

Committee: Cabinet

Date: Thursday,
18th April 2024

Title: Strategic Grants for Ukrainians and Asylum Seekers

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Local Partnerships

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Key decision: No

Summary

1. This paper sets out a case to move to strategic grants to support the integration of refugees into Uttlesford's community.

Recommendations

2. To launch a strategic grants process for both Ukrainian and Asylum- Seeking cohorts across 3 domains of need.
3. To extend the individual grants fund to asylum seeking communities from the Asylum Dispersal Grant to support with adhoc funding requests and support to move into and furnish accommodation for a maximum of £1,500 per family.

Financial Implications

4. The proposed cost of the combined schemes is £215,000 per annum of which £115,000 will be funded through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (administered via Essex County Council) and £75,000 will be funded through the Asylum Dispersal Grant provided directly to Uttlesford District Council.

Background Papers

5. None

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	A full communications plan will be developed to launch the grant process and then to implement schemes once the grants are awarded.
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Community Safety	This proposal is not thought to have an impact on community safety.
Equalities	A full equalities impact assessment has been developed to support this work. The needs of the Ukrainian community were collected through direct engagement and indirect engagement via a local community group with a Ukrainian speaker.
Health and Safety	This proposal is not expected to have any health and safety implications.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	This proposal is not expected to have negative impact on human rights nor legal implications.
Sustainability	These proposals are not sustainable long term but will support the Ukrainian nationals eligible under the homes for Ukraine scheme and the current visa arrangements.
Ward-specific impacts	These proposals will impact all wards.
Workforce/Workplace	These proposals wont impact the workforce or workplace.

Situation

1) **Context**

- 2) Local Authorities play a key role in delivering programmes for refugees and asylum seekers and support with community integration. Currently councils are supporting Ukrainians who are residing in the UK following the War in Ukraine that started in 2022. As part of a wider, national policy district councils are working alongside county councils and other statutory and not-for-profit organisations to support asylum seekers pending an asylum decision and to support those with leave to remain with a homeless duty. However, in March 2023 the government announced these asylum hotels would close although to date only one is ear marked for closure in Uttlesford leaving one hotel (the Ibis) which currently houses families.

3) **What is Uttlesford District Council doing now?**

- 4) **Existing grants;** In November 2023 Uttlesford District Council launched an individual support grant (up to £500 for support with a range of activities including

transport and education and up to £1500 to help to move into new accommodation) and a community grants fund (for up to £300) for community activities.

- 5) **A move on offer – housing**; Housing was the main need identified by the Ukrainian's living in host accommodation in Uttlesford, mainly longer-term private rental or council stock. A project group have worked through viable options and considered what other Local Authorities offer. A move on offer has been proposed including incentives for landlords (deposit paid and rent guarantee) alongside dedicated funds for Ukrainians available with the same criteria as the discretionary housing payment.
- 6) **Small community grants** – As part of the Uttlesford Ukrainian support, a small, community grants pot was launched in November 2023. There has been one application so far to this fund for a Christmas meal for Ukrainians.
- 7) For the Afghan cohort Touchpoint have been working to deliver a community hub and wellbeing centre near Stanstead and a specific asylum seekers project with a cooking project, play and activities for children and also access to ESOL (English as a second language).
- 8) **What is the funding for Local Authorities?**
- 9) **Asylum Dispersal Grant** - In recognition of 'concerns raised in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting asylum seekers', the government have made provision for an Asylum Dispersal Grant to be paid to Local Authorities along with additional funding to 'recognise the existing contribution and longstanding support' of local authorities accommodating asylum seekers. All Local Authorities in receipt of the funding have discretion regarding spend, providing the money is 'used to implement and/or bolster services' for this cohort. For Uttlesford for 2022/23 and 2023/24 the total grant allocated was £130k (£30k 22/23 and £100k 23/24).
- 10) The Homes for Ukraine Grant and the tariff provided to Local Authorities is not ringfenced and up the local authorities to spend the money according to demand and need. There are four areas outlined;
 - a) Welcoming, safeguarding and settling in
 - b) Integration and work
 - c) Long-term sustainable housing
 - d) Reporting and data management
- 11) From January 2023 local authorities received £5,900 per arrival and prior to that £10,500 for arrivals before this date. Uttlesford District Council submits a monthly return to Essex County Council who collate on behalf of the District Councils in Essex and submit to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Uttlesford has spent £160,000 so far on activities to support this cohort.

12) **What are the remaining needs amongst this cohort?**

- 13) Within the Ukrainian cohort, there are 45 hosts and 99 refugees still residing in Uttlesford and many more who have moved into the private rental sector (noting there is an exercise underway to refresh the host list.)
- 14) An exercise completed over the summer 2023 highlighted continued need for support in the following areas;
- Support with bills (including council tax)
 - Childcare including wrap around summer activities (one off requests now included as part of the small individual grants launched in November 2023)
 - Transport (now included as part of the small individual grants launched in November 2023)
 - Access to dentist services (emergency requests now included as part of the small individual grants launched in November 2023)
 - Access to Adult Education
 - Support to move into the private rental sector (captured as part of Uttlesford's move on offer due to be launched in January 2024)
- 15) A dedicated Ukrainian speaker has been employed 2 days a week to support this cohort via Uttlesford Community Action Network (UCAN). Her feedback highlights a continued lack of understanding of how to access benefits and existing schemes including English language training and housing. This resource is in place until April 2024.
- 16) In Uttlesford there are currently 2 contingency hotels used to house asylum seekers awaiting decisions (predominantly Afghan nationals). Touchpoint, a local agency funded by Uttlesford District Council report the following needs for this cohort;
- Mental Health Services – trauma informed services for these individuals of all ages (children and young people and adults) through both peer support and one to one.
 - Information advice and guidance about local services and how to access support and benefits after their asylum decisions have been granted.
 - Access to language classes (ESOL) alongside wider employment and training support
 - Organised wellbeing activities including play activities for children and young people.
- 17) Some of these needs are being addressed through the services touchpoint are providing (currently funded by Uttlesford District Council) and others through volunteers and support agencies.

18) The launch of the individual and community grants have relieved pressure on the Ukrainian cohort and allowed individuals registered on the foundry system access to funds to support integration including £933 for transport, £4,888 for childcare and holiday activities, £175 for dentistry and £5,121 to furnish new accommodation.¹

19) Additionally, the support from UCAN's Ukrainian support worker has enabled Uttlesford to have documents translated and in reach support for this cohort (understanding how to access housing, benefits, food banks, employment and training and transport).

20) Options

21) Uttlesford Council now has an understanding of need of the Ukrainian communities and of asylum communities. The options are:

Option	Description	Risks	Benefits
Provide services in house	Provide in-house services to meet the needs identified for these cohorts. These are; emotional wellbeing and mental health, childcare/holiday activities, information advice, guidance including inreach into communities.	The council has no direct clinical expertise to deliver emotional/wellbeing and mental health services to complement the existing Essex MIND and EPUT offers. This is the same for the other services too. There is a lack of trust from these communities for council staff and no existing relationships.	Greater control of services delivered and the ability to pivot/change services if needs change or new communities arrive.
Grant fund organisations through a competitive and open process	Grant fund organisations to deliver services across both cohorts to meet need through a competitive process which is outcomes based and delineated into specific 'lots'. These lots would be separated by cohort but with the same type of activities to ease	The closure of Great Hallingbury hotel presents a risk to continuity of funding for the Asylum Dispersal Grant. To mitigate changes or reduced funding, this approach will have annual break clauses built in to allow UDC (or the recipient organisations) to cease activities if the need changes or if the funding ceases. There are limited risks through this approach as the fund and application	There are a number of benefits to this approach including; Supporting the wider not-for – profit sector locally by allowing more, diverse organisations to apply for funding. Reduced impact on council resource as the role of the Local Authority would be to oversee activity and performance rather than directly deliver. Compliance with the council's contract

	reporting. Funding would be across numerous years to align with the council's approach to grant funding but with break clauses to protect against withdrawal of funding.	process would be launched in an open and transparent way and evaluated through a panel based on criteria outlined to organisations applying for funds.	procedure rules and with robust grant agreements including information sharing, data protection and GDPR, safeguarding and any case management requirements.
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25. Recommendation: It is recommended that Uttlesford District Council move to a competitive grants process funding organisations to deliver services to meet the following needs across the Ukrainian and asylum-seeking communities in Uttlesford. Additionally, it is proposed to launch an asylum seeker's individual grant fund aligned to that available for the Ukrainian cohorts.

26. The grant service lots and maximum per annum values proposed include:

- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health – grants up to £70,000 per annum (£50,000 Homes for Ukraine and £20,000 Asylum Dispersal Grant)**– following engagement with GP's, other organisations supporting these cohorts and the individuals themselves there is a need for emotional wellbeing and mental health support locally to supplement the statutory services delivered by EPUT and the services delivered by MIND. For children and young people access to virtual support, one to one services and groups in their primary language is an ongoing need. For adults and those over 18 years old, group support and one to one support delivered in their primary language is an ongoing need. It is envisaged that the services offered work alongside statutory mental health services and other support services to ensure effective triage and referral for those with more complex ongoing mental health needs. This service is envisaged to be accessible in a variety of languages but delivered through a combination of virtual and face to face sessions using trauma informed methodology to support this cohort with integration. Activities could include gardening and cooking or more structured group talking sessions.
- **Information, advice and guidance about a range of topics including access to housing, welfare benefits, employment, education and training with proactive in reach into communities and ongoing support – up to £70,000 per annum (£50,000 Homes for Ukraine and £20,000 Asylum Dispersal Grant)** there is a clear need for 'in reach' into these communities and information, advice and guidance to access services including but not exclusive to housing, welfare benefits, language training and GP services. It is envisioned that this service would act as a 'front door' for these communities to access council and local services and would provide the Local Authority with information about these cohorts including upcoming homeless applications or host placement breakdowns to allow Uttlesford to formulate a prevention offer.

- **Organised activities for children and young people and families (weekends, evenings and holiday periods) -up to £25,000 per annum (£15,000 Homes for Ukraine and £10,000 Asylum Dispersal Grant)** dedicated activities for a range of ages and at a range of locations for children and young people with peers delivered in their primary language. It is envisaged that these activities will supplement existing holiday activities and wrap around childcare available locally and for those in hotel awaiting asylum decisions (or indeed preparing to move out of the hotel into private or council accommodation) with structured activities for their children and young people to play.
- **Extend the individual grants fund to asylum seeking communities £25,000 – Asylum Dispersal Grant** to support with adhoc funding requests and support to move into and furnish accommodation for a maximum of £1,500 per family.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Reputational risk in not commissioning or providing dedicated support for these cohorts with the grants provided.	Low	1	There is support for the Ukrainian cohort through individual grants, community grants and also the move on offer that Uttlesford has in place. For the asylum seekers eligible for services under the asylum dispersal grant Touchpoint and others have been providing support to this cohort.
Cessation of funding by central government.	Low	3	It is proposed to have annual no fault break clauses built into the agreements to allow UDC or the provider to withdraw should circumstances change.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.