

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	To make additional payments to Homes for Ukraine sponsors to support them with the increased cost of living and to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst Ukrainian guests.
Date of decision:	22.03.23
Decision maker:	Acting Service Director, Community Wellbeing
Authority for delegated decision:	The Support for Ukraine Cabinet decision made in October 2022 approved that authority is delegated to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing to take all operational and budgetary decisions in relation to their proposals and the implementation, including the use of contingency sums and budget variations within the overall approved budget.
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	<p>Herefordshire residents acting as hosts / sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme have played a key role in the county's response to supporting Ukrainians seeking refuge in the UK. Feedback on the support needs of the hosts in their sponsorship role has been received from a range of stakeholders including the Diocese, St Peter and St James, Housing Solutions and the Homes for Ukraine Operational Team. Highlighted in this feedback was the impact on the sponsor of the increased cost of living when hosting Ukrainian guests.</p> <p>As a result, a previous Record of Officer Decision taken on 2nd December 2022, enabled the Council to top up the government thank you payments to hosts over the winter period (November 22 to March 23) by an additional £350 per month in recognition of increased cost of living. Feedback received to date indicates that this has been very much appreciated, with hosts saying it is making a real difference.</p> <p>Research into the approaches that other local authorities have taken in making additional / cost of living payments to sponsors has also been taken into consideration.</p>
Decision made:	Herefordshire Council will make monthly top up payments as required to each sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine scheme so that they receive £500 thank you payment in total per month. This will come into effect from 01.04.23 for all new sponsors and after the five-month period of increased payments for existing sponsors (agreed through Record of Officer Decision on 02.12.22).
Reasons for decision:	<p>As of the 28th February 2023, 593 Ukrainian guests have arrived in Herefordshire and there are 201 active sponsors.</p> <p>On 14.12.22, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced that further to its £350 thank you payment to hosts in the first twelve months of a guest's stay, Homes for Ukraine hosts would receive £500 a month as a 'thank you' for ongoing support during the Ukrainian's second year of sponsorship. This was in recognition of the continued support by hosts, especially during a period of the rising cost-of-living.</p> <p>Herefordshire Council has decided that all hosts will receive £500 not just</p>

	<p>those who have been housing Homes for Ukraine guests in the UK for one year or more. This Herefordshire Council payment is in addition to the Government’s payments to sponsors.</p> <p>There is still a significant unmet need for hosts / sponsors with Ukrainian households seeking refuge in the UK unable to apply for visas without an identified sponsor. The increased thank you payment will encourage additional interest in becoming a sponsor as well as helping existing sponsorship arrangements to continue. It is believed that this will continue to help reduce the demand on temporary accommodation and homelessness services. The numbers of Ukrainian families in temporary accommodation is stabilizing (currently 18 Ukrainian families). As well as reducing the risk of homelessness, sustaining the relationships between guests and sponsors also supports community integration as guests become more imbedded in the local community over time and children benefit from a sustained period in local schools etc.</p> <p>A desk top bench marking process has been carried out to establish what other local authorities are doing since the Government’s announcement of 14.12.22. The proposal to ensure that all sponsors receive a minimum of £500 is in line with most recent decisions made, including by Gloucestershire, Hampshire, East Devon and Stockport.</p> <p>Top up payments of £150 will be made to all new sponsors eligible for government thank you payments from 01.04.23 as well as all existing sponsors after the five month period of increased payments of £350 which was previously agreed by a Record of Officer Decision on 02.12.22. Payments will be made through the Homes for Ukraine operational team. The team already manage the thank you payments to hosts. This decision will be reviewed no later than 31.03.24.</p>
<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p>It is difficult to estimate the cost of the increase in payment, due to two key variables: the length of time guests stay with sponsors and the number of new sponsors hosting Ukrainian guests coming from abroad. An estimate of the cost in 2023/24 is as follows: £150,000 as the cost of existing sponsors continuing to sponsor their guests for the full year to March 2024 together with an additional cost of £51,000 for new sponsors during the course of 2023/4. This would be a total of £201,000 for 2023/4. The costs will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and a decision taken before 31.03.24 on any continuation of the scheme. All of this cost will be met by funding provided by the Government to facilitate and support the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme outlined below.</p> <p>The Government has agreed to pay local authorities £10,500 per person arriving under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme before 31.12.22. From 01.01.23 the figure has reduced to £5,900 per person. Funding for these top up payments will be paid for out of this tariff. The thank you payment from government to sponsors is separately funded and does not come from the tariff payment.</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and</p>	<p>Not to make an additional payment to sponsors. This option is not recommended as it is increasingly clear that being able to offer an increased thank you payment helps hosts meeting cost of living pressures,</p>

rejected:	which is a consideration for many on whether they offer their accommodation to host Ukrainians. If sponsors are ending sponsorship arrangements on the basis that they can't afford to continue to host their Ukrainian guests it is possible that the guests will need to access homelessness services. This will put pressure on the council's in-county supply of temporary accommodation and may mean that families have to move out of county, away from their schools and the community that they have begun to establish themselves in.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	None.

Signed..... Date:

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