

SUBJECT:	COUNTY OF SANCTUARY: HOMES FOR UKRAINE
MEETING:	INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION – Cllr Angela Sandles
DATE:	26TH FEBRUARY 2025
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To confirm support arrangements for Ukrainians living in the Monmouthshire as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, following changes to the national arrangements for funding and visas.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the council introduces a discretionary £150 per month 'top up' to encourage local households hosting Ukrainian families under the Homes for Ukraine scheme to continue to provide this support.
- 2.2 To enable the use of the Homes for Ukraine budget reserve, which was established using tariff payments received when families first arrived in the UK, to be used for this purpose.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the UK has offered sanctuary to nearly 300,000 Ukrainians. The residents and voluntary groups of Monmouthshire have played a significant role, housing more than a hundred families under the Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme. The Council also played a significant role, initially providing accommodation and support as part of the Welsh Government 'Super Sponsor' scheme, and more recently with day-to-day support and guidance.
- 3.2 There are a number of changes to the various schemes and support arrangements in place nationally.

Visa Extensions

- 3.3 Homes for Ukraine scheme visas were initially granted for three years. The UK Government has allowed existing Ukraine scheme visa holders to be able to apply for permission to remain in the UK for an additional 18 months under a new Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme (UPE). This opened to applicants on 4th February with people being contacted directly by the UK Government to advise on this matter.
- 3.4 A Ukrainian national, or the family member of a Ukrainian national, living in the UK with existing permission on one of the Ukraine schemes, may be eligible to apply for this visa enabling them to continue living in the UK for up to a further 18 months. It will be free to apply to continue to live, work and study in the UK and access public funds. At present there are 63 Ukrainian households hosted in Monmouthshire, with a further 61 households living independently in rented accommodation.
- 3.5 Applications must be made before the current visa permission expires. However, applicants are advised to apply only once their current visa has 28 days or less remaining until it expires. If people apply early, the UK Government has advised that it may reject the application and ask the person to re-apply at a later date. If applicants are unsure when their visa expires they can sign into their UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account via www.gov.uk. The council's Ukraine Support team are able to provide assistance in completing the application form and with translations, but are unable to offer immigration advice or submit an application on someone else's behalf.

Thank You Payment for Hosts

- 3.6 When an HfU guest moves onto the new extension UPE visa, hosts will need to make a new claim to enable their Thank You payment to continue. The UK Government will fund this at a rate of £350 per month. This has previously been made at the higher of £500 – with some differences locally, regionally and nationally.
- 3.7 With standard payments reverting to £350 it is proposed that MCC creates a discretionary top up of £150 per month for hosts. This recognises the particular challenges in the local housing market and the vital role that local hosts have played in making this scheme work. We presently have just under 60 hosting arrangements in place and if these were to end it would create a significant burden and cost pressure on homeless budgets, potentially exceeding the cost of this discretionary scheme. It has been identified via discussions with other authorities in Wales via the WLGA hosted Strategic Migration Partnership, that a number are likely to maintain funding at the higher level.

This payment would be administered on a discretionary basis, upon application of the host. The payment will not be means tested, as per our existing practice with our present 'Thank You' payment top up.

Sponsorship of eligible children by parent / guardians

- 3.8 The UK Government has amended the sponsorship eligibility criteria under the HfU scheme to enable a parent or legal guardian to sponsor their child/ren to join them in the UK. They do not need to have settled status to sponsor their child and must offer accommodation for the duration of their child's visa. This change took effect on 31st January. The accommodation requirement means that we do not anticipate this having a material effect on housing in Monmouthshire. However, local authorities still need to carry out an accommodation suitability check and an in-person welfare visit, after the child arrives in the UK so could be some additional pressure on staffing.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 Monmouthshire can rightly be proud of the support this county and its communities have offered to those fleeing war and persecution. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine many hundreds of people have found a welcome here, some in the short term, in the welcome centre we operated on behalf of Welsh Government, and others who have stayed longer, living, working, studying and contributing to the economy, culture and social fabric of our place.
- 4.2 The impact assessment has identified the positive effect that migration has on the economy and the potential for improved outcomes for some groups who will have fled war. It recognises that there are pressures on local housing and identifies that taking efforts to maintain hosting arrangements is the most effective way to mitigate additional pressure being placed on the limited supply of affordable housing in the county.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The following options were considered:
Option 1 – Pay 'Thank You' payments at the rate of £350 per month funded by the UK Government. As highlighted in para 3.7 this creates a risk that hosting arrangements could come to an end at an earlier date placing additional pressure on an already limited supply of affordable housing, with any resulting homeless duty falling on the local authority.

Option 2 – Pay ‘Thank You’ payments at a flat rate of £500 to all hosts to mitigate the risk identified above

Option 3 – Pay ‘Thank You’ payments at the standard rate of £350, with the option of a £150 top up when requested by hosts, to reflect the challenges and costs associated with the local housing situation in Monmouthshire. This would have the advantage of a ‘standard’ payment which is consistent with the position in most of the UK. It could also result in lower costs as some hosts may choose not to apply for the discretionary uplift in the tariff.

Option 3 was selected as the preferred option

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 This will be assessed on the basis of:

- Continuation of hosting placements with a similar level of attrition as seen for the past 18 months.
- The level of homeless applications from households who have previously been hosted under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

7. REASONS:

7.1 To ensure that those who have fled the war in Ukraine, continue to be supported for the duration of their visa and to provide appropriate financial support and guidance to local families who are generously continuing to offer support under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 The UK government provides funding to councils at a rate of £5,900 per Homes for Ukraine Scheme arrival in their first year in the UK (£10,500 for eligible minors). In addition to this MCC receives funding of £350 per host family per month which is passed directly to the host family in the form of a thank you payment. This is passed directly to them.

8.2 The discretionary top up payment will cost a maximum of £153,900 if all families take it up and continue arrangements for the full eighteen months. This will be funded from the tariff received from the UK Government when families first arrived in the UK. This money has been set aside for this purpose. It has not come from the council general fund and could not be used for other purposes.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team
Assistant Head of Finance (Revenue, Systems and Exchequer)

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

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