

1. Refugees being hosted in Uttlesford (whichever port of entry they arrive through)

Many more families are now arriving via the Government schemes. We have been provided with a list of addresses of those hosting families and we completed 6 accommodation inspections yesterday, as this is one of our duties at the district council level. There are currently 136 host families expected in the district, though of course this number has considerable potential to grow. Well done to all our colleagues carrying out this work – I imagine that there are a lot of questions being asked by both the guests and their hosts, and in many cases, we won't have detailed answers yet.

There is a very thorough 'welcome pack' produced by the Government [Welcome: a guide for Ukrainians arriving in the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) though I've only seen an English language version, and there's also an Essex pack too aimed at hosts [Welcome to Essex: packs for sponsors - Essex County Council](#). As you'll see in the Government guide (page 7), people are pointed at their local council (ie us, as the housing authority) should their placement with their host breakdown and they be asked to leave or choose to end it after a breakdown in that relationship, and there are various other points in the guidance that point either the hosts or the refugee at their local council for help - either us or the County, depending on the issue, but without explaining which one for which topic, so we can expect some confusion in this regard, which of course we will aim to smooth out with our Essex colleagues, with whom we are working very closely.

I mentioned in my last update that some estimates of the proportion of placements that may break down are around 50%, so half of the 136 placements currently expected would potentially represent a huge challenge for us to be able to cope with – much as it would every other council in the country. We are making contingency plans now for in this eventuality, though of course it is better to invest a little time and energy in preventing and avoiding a breakdown in the placement rather than waiting for it to happen and then coping with the consequences. Appropriate and well-targeted community and professional support for these often traumatised newcomers will be very much welcome, so you might want to point your residents keen to help to register with CVSU so that they can be called on as and when needed, as well as joining in local initiatives in our different villages and towns.

2. Refugees arriving at Stansted as their port of entry, regardless of their intended final destination

Again as you'll see in the Government welcome guide, incoming refugees under the official scheme are encouraged to have made prior contact with their host ahead of arrival, and be ready either to meet at the airport, or to travel on to their host's home directly – and there are details of how they can get their train tickets etc. for free. There is mention of a 'welcome point' at the airport, and I understand from our County colleagues that considerable progress has been made on developing this in a much more suitable fashion than was in place for the first week and a half, where our

reception centre was in a separate building ten minutes walk away, and there was just a Red Cross volunteer standing in the arrivals hall with a flag and a clipboard – which as I mentioned last time was in my opinion woefully inadequate to the point of downright embarrassment. I should like to make clear that I have nothing but praise for the staff and volunteers on site at the airport and their compassion and hard work – I believe that paucity of facilities for an actual welcome at the point of coming out of the border control process was however a matter of institutional shame. I am very grateful to our County Council colleagues leading on this process for embracing my criticism, having independently reached their own I think similar conclusions (albeit in perhaps rather less blunt terms than I have used) and for having made urgent changes with the support of the Airport operator.

This notwithstanding, most arrivals are being met or successfully making their own way onwards to elsewhere in the country, either without needing any assistance, or just minimal help and signposting, such as around securing their free train ticket.

Only a small minority are arriving outside of the two official schemes, and are still, unusually, being admitted by Border Force ‘with recourse to public funds’. Some of arrivals are hoping to travel on to other parts of the Country but the Local Authorities where they want to go to have refused to accept a homeless application from them. We are therefore having to provide emergency accommodation and take on the homelessness duties for all these arrivals – even though many don’t necessarily want to be here in Uttlesford. We have raised this problem with DLUHC representatives and yesterday they saw first-hand what we are having to deal with when they visited the airport.

We are having some difficulty in quite a proportion of these cases establishing if the arrivals have passports or visas, or their circumstances. We have already raised safeguarding concerns with social care regarding some of the arrivals. As you are perhaps aware people wouldn’t normally be let into the country with immediate full recourse to public funds, including housing, but this is what is happening until we can establish some facts, and as a result, we in UDC have accommodated 6 so far this week. The support network that was provided for Syrian and Afghan refugees has not been put in place for Ukraine arrivals as there was an anticipation that most would arrive via a formal Government scheme. Although this assumption is correct, the numbers who are the exception to this rule is growing, potentially towards a problematic level.

Our officers are now beginning to struggle to cope with the ongoing support that these families/people require. We have therefore arranged for a community responder to visit the hotels every morning to check that those we have accommodated are receiving the services they need – eg translators, applying for benefits, housing, moving on.

As a local authority covering a major port of entry there is apparently going to be a sum of money given to UDC to cover some of these immediate support costs – estimated currently at £140k. We are in discussions with our colleagues at the CVSU about what support can be provided for those we are accommodating. I understand that the Essex County Council-led Tactical Coordinating Group are

also in discussions with the CVSU regarding staffing the hub at Stansted when the Red Cross pull out, and we are hugely grateful to them for this partnership, and through them to our whole community that they help mobilise in their public volunteering efforts.

Homelessness Officers and other UDC staff are working through the day and night to sort out these arrivals, and we have had staff working until the early hours of the morning every day this week. To ease pressure on our Homelessness Team we have block booked hotel accommodation over the weekend in anticipation of more arrivals so that the Red Cross at the Airport Reception Centre can then send anyone directly there, and if these rooms get used and more are required the Red Cross can then contact our Homelessness Team.

Clearly this situation is not sustainable so we have raised this as a concern with our County Colleagues and asked about mutual aid, which may well come from neighbouring district/borough councils, who have the homelessness expertise, but who don't have a huge port of entry in their district.

In summary therefore, our nation is quite rightly welcoming many more people fleeing the Russian invasion of their country, many in considerable distress. Our community both locally and nationally is stepping up both in terms of volunteering to provide housing as a host, or locally as volunteers assisting with the immediate welcome effort, with the ongoing welcome, integration and support effort locally still being shaped up. The frictions, tensions and inconsistencies I have mentioned are being acknowledged, addressed and worked through, and again let me say thank you to both our staff, to County Council colleagues, and to those in the other agencies, including especially the Red Cross and CVSU, as well as to DLUHC colleagues in central government for hearing and seeing how these issues are playing out on the ground.

I know that Parishes, like many others, are asking how best they can help. As more of these 136 (and climbing) placements around our district are filled, there will be more of an opportunity to provide wrap-around support for those in your area. I'm sure it may be frustrating when there is so much energy to help, but these local efforts need to wait to be called on by either our new guests and/or their hosts, rather than running the risk of overwhelming them, as often people will need some quiet and time to decompress. Readyng initiatives that can be stood up quickly when needed and focusing on providing a visible welcome in your community would be a sensible approach, as well as encouraging individuals keen to help to register with CVSU as a volunteer is also a positive action to take, although as we found with the overwhelming number of volunteers during the early days of the pandemic, not all will be called on. I hope it's helpful to explain also that we don't currently need big empty buildings identifying as potential rest centres, with rows of camp beds laid out in big draughty halls – what is needed is quiet homes with longer term living facilities for families fleeing for their lives and often leaving many behind to cope in dignity with their trauma, and this is being provided through the Government schemes, and then (in due course) practical wrap around support from professionals and volunteers alike to both the refugees and also to a degree their hosts.

I do hope that is helpful to you as Parishes in understanding how things are playing out across our district as together we rise to the occasion.

Kind regards

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