilst simultaneously using their own internal systems and processes which was a capacity and technical shift for Refugee Action staff. At this time, Refugee Action were also recruiting new staff to oversee the contract delivery. Phase one of contract monitoring reflected the challenges and the novel aspect of this part of the mobilisation.
41. Refugee Action also led the operational delivery of priority areas identified by BCC Ukraine Response. This included issuing of £200 prepayment cards for new arrivals within set timeframes (to date Refugee Action have issued prepayment cards to 194 guest households which accounts for 686 guests, and these have been issued within an average of 4 working days), commencing post arrival checks on guests flagged for priority review who arrived between March-June 2022 and initiating accommodation checks on newly arriving guests where BCC had identified a concern. 293 guests' details were provided to Refugee Action to conduct post arrival visits. Completion of these checks within agreed timeframes (6 weeks) were monitored during the weekly meetings with Refugee Action.
42. With safeguarding the key priority, initial contact was made with guests and hosts who were sponsoring unaccompanied children, guests with special needs, families with young children or where pre-arrival checks had flagged a concern.
43. **Phase Three and Four** Refugee Action took on responsibility for providing emergency assistance where guest/sponsor relationships had broken down, provision of housing advice and assistance as well as re-matching. They were responsible for undertaking all new wellbeing checks on arrivals and initiating host support. Refugee Action initiated stakeholder engagement with Ukraine support groups (Moseley, Sutton, Centrala) and BVSC Engage for Ukraine. Some examples of specific support provided by Refugee Action include:
- a. Supported a guest to access sector specific training to enhance employment opportunities. L was a nurse for 25 years in Ukraine and is keen to get back into nursing. Refugee Action have referred her to specialised provider that have started supporting L in preparing for the required medical exams.
 - b. Supported a young person with integration. B had been struggling to adapt in the UK and missed her father and friends from Ukraine. Her mother advised that her daughter is only interested in dance classes, but she could not afford them. Refugee Action identified and negotiated free full-time tuition at a dance studio, which B has been attending since October.

This has helped her become more integrated and sociable with other children.

- c. Supported a family to bring over their pet. The family was eager to bring their dog from Ukraine into UK but was struggling with the process and the paperwork. Refugee Action supported the family in the end-to-end process; from finding a vet in Germany to support with the medical requirements of the dog; to completing the paperwork and obtaining a license APHA. Refugee Action also supported the family with advocacy to release the dog from quarantine and be united with the family.
- d. Supported the safe transition of a guest to another local authority by continuing wellbeing support. A case related to an individual with mental health concerns who left the host accommodation to secure work in a factory and lost touch as they moved to another local authority. Refugee Action tracked the client down to continue providing wellbeing support until the new LA picked this up.

44. **Phase 5** Complete delivery including data cleansing and CASS referrals. This will commence in April 2023.

D. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO HOST & GUEST CONCERNS

45. The scale and novel nature of the Homes for Ukraine scheme has meant that there have been many challenges to delivery, particularly in rapidly designing and implementing new processes. Perhaps the most striking innovation in the Homes for Ukraine scheme is the role of hosts – those local people who have voluntarily come forward to provide refuge for a Ukrainian guest. Hosts stepped into this role in an environment of great uncertainty, had a wide range of differing expectations about their role and the support they would receive, and have experienced a wide range of outcomes in terms of the nature of their guests and the challenges they have faced.
46. It is a remarkable strength of the Homes for Ukraine approach that guests have willing hosts who often act as their advocates, help them navigate their new environment, and facilitate access to essential services and resources. This is in contrast to many other refugees, migrants and asylum seekers who arrive under different arrangements. The council has sought to respond to the needs of hosts in a challenging and fast-moving environment.
47. Over the course of the previous nine months, the following challenges have been faced:

New financial processes and payments for guests and hosts

48. As Ukrainian guests started to arrive at the end of March 2022 there was not an established payment mechanism that enabled the Council to easily roll out the £200 initial payments to guests. The Council had recently adopted a new

payment system, which made it difficult to pay individuals directly. The £200 payments were essential to arrivals having access to immediate cash, and we quickly started to receive concerns from hosts about the delay in payments. In early April, to avoid any significant delay Refugee Action, through the vehicle of an existing resettlement contract arrangement (Afghan / Syrian resettlement) started to roll out prepayment cards directly to guests that had arrived and were continuing to arrive.

49. Similar issues surrounding payment mechanisms also applied to the monthly sponsor (host) 'thank you' payments. By May 2022, some hosts were beginning to experience the financial strain of adding to their households. A solution was identified through the adult social care system, CareFirst, which would mean an automated and enduring payment solution. However, this did require some configuration/development work so that sponsors data could be maintained separately from any adult social care records. Whilst this was set up, off-system payments through Oracle were made at the end of June which included any backdated payments. The CareFirst 'thank you' payments went live at the end of July and is still managing the monthly Sponsor payments.
50. Whilst these system issues were one facet of the delay in sponsor 'thank you' payments, guidance from Central Government changed at the end of May 2022, which related to the requirements needed for local authorities to onboard and pay a sponsor. As well as successfully clearing any pre-arrival checks, the post arrival wellbeing visit became a 'new' prerequisite to enable payment.
51. Host payments are now routinely made at the beginning of each month basis, in arrears, and this is monitored through the dashboard.

Resource intensive/face to face checks

52. Prior to June 2022, the Council had resources from Birmingham Children's Trust and the Contact Centre that could focus on onboarding and conducting pre-arrival/initial checks on sponsors. There was limited resource that could be pivoted to conduct post arrival visits without impacting a critical service to other vulnerable residents. Therefore, this was deemed as a first priority for the commissioned provider, Refugee Action, to get to grips with. In the interim, Birmingham Children's Trust were on hand to support any urgent/high risk cases. In early June, the Council started to receive challenges and concerns about the lack of face-to-face visits. Refugee Action began to conduct post arrival visits and based on the 150-household backlog (293 guests), took a risk-based approach to conducting visits for e.g., identifying those that had arrived with children and vulnerable adults.

Community Organisation involvement

53. During the timeline it took to agree and onboard the commissioned provider, Refugee Action, community organisations were actively supporting Ukraine arrivals in a range of ways i.e., helping arrivals with practical elements like food/clothes shopping through to helping them apply for benefits. Community organisations began to voice concerns about their capacity to maintain support at the scale required without any additional resources from the Council.

54. By the end of May, there was a growing consensus that their level of involvement was unsustainable. In response to this, the Council announced a grant scheme for organisations supporting Ukraine guests and sponsors. The grants awarded enabled support to be provided across a range of areas stemming from employment support, low level mental health therapies as well as support to hosts. The scheme made 14 grants awards to 9 organisations, to a value of £270,000.
55. Through community organisations' extensive engagement with guests, they started to raise the issue of travel as one of the key issues that was impacting Ukrainian arrivals to successfully begin to settle. Through support from National Express, the Council secured funding to launch free 12-week bus passes for Homes for Ukraine and Family Visa Scheme arrivals. Through the volume and demographic data that was held by the Council, National Express were able to financially profile the costs, which enabled them to confirm the offer. The first phase for Homes for Ukraine was launched on the 6th September followed by the Family Visa Scheme in October. National Express are using this as a pilot to see if this can be extended to other resettlement schemes.

Direct engagement with community groups and hosts, emerging issues

56. Since September 2022, BCC has proactively sought to build and sustain relationships with community organisations that are offering support to Ukrainian arrivals, to get a more holistic view of the ongoing needs of the community. The programme has created a small stakeholder group which currently includes key community organisations alongside a number of hosts. The group met for the first time in November and developed a shared action plan. Within the plan, the following priorities have been identified as immediate areas of action that benefit Ukrainian families and have a significant positive impact on their ability to settle in the City:
- a. Improving the communication channels and signposting to support
 - b. Finalising a housing move approach and looking at employment pathways
 - c. Provision of ESOL
57. One of the first actions that has been driven forward by the group has been to support the operational design of the £3-4000 move on fund that was announced by the Council in November 2022, to support Ukrainian households move on from hosting arrangements to their own. The group have devised the claims process and communication approach to rolling out the funds. The first phase of roll out begun at the start of the year and has initially targeted guests that have recently moved on from hosting arrangements and those that are in the process of moving on. The Council has made one full payment of the move on fund to support a guest moving on to private rented accommodation and is processing three more payments as of 18th January 2023. We are continuing to roll out and this offer will be available to all guests.

58. As well as engaging organisations, the programme has also started to directly engage with hosts (and has plans to do so with guests). In December 2022, the Council hosted two events for sponsors – one face to face and one virtual - to listen to their experiences of hosting. The events were attended by approximately 85 hosts, who provided a wide range of experience and views about their sponsorship arrangements. There were sponsors that had signed up to the scheme and had very little knowledge and/or no expectation about accessing support and wanted to provide this themselves; whereas there were others that solely saw their role as providing accommodation and expected the wraparound support to their guest would be provided by the Council or elsewhere. Some hosts have had guests that required quite intensive support, whilst others have had guests that are either well-resourced or almost completely self-sufficient. The range of experience and expectations was very diverse. However, like the community organisations, they raised the same priorities in relation to guest's needs. This has provided validation to the priorities being addressed in the action plan.

E. EVOLVING POLICY AND FUTURE LANDSCAPE

59. The Council is trying to provide a higher level of support to Ukrainian refugees than for any previous group of arrivals. It is doing this in a new way with much greater reliance on the generosity and efforts of private citizens: as hosts; through community and voluntary organisations; and also through private individuals who have voluntarily chosen to act as brokers and provide support to host and guest families. Homes for Ukraine sponsors have become a strong advocate for their guests and are challenging parts of the system and reframing expectations about the level and intensity of support that should be provided to refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.
60. This has come at a time when the Council needs to refresh its City of Sanctuary strategy. Therefore, the following lessons from this programme will help to inform this approach:
- a. The Ukraine response has shown that an inter-agency response and capacity is required for medium- to long-term resettlement programmes, beyond the traditional emergency planning arrangements to ensure that emerging needs can be anticipated and met.
 - b. The Council's programme and data management (including the resourcing of a single online tool) have been essential to meeting the scale of the challenge and has helped to leverage new investments and initiatives such as the free bus travel and approach to guests moving on to independent accommodation.
 - c. Establishing good community engagement and partnership working with the voluntary and community sector from the outset will help to provide an enhanced view of needs. It will also maintain confidence and trust through periods of uncertainty.

- d. Practical data/systems/technology capabilities have an impact on the Council's capacity to respond to crisis/rapid events - for example having in place a platform to make payments at scale and direct to residents.
 - e. There is an ongoing challenge responding to public expectations, where high-level national announcements run ahead of the issuing of any detailed guidance and direction.
61. It is important that given the novel nature of this resettlement approach, the Council draws on any lessons learnt to inform the future approach to resettlements and seeks to apply this in so far as it is possible across the board to all refugee groups. However, Homes for Ukraine provides specific national funding for arrivals under this scheme which is not available for other refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. Similarly, the Homes for Ukraine scheme provides significant data on the individuals who are arriving, which facilitates better service provision and support. Again, this data is not available to the council for other arrivals, including for those Ukrainian arrivals under the Family Visa scheme. As well as seeking to apply the lessons of the Ukraine programme locally across the board, there remains a strong need to advocate nationally for equitable treatment and funding of all refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, regardless of their country of origin and entry route.
