

# SEVENOAKS DISTRICT - HOMES FOR UKRAINE AND ASYLUM SEEKER DISPERSAL UPDATE

Housing and Health Advisory Committee – 12 September 2023

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer People and Places

**Status:** For information

**Key Decision:** No

**Executive Summary:**

This report provides an update on the progress of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and an overview of the changes in the delivery of Asylum Seeker Dispersal Areas and Refugee Resettlement Schemes.

**This report supports the Key Aim of:** Housing Strategy 2022-2027

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Perry Cole

**Contact Officer:** Alison Simmons, Head of Housing, Extension 7272

**Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:**

To note the contents of the report and information provided on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and an overview of the changes in the delivery of Asylum Seeker Dispersal Areas and Refugee Resettlement Schemes.

**Reason for recommendation:**

The report is for information only.

## Introduction

- 1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and an overview of the changes in the delivery of Asylum Seeker Dispersal Areas and Refugee Resettlement Schemes.

## Homes for Ukraine

- 2 The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022. The Sevenoaks District received 555 host applications with 471 guests arriving in the District. Kent County Council have been leading on the scheme. The Hosts that have come forward have offered their accommodation for a period of at least 6 months, received a thank you payment and have found their own guest. The Hosts are expected to support their guests to adjust the life in the UK.

- 3 The Homeless Legislation and Homeless Code of Guidance was amended to enable guests to make applications to the Council when either their relationship with their host has broken down or their 6 month period was coming to an end and the host was no longer able to accommodate.
- 4 The Council held events with guests and hosts in March 2023 to discuss the next steps, the process for making a homeless application and the housing options and support available to them.
- 5 The guests have had 3 housing options to consider when they have required alternative accommodation, details are included in the table below:

Option 1 - Rematch to a new host	Option 2 - Sole occupancy	Option 3 - Shared accommodation
<p>The Council have been working with Kent County Council to find a suitable rematch with a new host, however this route has slowed down with fewer hosts coming forward with offers of accommodation.</p> <p>The new host will be located in Kent although there is no guarantee this will be within the Sevenoaks District and guest will be offered 1 rematch.</p>	<p>Working with couples and families to find suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector.</p> <p>The Council provide Rent Deposit and Rent in Advance to help secure accommodation.</p> <p>The accommodation may be in the Sevenoaks District or out of the District.</p> <p>Guests are made 1 offer of suitable and affordable accommodation</p>	<p>Working with single adults to find suitable and affordable accommodation in a shared house.</p> <p>The Council provide Rent Deposit and Rent in Advance to help secure accommodation.</p> <p>The accommodation may be in the Sevenoaks District or out of the District.</p> <p>Guests are made 1 offer of suitable and affordable accommodation</p>

- 6 The Council have received 107 homeless applications from all the Ukrainian Refugee Schemes since February 2022 of which 41 homeless duties have been accepted, 5 households have been placed into temporary accommodation and 27 of the guests have been successfully accommodated in the private rented sector.
- 7 The Council have received £2,802,620 capital funding towards the provision of 16 units of accommodation for Homes for Ukraine and 1 x 4 bedroom unit for the Afghan Scheme through the Local Authority Housing Funding. To date 6 units for Homes for Ukraine have been delivered and guests have been supported to move into their new accommodation. The remainder of the units will be delivered by the end of the financial year.

- 8 The Government have provided £150 million of UK wide funding that has been made available to local authorities and devolved administrations for this financial year to ensure that Ukrainian guests can be supported to move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness. The funding has been allocated across the UK in relation to the proportion of Homes for Ukraine arrivals in each part of the UK, with England receiving about £109 million.
- 9 Sevenoaks have received £297,898 and this will be prioritised for supporting our Ukrainian guests into sustainable accommodation, for example through access to the private rental sector, supporting employment access, and facilitating ongoing sponsorship into guests' second year.

### **Asylum Seeker Dispersal**

- 10 The Government has introduced a new approach to Asylum Seeker dispersal where all authorities are expected to take part, to ensure a fairer distribution nationally.
- 11 In the South East there are 8,497 Asylum Seekers, 2,140 in Dispersal and 6,357 in Contingency Accommodation. The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration has been working with regional partners to collectively understand, solve problems collaboratively, and ultimately drive the delivery of regional/national plans.
- 12 The South East sub-regions have been divided and agreed as follows:
  - Hampshire Isle of Wight
  - Kent
  - Surrey and Sussex
  - Thames Valley
- 13 A place based approach has been agreed in principle which recognises all migration schemes with the assurances that no one should be made homeless through asylum procurement. A 'fair allocation' model has been developed by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration, based on each Local Authorities percentage share of the South East population.
- 14 As part of the 'fair allocation' model, Sevenoaks District could be allocated 86 asylum seekers between now and 31 December 2023. The South East Strategic Partnership has submitted its 'fair allocation' model for the South East to the Home Office for approval.
- 15 The Council does not have to acquire or pay for properties to house asylum seekers. The Home Office has appointed Clearsprings to identify and secure private rented accommodation in the South East for asylum seekers.
- 16 A Hot Mapping exercise will be undertaken by Clearsprings to find private rented accommodation across the South East, including Sevenoaks District (eg

the 86 asylum seekers), if 'fair share' allocation model is approved by the Home Office.

- 17 Clearsprings will meet with key stakeholders from the Local Authority before procurement begins to understand which areas are preferred and which are definite no go areas. Whilst sourcing properties, Clearsprings will consider:
  - Community cohesion, anti-social behaviour, racial tensions.
  - Local services – transport links, GPs etc.
  - Indication of housing market activity in the area.
  - Ensuring Housing Act 2004 Regulations and HMO Regulations are adhered to.
  - Integration of Asylum Seekers into the area.
  - Dispersal ratio levels.
- 18 Once a property has been identified by Clearsprings they will undertake consultation through submission of a Property Consultation Check to a named contact at the Council, Kent Police etc. Clearsprings must ensure good quality accommodation and services from landlords, with procurement activity that supports and reflects the Council's position on sustainable communities, environmental issues, equal opportunities, and diversity.
- 19 Once a property is made 'live' and a Service User has moved in, they are managed by Clearsprings field teams who undertake regular welfare visits and property inspections.
- 20 The Home Office need to find a solution for housing asylum seekers whether the fair allocation model is approved, there will be a requirement for the District to accommodate asylum seekers. The 86 asylum seekers quota is not currently imposed on Sevenoaks District Council, but it has been put forward to Home Office as part of a South East 'fair allocation' proposal.
- 21 If the 'fair allocation' proposal is not accepted by the Home Office, we may risk Home Office imposing a higher allocation of asylum seekers in the South East, including the Sevenoaks District. The risks for the Council:
  - The availability of affordable private rented accommodation in our district, which we use for our 'general' homeless, will be greatly diminished with the increase competition from the packages offered to Landlords by the Home Office, which will result in households staying in temporary accommodation for longer.
  - The potential increase in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and the resources required to process licences and the concerns over the announcement that HMOs for asylum seekers may not require licensing could lead to poor quality accommodation in the District.
  - Poor 'after care' by Clearsprings to its tenants in the district, increase in anti-social behaviour, community tensions and the impact on local services.

- Risk of homelessness increasing after 5 year lease arrangement ends, if existing renting arrangement is not sustainable for tenants.

## **Resettlement Schemes**

22 In addition to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and Asylum Dispersal there are several other refugee resettlement schemes detailed below:

### *Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme*

- 23 In October 2015, it was agreed that Kent County Council would coordinate and commission a service and work in partnership with the Kent district councils to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS). The providers work closely with the district council, Kent County Council, other agencies, and the voluntary sector to provide all the necessary support to the families.
- 24 In July 2017, Cabinet approved the decision for the Council to participate in the SVPRS programme in Kent, 5 Syrian families have been resettled into properties in the District. The families have been supported by the Kent County Council commissioned provider and Sevenoaks Welcome Refugees, a local voluntary sector organisation.

### *UK Resettlement*

- 25 In June 2019 the Government announced the launch of the UK Resettlement a second report was taken to Cabinet in April 2020 to adopt the updated Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy. This enables the Council to participate in the scheme when suitable and affordable properties are identified (in the same way as the SVPRS).
- 26 The Policy details how the Council will work closely with local partners including Kent County Council and the contracted support provider. Properties put forward for the scheme will be considered on a case by case basis and approved under the Policy, once the property has been assessed for its affordability and suitability for the scheme, in consultation with Kent County Council and the local health/support providers

### *Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme*

- 27 In 2022 the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) were launched.
- 28 The ARAP Scheme provides for the relocation of eligible people who worked for the UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan along with their dependents. Following quarantine, people are being temporarily housed in 'holding hotels' until Local Authority accommodation can be sourced. Households have

Indefinite Leave to Remain, recourse to public funds and immediate right to work. Families are supported for a period 3 years

- 29 The ACRS focus to resettle 20,000 (5,000 in first year) and the scheme prioritises women and girls at risk, members of minority groups at risk, people who assisted UK efforts in Afghanistan. Households have Indefinite Leave to Remain, recourse to public funds and immediate right to work. Families are supported for a period 3 years. The only real difference between the two schemes is the eligibility criteria

### *Bridging Hotels Dispersal*

- 30 Nationally there were approximately 7 to 8,000 households in Afghan bridging hotels and this is not suitable for long term accommodation and the Government have announced that they are all to be closed by the end of August 2023. Some of the households may find their own properties in Kent under the "Find Your Own Property" route and Kent County Council would then be asked to support them.
- 31 There are 3 Bridging Hotels in Kent, 1 in Ashford and 2 in Canterbury and all residents have been served with notices. The Home Office have advised that households can make a homeless application to any Local Authority and that their Bridging Hotel does not give a local connection.
- 32 The households in the Bridging Hotels are offered a maximum of two housing offers, if the accommodation is refused the Home Office will consider the reasons and decide whether it is a valid refusal and will be issued with a 56 day Notice to leave the Bridging Hotel.
- 33 Additional funding has been made available to the Local Authority that the household approaches to make their homeless application. Local Authorities can claim a fixed tariff of £9,150 per household to help meet staff and administration costs for processing and accepting a homeless duty.
- 34 In addition, there are approximately 6,000 or so Afghans who qualify for resettlement under ARAP or ACRS but who are currently in third countries like Pakistan. They will only be brought to the UK now if Local Authorities find a property for them or if they find their own properties and we agree to support them.

### *Sudan Scheme*

- 35 In December 2022, 2,000 people were evacuated from Sudan. Legislative changes have been made to provide support to eligible individuals arriving from Sudan. Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, exempt from the habitual residence test for access to income based benefits including:
- Universal Credit,

- Disability and carer benefits
- Child Benefit

36 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) laid separate parallel regulations to exempt those from the habitual residence test for access homelessness assistance and housing support. The Homelessness Code of Guidance and Social Housing Allocations Guidance have been amended to reflect these changes.

### **Other options Considered and/or rejected**

The Council are delivering services to meet the requirements of the Government funded Refugee and Asylum Dispersal Schemes and in collaboration with Kent County Council.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

The Council are delivering services to meet the requirements of the Government funded Refugee and Asylum Dispersal Schemes and in collaboration with Kent County Council.

#### Resource (non financial)

None

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

None

#### Equality Assessment

Not applicable

#### Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

### **Conclusions**

For the Committee to note the report.

**Appendices**

Not applicable

**Background Papers**

**Sarah Robson**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People and Places**