

Report from Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board to Cabinet 24 March 2022

Worcestershire Response to Invasion of Ukraine – Scrutiny comments

At its meeting on 23 March, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) considered the report to Cabinet about the County Council's response to the invasion of Ukraine and support for the Ukrainian people. The Board is grateful to the Leader and Chief Executive for their attendance at the meeting, detailed presentation and answers to questions.

The discussion at OSPB was wide ranging, but the Board wished to raise the following points with Cabinet:

1. The role of County Councillors in communicating with their residents was viewed as critical and thus the Board recommended that regular updates are provided to all Councillors in a format for easy onward dissemination.
2. Related to this, the Board suggested that information on the Council's website is made very prominent (in the form of a banner) so it can be found quickly via search engines (an example was given that a search for Here2Help currently shows as a site for dealing with Covid which may confuse members of the public).
3. The Board welcomes the 'One Worcestershire' approach between the County and six District Councils working together on a coordinated response and suggests that a clear strategy and vision is articulated for how the County Council and partners are dealing with the Ukrainian issue.
4. The Board was concerned about how the Council and partners will establish which of the refugees are in greatest need of support (particularly those harder to reach).
5. A non-member of the Board suggested that the Council works with military organisations and charities which are likely to have experience of supporting relatives of those serving as soldiers (noting that males between 18 and 60 are not being allowed to leave Ukraine in order to take part in resisting Russian forces). The Vice Chairman of the Board is raising this with the Armed Forces Covenant Group, and the Board suggests this is taken up by those working on support for Ukrainians who come to Worcestershire.
6. The Board appreciated the fluid situation at the moment with many details to be confirmed by Central Government but asked for reassurance that the 'what ifs' mentioned during the meeting are being considered whilst the response is being planned and confirmed.
7. Whilst acknowledging the merits of pooling the £10,500 allocation per person of the local sponsorship scheme, the Board considered that there should be clear allocation and monitoring arrangements in place. It recommends that this should be a person-centred approach, monitored by the appropriate Scrutiny Panel as part of its quarterly financial monitoring.