

Report to: **Hub Committee**
Date: **5 March 2024**
Title: **Home for Ukraine Scheme and Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme**
Portfolio Area: **Cllr Mark Renders**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained:

Date next steps can be taken: Upon the expiry of the Call-in period – Thursday, 14 March

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RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Hub Committee:

- 1. note the positive progress of the Council's participation in the resettlement schemes;**
- 2. note the successful conclusion of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF1 and 2) initiative, delivering a total of 8 new properties in Okehampton and Tavistock; and**
- 3. agree to contribute £30,000 to provide 5 Affordable Homes at Pilchers Field, Crapstone from identified s106 contributions.**

1. Executive summary

1.1 Resettlement

This report provides an overview of how West Devon Borough Council are continuing to respond to the needs of people escaping the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict in Afghanistan. It also confirms our role in delivering the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Programme (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) schemes to assist people settling in the Borough.

- 1.2 To date we have welcomed 195 Ukrainians to West Devon in 80 family groups and 16 Afghan nationals in 3 family groups.
- 1.3 The team are currently supporting 23 Ukrainian households that reside in host accommodation, 22 households in West Devon that reside in the private rental sector and 3 Afghan households.
- 1.4 A further 38 visas have been issued to Ukrainian nationals that have not yet travelled to West Devon.
- 1.5 Currently 3 properties acquired under LAHF 1 are occupied for Afghan Resettlement with one further offered to the Home Office and from March another 3 bedroom property acquired under LAHF 2 will be offered to the Home Office for Afghan Resettlement in accordance with the scheme obligations restrictions.
- 1.6 Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF 1 & 2)
The portfolio of properties acquired under the LAHF 1 scheme was completed in June 2023, consisting of five properties in Okehampton. Two properties under LAHF 2 completed in December 2023 with one remaining completion scheduled by March 2024
- 1.7 The total underspend compared with the original business cases across LAHF 1 and 2 funded via the Homes for Ukraine budget and Section 106 receipts is approximately £29,500.
- 1.8 All properties have 10-year NHBC warranties and EPC 'B' ratings.
- 1.9 Pilchers Field, Crapstone
The Abbeyfield Society, a specialist provider of older persons accommodation, obtained planning permission (0875/185/FUL) on the 22nd March 2023 for 5 additional, open market, 1 bed flats to their current housing scheme at Pilchers Field, Crapstone.
- 1.10 The Abbeyfield wish to provide these as Affordable Housing Additionality, utilising Strategic Partnership Funding through Homes England.
- 1.11 It is recommended that the Council contribute £30,000.00 from s106 contributions to enable the scheme to proceed.
- 1.12 Homes England are providing £645,450.00 as a grant to the Abbeyfield to convert these units from open market units to Social Rented homes for the elderly.
- 1.13 Provision of additional Social Housing meets the aims of the Housing Strategy and the actions within the Housing Crisis which was declared in February 2022.

2. Background

- 2.1 It is over 2 years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Responding to overwhelming public support the Government launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which opened for applications on the 18th of March 2022. The scheme operates via sponsorship for individuals or households fleeing from Ukraine who had named people in the UK willing to sponsor them for a minimum of 6 months. In reality, this was not through known acquaintances and friends, and most were arranged through social media pages, where willing sponsors could connect with potential guests and take the process through the visa application together. There have been other schemes such as the family sponsor scheme which have brought other people into West Devon however the involvement of the Council has been limited in most cases to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 2.2 As of the 23 January 2024, 282,000 visas have been issued nationally to Ukrainians, with 179,200 issued under the Homes For Ukraine scheme. There have been 2,104 arrivals in Devon under this scheme.
- 2.3 Devon Districts and the County Council have worked together on the scheme since March 2022 and continue to do so. Where other Councils have outsourced their support services, the Council has delivered an inhouse solution, working closely alongside other council services to offer a holistic service for both hosts and guests. The value for money the inhouse service has represented has meant that the Council could use Homes for Ukraine funding to contribute £545,000 to the business case for the purchase of properties under LAHF 1.
- 2.4 All Councils are concerned about placement breakdowns and the pressures this puts on housing advice teams with the availability of housing in acutely short supply. However a further advantage of an inhouse service is the join up between resettlement and housing, and as a result very few Ukrainian households have had placement breakdowns that resulted in a requirement for temporary accommodation.
- 2.5 The work of our hosts – extraordinary residents of West Devon, who opened their homes and shared their lives with people fleeing their country, leaving loved ones behind has been tireless and unwavering, without which West Devon would not have been able to welcome so many guests. It is important that their contribution receives the recognition it deserves.
- 2.6 The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) is for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles and may include an offer of relocation to the UK for those deemed eligible by the Ministry of Defence and who are deemed suitable for relocation by the Home Office. Afghan citizens who are eligible for

relocation to the UK under the ARAP may relocate with a partner, dependent children and additional family members who are also deemed eligible for relocation under the ARAP by the Ministry of Defence and suitable for relocation by the Home Office. The ARAP was launched on 1 April 2021 and remains open.

- 2.7 The UK formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 6 January 2022. The scheme prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law; and vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)
- 2.8 We have welcomed Afghan families to West Devon, and because of our established Homes for Ukraine resettlement team were able to support the arrivals rapidly and appropriately.

3. Support Implemented

- 3.1 Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, each individual arriving between the scheme launch and 31st December 2022 received funding of £10,500. The County retained £4,200 of this money with the remaining £6,300 available to District Authorities to fund activity to support the scheme. From 1st January 2023 the funding reduced to £5,900 per individual with County retaining £590 and £5,310 being made available to districts. This funding has so far been used to fund staff resource to undertake welcome visits and property checks, welcome payments, leisure passes and individual items such as car seats and transport, rent in advance, deposits, furniture, and employment support. The fund has also been used to support the Councils match funding of the properties purchased under the Local Authority Housing Fund 1 & 2.
- 3.2 The Council is responsible for issuing monthly payments to hosts for the support they provide to Ukrainian guests in our area. To ensure quick and efficient payment we have utilised systems deployed for the business support grants and automate the host thank you payment each month. This has assisted our hosts in accessing their payment without an overly bureaucratic process.
- 3.3 The team have provided support to individuals in claiming benefits, obtaining employment, sourcing childcare, support with education, and immigration enquiries.
- 3.4 The Afghan nationals arriving under the ARAP and ACRS schemes are eligible for funding of £20,520 over 3 years (or less if they relocate in that time). This funding is to include but not limited to support integration into UK life and the local communities including furnishings, employment support, English speaking lessons, support to claim income, register and attend medical appointments.

- 3.5 Children aged between 3 and 18 attract financial support for educational purposes in their first year that will be claimed by and given to the schools or colleges that support our guests.
- 3.6 The local NHS services can also claim additional support due to the guests in our areas and we will work with them to ensure they receive everything that is due.

4. Challenges

- 4.1 Hosts who signed up to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme were asked to commit to a period of at least 6 months. Placement breakdown is a significant risk, and it is important that the team remain vigilant and responsive to hosts and guests asking for help. We continue to avoid the need for temporary accommodation wherever possible and support to access other housing options prior to planned move ons.
- 4.2 A further challenge is around supporting guests into suitable accommodation. Along with the standard issues regarding finding accommodation our Ukrainian guests do not have credit histories, guarantors, or references from previous landlords. The team work with landlords and agents to support our guests into the private rental sector.
- 4.3 Supporting guests into employment that matches their qualifications, experience and knowledge. West Devon is an expensive area to reside in with high rents. The team work with outside organisation Odils to support guests with qualification recognition, job applications, interview training and ongoing job specific English language support.
- 4.4 Whilst initial arrivals have slowed, we still have a significant number of arrivals outstanding and continue to receive new guest notifications regularly that we will be required to support for at least 3 years from arrival – until 2027.
- 4.5 The first guests arrived in March 2022 and their stay in the UK was for an initial 3 year period. There is currently no information about what will happen to the scheme for those arrivals from March 2025 when their Visas will expire.

5. LAHF 1 & 2 (Local Authority Housing Fund)

- 5.1 The Hub in meetings of the 7th March and 19th September 2023 approved participation in the Governments LAHF 1 and 2 schemes. These are designed to provide housing for Homes for Ukraine guests, Afghan families in bridging hotels and local housing need.
- 5.2 The initial funding model was for the acquisition of 5 properties which was approved at the March Hub meeting and the properties subsequently acquired in Okehampton.

- 5.3 In September with the announcement of a second round of the LAHF, approval to purchase a further 3 properties was granted. Tavistock was identified as a preferred location for this scheme due to proximity of amenities, availability of public transport and opportunities for jobs and training.
- 5.4 The mix across the portfolio is as follows:
LAHF 1 - Okehampton:
2 x 2-bed houses
2 x 3-bed houses
1 x 4-bed house
LAHF 2 - Tavistock
1 x 2-bed coach house
2x 3-bed houses
- 5.5 On both developments commercial discounts were secured through negotiation, together with the inclusion of optional extras within the budget. These include carpet and vinyl throughout, free standing kitchen appliances and provision of EV cabling infrastructure to every property from the consumer unit to external box. In addition, charge units were provided and installed on several of the properties providing immediate capacity to charge electric vehicles.
- 5.6 The properties are built to a good quality standard, backed by a 10-year NHBC warranty and achieving high EPC ratings. This will provide good thermal insulation and lower energy bills for residents.
- 5.7 Both LAHF schemes have been delivered ahead of schedule. The Okehampton properties were completed and handed over in June 2023 and West Devon was one of the first Authorities to complete its pledge. 2 of the Tavistock properties were completed in December. The remaining 3-bed property is forecast to be completed by March 2024, meeting the LAHF 2 deadline.
- 5.8 Subject to minor adjustments for estimates of furniture costs, in aggregate the combined LAHF programme has been delivered £29,500 under-budget.

6. LAHF 1 & 2 funding

- 6.1 The expenditure incurred on both schemes was as set out in the Hub reports of March and September 2023. Both acquisition schemes were under budget with LAHF 1 underspend (£59,188) utilised on LAHF 2, where there was a further underspend of £16,651 which was not drawn down from S106 affordable housing contributions

7. Affordable housing for older persons (Pilchers Field, Crapstone)

- 7.1 The Abbeyfield are a Registered Housing Provider with charitable status. They currently own property across the UK and with schemes in Tavistock at Plymouth Road and at Pilchers Field in Crapstone.
- 7.2 The Abbeyfield applied for planning permission to provide an additional 5 units at their scheme at Pilchers Field. Planning reference 0874/18/FUL was granted. There was no requirement to provide Affordable Housing on this scheme as it was below the threshold in the Joint Local Plan.
- 7.3 The Abbeyfield have since approached West Devon Borough Council and Homes England for financial assistance to build these properties as Affordable Housing as the use of their Recycled Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) was not available.
- 7.4 Homes England have agreed to support the scheme, with grant of £129,090 per unit through the Strategic Partnership Fund. This is a total of £645,450 to make Open Market homes available for Social Rent.
- 7.5 The Council hold S106 Affordable housing contributions. It is recommended that £30,000 is used as a contribution to enable the 5 units of older persons accommodation to come forward. It is proposed to use the following sums:
- Beechfield Nursing Home - £16,000
Woodcroft House, Broadwoodkelly - £7,481.25
Land to the rear of Rowan Cottages - £6,518.75
- 7.6 The Abbeyfield have not committed to using Devon Home Choice on previous schemes in West Devon. Neither have the committed to using the Local Allocations Policy (LAP) when allocating their properties. As part of the approval to provide funding they have been asked to sign up to an agreement to advertise and allocate in accordance with Devon Home Choice and the LAP.
- 7.7 There may be challenges around the completion of the build of these properties due to the current situation with the development industry such as lack of labour and materials. This will be a risk to the Abbeyfield and not to the Council.

8. Options available and consideration of risk

- 8.1 That the Council continues to resource appropriately the Resettlement team and continues to take early intervention to prevent placement breakdown wherever possible and provide integration support to our arrivals.

8.2 That we continue to work as part of Team Devon on holistic solutions to placement breakdowns on a large scale for Ukrainian nationals.

9. Pilchers Field

9.1 The risk of not releasing the £30k from s106 funding could mean that the build goes ahead but that these properties are not allocated to applicants on the Devon Home Choice register.

9.2 If S106 funds are not allocated and spent there is a risk that these will be handed back to the developer who provided them if the time limit to spend these expires.

10. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	<p>The Council has made a commitment to the Homes for Ukraine and the ARAP and ACRS schemes, and it is an expectation of Government that we adhere to the scheme framework, and that funding is used to resource the support required to manage the scheme successfully.</p> <p>The Council has statutory duties under homelessness legislation which has been amended to include specifically people who are residing in England under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.</p> <p>The scheme at Pilchers meets the requirements of S106 agreements for spending of contributions in lieu of affordable housing.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		<p>The Council currently receive funding per guest as detailed above. It is expected that all expenditure associated with the schemes is accounted for through this funding.</p> <p>The scheme of 5 units will only be costing the council £6k per unit. This is a very small use of resource to increase the social housing units by 5 for older persons use. Wider financial implications will be an ease on the care budget as support can be accessed on site if required.</p>
Risk		<p>The Council has declared a Housing Crisis and recognised the significant difficulty in finding accommodation in the Borough. It is therefore a significant risk that rematching opportunities will</p>

		<p>not be found for placements that breakdown and the Council may be required to place in temporary accommodation for significant periods of time. Whilst the cost of this is one factor, there are other concerns including the challenges with finding temporary accommodation or rematch placements close to where people may have their children in school, have work or training requirements or receive support. It should not be forgotten that these are people who have fled their Country because of the invasions and no doubt some will have significant trauma attached to this. A further placement breakdown may have further effects on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Whilst the Council will seek to avoid placements that might be deemed unsuitable it is inevitable that some people will be placed in temporary accommodation some distance from their support networks.</p> <p>No risks in terms of Pilchers Field.</p>
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Homes Council Services Wellbeing
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		<p>No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations.</p> <p>These have been assessed as part of the planning application for Pilchers Field.</p>
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		We will continue to monitor this impact
Safeguarding		We continue to work closely with our colleagues in children and adult services to address any safeguarding concerns
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		We will continue to monitor this impact
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		We will continue to monitor this impact
Other implications		

Appendices:

None