

## Report to Communities and Environment Scrutiny Committee – June 2024: Refugee Resettlement & Homes for Ukraine

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### 1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide a progress update to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to the support we are providing to those seeking sanctuary from war and human rights violations. In Nottingham there are four principle strands of work in relation to this. The city currently manages a Homes for Ukraine programme, funded by DLUHC, Afghan and worldwide refugee resettlement programme. Nottingham is also part of the Home Office led Asylum Dispersal Scheme – where the Home Office contracts with SERCO to place people awaiting a decision on their refugee claim here.

### 2.0 UKRAINE

- 2.1 Since setting up the Ukraine scheme in the city in 2022 the team have established a process to DBS check and visit potential Hosts. They then ensure hosts receive the Host Payments to enable Ukrainian guests to stay with local people wanting to support them. If a host/guest arrangement breaks down the team work to organise a re-match with a new host.
- 2.2 The team have supported and attended drop in sessions organised by the Ukrainian Cultural Centre. They have established a comprehensive mailing list to share information about classes, employment opportunities and other matters which may interest the Guests.
- 2.3 Nottingham receive ringfenced funding for this work from DLUHC, the team have to complete DELTA returns to DLUHC to account for the spend. The last DELTA return was submitted in May.
- 2.4 To improve our offer to Ukrainian guests and hosts there will be investment in growing a new joint Migration Team, learning from the successes of our refugee resettlement work. This will include recruiting workers to engage with hosts and guests, commissioning employment and housing support and establishing a small grants process.

Homes 4 Ukraine

Year	Pre 2022	2022	2023	2024	Total
Guests	114	261	82		457
Hosts	66	112	48		226

### 3.0 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

3.1 Refugee resettlement has been coordinated by Nottingham City Council on behalf of much of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire since 2015 (Including Nottingham City, Broxtowe BC, Gedling BC, Newark and Sherwood BC, , Nottinghamshire County Council in the partnership). Originally focused on Syrian refugee families the scheme was expanded by the Home Office to the UKRS (United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme - worldwide). In 2022 the team also took on lead responsibility for the two Afghan schemes – ARAP and ACRS. ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy) is a policy 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. The ACRS (Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme) is designed to support those who have assisted UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for UK values, as well as vulnerable people, such as women and girls at risk. Nottingham City acts as the lead partner in matching families at need to properties and commissioning and grant aiding support services.

3.2

Count of URN	Column Labels	1900	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Grand Total
ACRS		13							1	36	82	15	147
ARAP		5							61	5	51		140
UKRS		8	74	76	43	58	86	10	25	24		7	411
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>698</b>

3.3 The bridging hotel in Nottingham was set up following the Afghan evacuation under Operation Pitting in 2021, and this was followed with the procurement of serviced apartments within the city. Throughout their stay of two years, the team provided Afghan refugees with wraparound care, and worked in partnership with DWP, Home Office, health, and the charity/voluntary sector to ensure the needs of the families were met. The team and its partners were recognised by the Home Office as providing this support at the highest standard across all LAs.

3.4 Many individuals were suffering with high levels of PTSD due to their experiences, as well as family members who had remained in Afghanistan, and were at risk. We provided regular on-site ESOL, sexual health, healthy relationships, employment/career advice, children’s activities, and homework support throughout the two years, alongside outings and social gatherings to provide an opportunity for families to forget their trauma and stress for a time. They have now created and named their own football team.

- 3.5 The team's substantive focus during 2023 was on Afghan families accommodated in bridging hotels/serviced apartments (see below for further detail) following the evacuation of Afghanistan in 2021, while more durable solutions were identified. The Home Office issued all families with a 'Notice to Quit' their bridging accommodation in June 2023, and ultimately closed the bridging estate at end of August 2023, so the team had to work intensively to avert families moving into homelessness provision.
- 3.6 All families accommodated in the bridging hotel were successfully housed. The majority remained in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, but for those who wanted to move out of the area for a specific reason (family, job opportunities, etc) the team worked across localities to secure properties in other cities. Overall, the team supported **131 individuals** in bridging accommodation, **107 of which were resettled in Nottinghamshire**.
- 3.7 Following that success the team have worked intensively with the MOD to accommodate Afghans being evacuated from Pakistan, where they face deportation. Across the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire there are 10 MOD-provided Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties now housing families. Families will reside in these properties for up to three years.
- 3.8 In line with the Home Office funding requirements all refugees over the age of 18 receive at least 10-12 hours formal ESOL training per week and the team continue to work with partners to enhance this offer through various accredited courses which include security, construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, and food safety. Each resettled adult also completes a 10-week 'Life in the UK' course to support their initial cultural orientation.

## 4.0 ASYLUM DISPERSAL

- 4.1 Nottingham has been part of the Home Office asylum dispersal process for over 20 years. This provides accommodation and support via a Home Office-contracted provider (currently SERCO, previously G4S) while individual asylum claims are assessed. Historically, Nottingham has been home to a population of around 1000 asylum seekers at any given time.
- 4.2 Since 2020, this number has increased; there have been two SERCO-operated contingency hotels in Nottingham (one now closed), as well as a large block of flats which provides a mixture of temporary, initial, and dispersal accommodation to asylum seekers. These are in addition to various other clusters of private-sector housing across the city that are procured by SERCO as dispersal accommodation. Nottingham City no longer has a meaningful say in the Home Office and SERCO decision about where to place asylum seekers due to changes in policy at a national level.
- 4.3 In 2023, participation in asylum dispersal became mandatory for all local authorities, and SERCO have been actively seeking properties across Nottinghamshire.

- 4.4 In 2023 a new streamlined asylum decision process was implemented by the Home Office, intended to clear a substantial backlog of applications from individuals from seven countries, including new arrivals from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Iran, and Yemen.
- 4.5 Applications are being assessed by the Home Office through an expedited 20-day process, but there have been issues with this process. The Home Office have increased the number of officers assessing applications, which will increase the throughput of decisions made, and it is expected that a significant majority of individuals subject to this process will receive positive decisions. A significant majority of these individuals are single people who will not qualify for support under Housing Solutions emergency accommodation criteria, leading to a potential increase in homelessness in the city with no additional funding from the Home Office to help mitigate this. Working with Housing Solutions, Refugee Forum, The Red Cross, Framework, Emanuel House and others partners have managed to avert a crisis of street homelessness amongst those recently given refugee status over the winter.
- 4.6 In collaboration with partners, on-site drop-in support session is now provided for asylum seekers, both at the largest contingency hotel and the flats in order to address issues and minimise escalation to other services, particularly Children and Families.
- 4.7 In 2021 the Home Office provided Local Authorities with **Asylum Dispersal grants** for each bedspace they accommodated in each LA area. This funding can be used to best ease specific local pressures arising from accommodating additional asylum seekers and ease pressures on local services. We have been able to use this funding to support Refugee Forum following the loss of the General Fund contribution to Grants in April and will continue to support the voluntary sector to provide these vital support services if the funding is repeated from national government in future years.
- 4.8 The team have delivered a small grant scheme for grants between £500.00 and £10,000 which include the following criteria:
- Addressing **isolation** in asylum seeker communities – including supporting existing work to promote **healthy relationships**.
  - Providing **safe spaces** for asylum seekers – supporting communities through providing physical space, particularly to asylum seekers who face social isolation or multiple barriers to inclusion
  - Being part of Nottingham – targeting **integration** through a range of activities or events including cultural and local awareness, peer support, befriending and social gatherings
  - **Empowering** asylum seekers – to offer support around crisis, hardship and poverty, this could mean financial difficulties or support and advice around practical needs OR to help asylum seekers be heard within mainstream services, partners and organisations
  - Support for asylum seeker **voices** – enabling asylum seekers to challenge cultural stereotypes, championing Nottingham as a **zero**

**tolerance city for hate crime** directed at asylum seekers and undertaking difficult conversations with wider communities.

- Mental Health Support – providing support that complements statutory provision to meet the specific mental **health and wellbeing** needs of asylum seekers

#### 4.9 Meetings and Forums:

- **MAF (Multi-Agency Forum):** This is the main forum serving as a clearing house for all matters relating to migration, where policy shifts, issues, concerns are addressed. This meets quarterly and is attended by a wide variety of statutory, voluntary, and charitable organisations who work within this field. SERCO, Migrant Help, Reed in Partnership, East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) and others also attend to provide updates and take away issues for redress.
- **SERCO Temporary Sites:** The team facilitate meetings monthly with the voluntary/statutory sector to ensure there is co-ordinated approach across the two contingency sites and the tower block, to address any issues/concerns. So far this year, we have established the following:
  - Social prescribers now attend sites regularly
  - Regular wellness sessions
  - Mental health drop-in sessions
  - UK SIM cards distributed to residents
  - English, employability, beauty and nail courses
  - Drop-ins for women
  - Health sessions
  - Visits by the dental bus
  - On-site eye testing via contact with optician
  - English classes running each Monday at a local church
  - Conversation classes to enable English language practice
  - Youth group each Thursday evening for 6-13 year old's
  - Christmas gifts for families and individuals at all 3 venues.
- **Safeguarding Reference Meeting:** Due to the high number of vulnerable individuals and families we support, the team have developed a bi-weekly safeguarding group to raise and address safeguarding concerns relating to asylum seekers. The aim of this is to provide early intervention support while at the same time protecting the most vulnerable, and hold individuals/organisations accountable. A Terms of Reference has been agreed, and since commencing in April 2023 the team have discussed and actioned 32 cases.
- **Countering Asylum Hate and Vulnerabilities:** This is a new forum which was formed in 2023 due to the increase in hostility and negativity towards asylum seekers and other migrants. An action plan was delivered which included :
  - Work to build understanding with the established communities

- Help asylum seekers understand key UK rules and support Integration
  - Build and plan activities for Asylum Seekers using a coordinated approach and empower asylum seekers to actively engage with the broader community
  - Develop partnerships with local community and voluntary organisations, government agencies, educational institutions, and religious organisations to create a unified response to hate crimes.
  - Develop and implement communications to raise awareness about the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees.
- **RASLAG:** (Refugee and Asylum Seeker Liaison and Advisory Group) This is facilitated by Midwifery services, specifically working with pregnant asylum-seeking women to ensure the safety and wellbeing of mother and child, and their wider family if required. They work closely with the Transient Health Visitor's Team.
  - **East Midlands Regional Asylum Meeting/East Midlands Resettlement Engagement Meeting:** These are region-wide meetings which provide updates from the Home Office, DLUHC, and SMP. They provide peer support across all LA's, offer advance notice of new policy work under development, and highlight any current issues, concerns, or trends for escalation.
  - **Drop-Ins and Support:** Our Asylum Seeker and Refugee Coordinator provides support to new arrivals with access to education, health, housing, and other services as required. Drop-ins are held weekly at the hotels and tower block in partnership with health colleagues and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF). These provide any necessary support or signposting.
  - **Homelessness meeting:** Meets bi-weekly to discuss and address the potential increase in refugees becoming homeless due to the streamlined asylum process.

## 5.0 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The two teams are now under a single manager to provide cross team learning and support. The Refugee Resettlement Team is currently recruiting a Contracts and Commissioning Officer to support the regularisation of the grants, contracts and landlord arrangements in the team which have become more complex as the cohort has grown.
- 5.2 Work on a power BI performance dashboard is underway to enable quick access to core data and progress.

5.3 Work to develop and deliver improved services to those in the Ukraine Scheme particularly is a significant focus and the team will be looking to commission evaluation and support for this cohort in the near future.