

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 9 March 2022

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD
Re: Support to Ukraine Families in Devon

Over the past two years, Ukraine has become one of the largest countries of origin for work visas in the United Kingdom since Brexit. A large number of these are in the agricultural sector, food production and processing.

Can the cabinet member please confirm what we are doing with other key partners in response to the crisis in Ukraine to support Ukrainian people and families already working and living in Devon?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Ukrainians already living in the UK who need to extend their stay

The Home Office has announced some temporary concessions for Ukrainians in the UK who have expiring visas and are unable to leave. The usual restrictions on extending visas or switching immigration category whilst in the UK are being relaxed. Those impacted must still meet the other eligibility criteria for the Visa category they are applying for.

All local Councils in Devon are providing details on their websites and via helplines information regarding where to access the latest advice on travel and accessing support around Visas.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD
Re: Ukrainian Resettlement Programme

The Russian governments expansionist aggressive unprovoked war against the people of Ukraine is an international disgrace.

It also represents in terms of displaced people fleeing war and terror, the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

What work is Devon County Council doing with others in regard to the United Kingdoms Ukrainian Resettlement Programme?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

People with UK family ties

The Ukraine Family Scheme allows family members of British nationals, UK settled persons and certain others to come to or stay in the UK. Those eligible

and who have lived in Ukraine before January 2022 can apply for a 3-year Visa, free of charge, via a temporary dedicated Visa Application Centre (VAC) in [Rzeszow, Poland](#).

You can apply at a VAC in any country if you are able to travel safely. VACs are currently operating throughout Europe include:

- [Budapest, Hungary](#)
- [Chisinau, Moldova](#)
- [Warsaw, Poland](#)
- [Bucharest, Romania](#)
- [Paris, France](#)

UK Government aims to process the applications within 24 hours. Those with a Visa will be able to live, work and study in the UK and access public funds. Those needing any assistance, can call the 24/7 free helpline +44 808 164 8810 (0808 164 8810 if you're in the UK).

People without family links in the UK

On 1 March the Home Secretary confirmed plans to establish a [new sponsorship scheme for Ukrainians](#) without any family ties to the UK. The scheme will allow sponsors, such as communities, private sponsors, or local authorities, to bring those forced to flee Ukraine, to the UK. Those who come under this scheme will also be granted leave for an initial period of 12 months and able to work and access public services.

The Government will work closely with international partners and neighbouring countries on the scheme to ensure that displaced Ukrainians are supported to apply.

We will also make sure that those who want to sponsor an individual or family can volunteer and be matched quickly with Ukrainians in need, working closely with local councils.

Further details on the scheme for people will be published soon, including information on how people and organisations in the UK can apply to be sponsors.

Local support:

The Leaders of Devon County Council, the District Councils in Devon and Devon Association of Local Councils released a statement on 3 March condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine and committing to work together in co-ordinating local action across councils to support refugees seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Currently we are awaiting further details around the various scheme's eligibility criteria and launch date which will inform the specific detailed activity required from DCC and partners.

DCC is committed to working with partners from District Councils, Health, Education, DWP etc. to ensure a coordinated response, based on previous learning and good practice from existing refugee support arrangements. This will include ensuring consistent messaging and signposting to key guidance and points of information relating to offers of support.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD
Re: Co-ordination of Works with Ukrainian Refugees

The overwhelming number of those seeking refuge and resettlement from the war in Ukraine, are children, women, and elderly people. As per the work that we have previously done with Syrian Refugees, and continue to do with Afghani refugees, what specific work will we be coordinating and leading on with Ukrainian refugees?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The specific activity required from DCC will depend on scheme criteria (yet to be announced) and numbers of families moving to the UK alongside the types of support needs people might have. To better understand those potential needs DCC will shortly be reaching out to families in Devon who have family members from Ukraine who they are planning to support to arrive in the UK to better understand what the accommodation (and wider) needs might be.

A local government group in Devon has been established to co-ordinate policy and operational approaches, building on learning in supporting other refugees locally.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD
Re: Work with Communities to provide Humanitarian Aid

As the Ukrainian people continue to fight bravely for their liberty and freedom, in the face of authoritarian fascist aggression, their national resources are being destroyed and ravaged. Can Devon County Council use its convening powers and strategic role in Devon to work with local communities, churches, charities and others, to help the people of Devon provide humanitarian aid, including medical supplies, clothing and food to our comrades and allies in Ukraine?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

DCC alongside Local Authority partners will encourage and promote financial donations to specific international aid appeals to support the crisis in Ukraine and to neighbouring countries providing direct support to refugees.

The UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched its Ukraine appeal which draws together funding and action across major charities and NGOs to support those displaced from conflict there. UK Government have pledged to match up to £20M of any donations from the public.

District Councils have agreed to hold offer accommodation until local requirements become clearer.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Supply Chains and Russia

Please can the Leader confirm that Devon County Council has conducted a full review of its supply chains in order to provide assurance there is no exposure to Russia and remove any that may exist.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

The Council's procurement service has conducted an immediate review of DCC contracts and to date, has found no links with Russian firms. An obvious line of enquiry is around the purchase of energy. DCC's energy provider, LASER Energy, has released a statement advising that its gas supplies have no direct link with Russia and they will let us know if they uncover any indirect links within their supply chain. The Council is also awaiting an update from the Cabinet Office which is expected shortly regarding what measures contracting authorities may or must undertake in relation to this issue. DCC officers will closely review this Cabinet Office guidance as soon as it is available and advise on what further measures may or must be undertaken.

I would also draw Councillor Baileys attention to the press release which was issued last week highlighting that Team Devon authorities, including Devon County and District Councils and the Devon Association of Local Councils, have pledged to work together to support Ukrainian refugees seeking sanctuary in the UK, and have each condemned Russia's actions.

Also, that individually, Councils have also taken steps to cut Russian links, such as through contracts for energy provision. And any few remaining investments within the Devon Pension Fund, linked to Russian assets, are being sold off quickly.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Contracts and Procurements with Russia

Please can the Leader confirm whether Devon County has any direct contracts or procurements with Russian companies and that it will terminate any that may exist.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

Please see response to question 5