
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

8 March 2022

Cabinet

Title:	Humanitarian Protection for People from Ukraine
Purpose:	To advise Cabinet of the range of supports the Council could offer to those people seeking sanctuary from the conflict in Ukraine, in partnership with COSLA and third sector organisations who are planning to provide direct aid to those affected.
Recommendation(s):	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. agrees to make a pledge to offer accommodation to provide sanctuary to people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine;ii. authorises officers to work closely with COSLA to develop plans for providing assistance; andiii. agrees for practical support to be given to third sector organisations who are making plans to offer direct assistance to those displaced by the conflict.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the humanitarian impact of the conflict in Ukraine and outlines the support that could be offered to those directly affected by the crisis.
- 1.2. COSLA wrote to all Scottish Local Authority Chief Executives on 28 February 2022 asking them to provide an indication of their individual Councils' positions with regard to capacity, should the UK Government enhance their current support for Ukraine by offering sanctuary to more people fleeing the conflict.
- 1.3. This report proposes that accommodation and support is pledged by North Ayrshire Council, and that officers work closely with COSLA in the coming days and weeks to develop plans as the situation emerges.

2. Background

- 2.1 On Thursday 24 February Russian armed forces began an incursion into Ukraine.
- 2.2 On Friday 25 February, representatives from local governments all over the world met as part of their worldwide membership body United Cities and Local Government (UCLG). COSLA officers contributed to the drafting of a statement on Ukraine issued by the political leadership of COSLA's European association the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). COSLA endorsed the statement and invited members to:

- i. Note the developments in Ukraine;
 - ii. Agree to express full support and solidarity to the Ukrainian people and peers in local and regional government;
 - iii. Note that Scottish Local Government stands ready to support those affected in any way we can; and
 - iv. Agree that COSLA endorses the declaration put forward by the leadership of CEMR.
- 2.3 On 3 March the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that over one million refugees had already fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries. They estimated that, with numbers increasing every day, the situation looked set to become Europe's largest refugee crisis this century.
- 2.4 All neighbouring countries have kept their borders open for refugees fleeing Ukraine. Most have fled to Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia and others have moved towards various other European countries. National authorities are assuming responsibility for the registration, reception, accommodation and protection of these refugees.
- 2.5 In Poland, UNHCR field staff report many miles of queues at the border on the Ukrainian side. Those who have managed to cross the border said that they had been waiting for up to 60 hours. Most arrivals are women and children from all parts of Ukraine. Temperatures are freezing and many have reported spending days on the road waiting to cross. When refugees arrive, they are registered by the appropriate authorities. Refugees who have the means and contacts in the host country are finding their own accommodation, whereas others are being accommodated within local communities, either by residents who have opened their homes or in reception centres.

Request from COSLA

- 2.6 COSLA wrote to all Chief Executives on 28 February regarding the crisis in Ukraine. They are seeking to build a picture of capacity should the UK Government enhance their current support for Ukraine by offering sanctuary to more people fleeing the conflict. At present, there are two routes for Ukrainian refugees to be resettled in the UK. Initially UK visas were only available on a relatively restricted basis, based on family ties. There is now a further route based on sponsorship of individual people and families.
- 2.7 The UK Government is establishing an expansive **Ukrainian Family Scheme** which will be fee free and allow British nationals and people settled in the UK to bring a wider group of family members to the UK, extending eligibility to adult parents, grandparents, children over 18, siblings, and their immediate family members.
- 2.8 The UK Government has also committed to establishing a **humanitarian sponsorship pathway**, whereby people from Ukraine who may not have family ties in the UK can be sponsored to come to the UK by willing and able individuals, businesses, or community organisations. There will be no numerical limit on this scheme, and the UK Government have advised that they will welcome as many Ukrainians as wish to come and that have matched sponsors.
- 2.9 COSLA have concerns about the scalability of the community sponsorship resettlement initiative, the lack of resources attached to it, and the risks if

families are not linked in to key services in a coordinated manner. However, UK Government have committed to working in partnership with local and devolved government to shape the scheme. The COSLA President and Community Wellbeing Spokesperson have also written to the Home Secretary on similar terms.

2.10 COSLA are looking to ascertain the extent to which councils will be able to offer up more properties on top of commitments that have already been made for the current Afghanistan and United Kingdom Refugee Resettlement schemes.

2.11 An initial response has been provided by officers, acknowledging the severity of the conflict and making a commitment to work with COSLA to plan to provide accommodation if a local authority scheme is developed.

Support for Ukrainians who may settle in North Ayrshire

2.12 As soon as the UK Government develops a scheme for resettling Ukrainian refugees, the Council is well placed to provide practical support. The Council's Refugee Task Force comprises a wide number of internal and external services including Housing & Public Protection; Finance and Corporate Support; Education; Health & Social Care Partnership; Connected Communities; Economic Development & Regeneration; Police Scotland; Department for Work & Pensions; Primary Care NHS Ayrshire & Arran; The Ayrshire Community Trust and Ayrshire College.

2.13 Officers from across the Task Force are well placed to assist with identifying suitable accommodation and preparing it for arrival. They are also able to assist with providing initial support and linking in with support services such as GPs, schools, dentists, welfare benefits, etc.

Third Sector Support

2.14 The Crisis in Ukraine has generated a significant community reaction, with many local people looking to donate items and provide direct support to help people fleeing their homes.

2.15 In response to the crisis the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), which is made up of 15 major international charities, has set up an appeal for financial support:

[Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal | Disasters Emergency Committee \(dec.org.uk\)](https://dec.org.uk)

The British Red Cross and partners are advocating this as the most effective way of supporting the Ukrainian situation given the logistical challenges of transporting supplies to the affected areas. It is proposed that the Council supports third sector organisations and partners to fundraise for the DEC appeal and other Ukrainian charities through free lets for our facilities and other practical support. KA Leisure will also support this approach.

2.16 It is also proposed that the Council supports the North Ayrshire Third Sector Interface (The Ayrshire Community Trust and Arran CVS) to establish a coordination role in liaising with and supporting local organisations, schools and volunteers who wish to supply direct aid to Ukrainian residents. This approach will ensure that partners are working together, that needs are identified and that knowledge and resources are shared effectively. This approach will link closely with the work of the Council's Refugee Task Force.

2.17 Considerable anxiety is already evident in people directly affected by the conflict and displacement of relatives and friends. Plans are being made to offer

ways in which people in communities can come together and provide emotional support and access advice.

3. Proposals

3.1 That Cabinet:

- i. agrees to make a pledge to offer accommodation and sanctuary to people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine;
- ii. agrees that officers should work closely with COSLA to develop plans for providing assistance; and
- iii. agrees for practical support to be given to third sector organisations operating in North Ayrshire who are making plans to offer direct assistance to those displaced by the conflict.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 North Ayrshire Council will work with COSLA to secure funds from the UK and Scottish Governments to support the Council's response to the Ukraine crisis.

Human Resources

- 4.2 Support for the families will be provided by the Services who make up the existing North Ayrshire Refugee Task Force.

Legal

- 4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 It is expected that many of the Ukrainian refugees will arrive with a variety of skills and attributes which will enrich our communities. It is anticipated that some of the refugees will be relatively fluent in English.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 None.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 Supporting Ukrainian refugees to resettle within North Ayrshire will contribute to achieving the Council Plan priorities of 'active and strong communities' and 'people and communities are safe'.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 It is expected that many of the Ukrainian refugees who may arrive in the UK will be well educated, able to speak English, and made to feel very welcome by their new communities, thereby being able to benefit from our Community Wealth Building principles.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The members of the Syrian Refugee Task Force have been consulted regarding the contents of this report. Members represent a wide number of internal and external services including Physical Environment, Finance and Corporate Support, Education, Health & Social Care Partnership, Connected Communities, Economic Development & Regeneration, Police Scotland, Department for Work & Pensions, Primary Care NHS Ayrshire & Arran, The Ayrshire Community Trust and Ayrshire College.

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Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Yvonne Baulk, Head of Service (Housing and Public Protection)** on **01294 324542**.

Background Papers

None