

CABINET

24 MARCH 2022

WORCESTERSHIRE RESPONSE TO INVASION OF UKRAINE

Leader of the Council

Simon Geraghty

Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities

Matt Dormer

Chief Executive

Chief Executive

Recommendation

1. **The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, recommends that Cabinet:**
 - a) **Endorses the joint ‘One Worcestershire’ approach to support Ukraine and the Ukrainian people following agreement between the County Council and six District Councils to work together and co-ordinate response;**
 - b) **Approves our participation in the Ukraine Family Scheme and Local Sponsorship Scheme;**
 - c) **Agrees that the Council uses its resources to help the co-ordination of efforts across the County and to work with voluntary and community groups to support local community response; and**
 - d) **Notes the work being done to review existing contracts and investments with our intention to immediately suspend any further investments in Russia and Belarus and review our approach to exit from all of the investments in Russia and Belarus.**

Background

2. Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This was an escalation of the ongoing conflict which had seen Russian-backed separatists take control of the Crimean Peninsula and parts of the Eastern Donbas region from 2014. Whilst Russia expected a quick war, Ukrainian resistance has been strong, backed up by a unified Western policy to support Ukraine and target the Russian economy through widespread sanctions.

3. The resulting conflict and targeting of Ukrainian cities and infrastructure has had a significant humanitarian impact. To date (15 March 2022), over 2.8 million

Ukrainians have fled the country, with the vast majority being re-settled in the European Union – particularly Poland. This represents the largest displacement of people in Europe since World War II. The UK Government pledged to support displaced Ukrainians, both through a refugee scheme and via donations of aid.

4. Worcestershire County Council, alongside the six District Councils and other public sector partners, already has a history of resettling people into our communities in response to crisis around the world. We recognise the strong support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and are ensuring we are aligned to the national response. As a diverse County, Worcestershire is home to people and families from Ukraine and we are committed to support these people and their families in line with the UK Government.

Ukraine Family Scheme and Local Sponsorship Scheme

5. The Home Secretary launched the Ukraine Family Scheme on 4 March, which will allow thousands of families to be reunited in the UK. The scheme will allow applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK, allowing immediate and extended family of British nationals and people settled in the UK to come to the country. Those joining family through this scheme will now be granted leave for three years. Successful applicants will be able to live, work and study in the UK and access public funds.

6. The Prime Minister announced that Government is working to establish the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukrainians with no ties to the UK to be able to come here. The uncapped route will allow sponsors, such as communities or local authorities, to bring people to the UK. Sponsored individuals will be able to work, and the sponsor would provide housing and integration support.

7. The Council is working closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and with local partners, to coordinate actions. The County Council has agreed with the six District Council's to co-ordinate our response as 'One Worcestershire' to ensure a joint approach is undertaken. It is recommended that the Cabinet supports these schemes and approach and agrees to receive further information from UK Government as it becomes available.

8. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities will continue to lead on the County's work on all resettlement programmes.

Co-ordination of Support

9. The Council has an important role in linking local efforts and initiatives together to ensure the county can best support Ukrainians impacted by the conflict. At the moment, the best way to provide humanitarian help for the people of Ukraine is through financial donations to organisations with a presence in the region. This is a more efficient and effective way to support those in need than physical donations, given the complexities and time it can take to physically transport supplies. A list of agencies supporting Ukraine is at Annex A. It is recommended that Cabinet approves this list and communicates it alongside our supporting statement for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people to ensure those seeking to support locally go through the most efficient channels.

10. The Council is also reviewing how its Here2Help service, originally dedicated to helping those who needed support during the Covid-19 pandemic, can help co-ordinate initiatives across the county to provide support for Ukrainian people. This will be of particular relevance for those who are resettled in the county as a result of the Ukraine Family and Local Sponsorship schemes and require guidance in how to access services and become part of the local community. Resource will be made available to support activity in this area and ensure local efforts are co-ordinated to provide the maximum support to the people of Ukraine.

Contracts and Investments

11. As a responsible public sector organisation, the Council has reviewed our contractual relationships to assess if there are any contracts held directly with Russian or Belarusian suppliers. We can confirm that we do not have any direct contractual relationships with Russian or Belarusian organisations. We will shortly be approaching our major suppliers to understand if they have contracts with Russian or Belarusian suppliers, either directly or within their supply chain. Where these exist, we will work with our suppliers to encourage them to reduce/remove dependency on this supply.

12. Our due diligence has identified the Worcestershire Pension Fund has a very small amount (0.15%) of the overall Fund invested in Russia. In light of the situation in Ukraine, we immediately suspended any further investments in Russia. Whilst we continue to review our existing investments, our approach will be to disinvest and exit from all of the investments in Russia.

Legal Implications

13. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

14. There are some minor financial implications arising from this report as a result of the review into the Council's contracts and investments and our commitment for no further contracts or investment associated with Russia or Russian companies. The very small (0.15%) investment of the Worcestershire Pension Fund in Russian organisations will be divested in due course although this will not have any significant impact on the Fund as a whole given its relative size.

15. Whilst initial assessment has suggested the Council holds no contracts directly with Russian or Belarusian organisations, there may be contracts held by suppliers with links to Russian or Belarusian organisations. The outcome and implications of this review will be assessed in due course. Where these exist, we will work with our suppliers to encourage them to reduce/remove dependency on this supply.

16. Ukraine is a major supplier of steel which supports the Council's capital programme. It is expected this will impact the availability and cost of steel and work is ongoing to review mitigation for this.

17. It is not expected that the expansion of the Here2Help service will have any immediate additional financial implications, however this will be reviewed in light of the outcome of the Ukraine Family and Local Sponsorship schemes and updates will

be provided should any additional resources be required for Worcestershire's response to these schemes.

Implications

18. There are no direct HR implications arising from this report. Communication has been sent out to staff who are directly or indirectly impacted or affected by the situation highlighting ways they can be supported.

Risk Implications

19. There is clear support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people from Governments across the world and recognition of the role of the UK Government to support those displaced by the conflict. There is a reputational risk to Worcestershire County Council should it not support these initiatives, as well as a risk to communities where settled people are not provided the support to access services and rebuild their lives.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

This report provides an overview of the Council's position and support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

A **joint impact assessment (JIA)** screening (and any full impact assessments – if screening indicates that they are required) will be completed for any specific initiatives that arise as part of the wider Council's and county's response to the ongoing conflict.

Supporting Information

- Appendix – List of agencies providing support to Ukraine

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report
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Background Papers

None