



SUBJECT: Update on the response to humanitarian crisis in Ukraine

Report written and submitted by: Local Authority Leads

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1	Areas Affected
1.1	Gwent – all local areas.
2	Purpose of Report
2.1	To present an update on activities by Gwent PSB member organisations in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine the draft Gwent Well-being Plan
2.2	This item is for PSB members' information.
3	General information
	<p>The Gwent Humanitarian Leadership Group has been meeting since the March PSB when the request was made to consider the regional response to the crisis. The group comprises the resettlement leads of the five local authorities, with Wendy Warren- Head of Planning Civil Contingencies and is chaired by Superintendent Mike Richards on behalf of Chief Superintendent Ian Roberts.</p> <p>The group discusses the situational awareness and shares best practice on problems encountered. Where possible, the group strives for a consistent response across the region. However, the workload in each of the five local authority areas varies considerably with 3 of the 5 hosting Welcome Centres or hotel populations that have arrived through the Welsh Government Super Sponsor route. It is worth noting that each local authority is managing the tariff received independently and so the support offer will vary across the five areas.</p>
4	Torfaen/Blaenau Gwent
	<p>Welcome Centre - Blaenau Gwent</p> <p>Changes in the wrap around support for centres come into effect on the 9th January. There will be full support for up to 5 weeks after arrival, while benefits are being applied for, the expectation thereafter is that guests will make a financial contribution, which will vary according to the accommodation. Charges will include some meals, laundry, pets and essential items.</p> <p>A refusals pilot is being trailed in Blaenau Gwent (and Monmouthshire) to encourage arrivals to move out to hosted accommodation. Where two offers are made and refused a weekly administration charge will be applied until a hosted/accommodation offer is accepted or the 6-months WG super sponsor accommodation comes to an end, this charge will be £25 per week for a single person.</p>

Homes for Ukraine - hosts

The rate of new individual sponsors has slowed (as has been seen across Wales). The focus remains on supporting existing hosts and guests including; orientating new arrivals to their new community, mitigating any tensions between hosts/guests, supporting moving into the Private Rented Sector and, in the event of breakdowns (or where host have been unable to extend their offer of accommodation (post 6 months) rematching with new hosts.

All hosts have been consulted regarding their longer-term intentions – all current hosts remain committed to support until 12 months, relationships more broadly remain strong. The focus for the LA over the next 4 months is to secure longer term accommodation for each case– we are now engaging all letting agencies on this point

The Local Authorities are now implementing a ‘top up’ of £250 per month (taking the thank you payment to £600) to ease the impact on existing hosting households and provide a cost-effective way of prolonging the arrangement. This top up (£250) is being supported by the tariff for up to 12 months.

Providing a financial support package of £1,500 for Ukrainians entering the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

This payment supports existing hosted households (per principle applicant) should they wish to progress to securing a tenancy in the PRS, removing the financial barriers with regards to bonds, first month’s rent, furnishings etc. This grant remains available for guests to apply at any stage during their initial 12 months. This approach is having a significant benefit in supporting guests to move into PRS.

The team is scoping the potential to support the deficit between LHA rate and rental value of PRS accommodation, noting that the affordability of private lettings remains the biggest barrier to move on.

Number of Arrivals

- **Torfaen** – 87 have arrived via this Scheme (not including arrivals via the Family Visa Scheme)
- **Blaenau Gwent** – 47 have arrived via this Scheme (including several cases that have been matched from Welcome Centres - not including arrivals via the Family Visa Scheme)

Letting agents/Property owners

The team have been liaising with letting agency managers, but with little optimism. The new Welsh housing legislation, effective from 1st December, is causing additional barriers. Many property owners are now looking to sell their properties due to rising interest rates and the new legislation.

Independent letting agents can make a contract up as they go along. E.g. Some property owners are asking for 3 months rent upfront and a guarantor even if on paper the tenant can afford the rent. Some agents have a 30 x monthly rent policy where the household needs to meet that requirement E.g. rent of £1000 per month, plus the household needs to be earning 30K+

Property owners see the possibility of Ukrainians returning home which is seen as a risk. Most agents will not even accept an application form if the prospective

	<p>tenant isn't employed in a permanent capacity (that is not working for an agency). The bigger agents require a holding deposit which is 1 month rent upfront, with a Bond of the same amount and credit checks by an external organisation.</p>
5	<p>Monmouthshire</p> <p>Welcome Centre The Council Offices adjacent to the hotel is now staffed in the evenings by two youth workers, to provide additional space to minimise tensions and ensure people have access to entertainment (gaming room, pool table, table tennis, cinema screen / projector).</p> <p>A self-catering kitchen is due to be installed mid-December. This should help ease tensions over the quality and supply of food, increased number of staff working shifts and not at the hotel for meal times and the basic human desire to cook and prepare their own food</p> <p>We are conscious of the need to increase the rate of people move-on from the Welcome Centre. The approach is to fund one month's rent and a bond, subject to affordability checks and guided by local housing allowance. However, MCC will soon have taken its allocation of Welcome Centre arrivals and will need to prioritise moving more people onto other counties.</p> <p>MCC is currently accommodating 210 people</p> <p>Homes for Ukraine - hosts MCC is adding a further £250 per month discretionary funding between October and March to the existing £350 host payment to recognise goodwill of hosts and increased cost of living. This is set for six months because it covers fuel over the winter period and can then be reviewed. This has been well-received and majority of hosts are continuing. MCC currently have 100 active hosts.</p> <p>The availability of move-on accommodation remains a challenge with a shortage of private rented accommodation and social housing in the county.</p>
6	<p>Newport</p> <p>Welcome Centre There are still 2 separate initial accommodation centres in the city, supporting guests through the WG Super Sponsor scheme. Currently there are 57 guests at two hotels. Guidance and awareness around the change in support for guests through this scheme (see above), from January 9th has been circulated, with local authorities liaising with hotels to shape the offer moving forward and communicate this clearly to guests.</p> <p>Homes for Ukraine - hosts Newport has 50 active hosts across the city, accommodating 101 guests. The majority of hosts are moving, or have already reached, the 6-month stage of support and the continuation of hosting arrangements after this point have been mixed. A large number of sponsors have ended their support at the 6 month point, as well as a high number of withdrawals from the expression of interest list held for potential sponsors. A recurring reason for this is the rise in living costs and how this will increase further through the coming months.</p>

	<p>Currently, ‘thank you’ payments are in line with the standard £350 per month but Newport are revisiting and exploring how support for all stakeholders can be developed moving forward. This includes further options around supporting the move-on phase, for those in a position to do so, into the PRS for guests and mitigating against some of the barriers faced in doing so.</p>
7	<p>Caerphilly</p>
	<p>Home for Ukraine- hosts</p> <p>In common with other local authorities the available unmatched host numbers are becoming stretched by the push to get people out of the network of Welsh Government Welcome Centres. However, in partnership with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly have been successfully able to settle families across the border from the Welcome Centres there.</p> <p>A media campaign has been released, with the support of the Cabinet member, to encourage more local families to come on board as hosts. An amount of spare capacity is needed to be able to manage hosted arrangements coming to and end and the potential for arrivals to end up in temporary accommodation. The efforts of WG over the next few months is to get as many people out of the Welcome Centres as possible due to the escalating cost, a factor which is driving the new payment and refusals policies in Welcome Centres from the 9th of January. Rationalisation and closure of Welcome Centres will place additional burdens on the hosting capacity.</p> <p>Caerphilly are currently supporting 104 arrived guests across 58 sponsors and are actively seeking more hosts to alleviate the pressure in the Welcome Centres and support neighbouring authorities.</p> <p>The focus going forward is to support and sustain the hosted arrangements as far as it is possible. A £250 to up to the UK Government thank-you payment was implemented in September and hosts have reported that this is enabling them to sustain the arrangement through the current cost-of-living crisis. This additional amount is in place until the end of March 23 and will be reviewed in line with budget considerations.</p> <p>Movement to the PRS is extremely problematic for the same reasons described by Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. The competition for PRS properties is intense in a rapidly decreasing market. Many guests would like to sustain their own tenancies but are unable to, given the restrictions that landlords and letting agents are imposing. A support package of rent/bond of approx. £1500, on a case-by case basis, has been agreed but this may not be enough to circumvent the problems.</p> <p>At the same time as the local authority is seeking PRS properties for Ukrainian arrivals to move-on from hosted arrangements, support is still requested for Afghan and UK Resettlement Scheme arrivals. In addition, the Home Office are actively and aggressively seeking hotel and PRS accommodation for asylum seekers.</p> <p>At the current time, fortunately, no displaced people arrivals are in temporary accommodation. However, this may alter as available hosts lessen, Welcome</p>

	Centres close, the PRS availability shrinks, and the cost-of-living crisis increases local populations at risk of homelessness.
8	ABUHB
	Health services continue to undertake initial medical assessments, the blue book assessment for refugees, medical screening, vaccination support and GP registration for any new arrivals. Ongoing health conditions are supported through normal channels. Transport support from the constituent local authorities was out in place following the last PSB meeting. However, with arrivals slowing, the capacity has met the current need.
9	Recommendation to the PSB
	The Gwent PSB is asked to note the information in this paper.

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