

Proposed recruitment of Ukrainian Community Support Officer position

Summary:

With the Government announcing the ability for large numbers of Ukrainian refugees to come to the UK through the UK Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine programme, it is believed that we could see quite large numbers of women, children and older people from the Ukraine come to North Norfolk in the coming weeks. In order to provide a warm welcome to North Norfolk to the refugee families and support local people who have offered to provide accommodation through the Homes for Ukraine scheme to assist them in accessing health, education, language support and employment locally, the Council proposes creating a Ukrainian Community Support Officer post within its People Services service area who is able to speak Ukrainian / Russian and provide a cultural link and support for this new community in North Norfolk.

Conclusions:

Cabinet propose appointing a Ukrainian Community Support Officer, initially for twelve months, to support Ukrainian refugees accommodated in North Norfolk at this time of crisis in their country.

The Cabinet would hope the costs of such a post can be met in due course through Government funding pledged to local authorities to provide a strong and supportive response to the national refugee programme, but for now is proposing to meet the costs from a Council Reserve.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is therefore recommended to:-

Agree to the Council recruiting a Ukrainian Community Support Officer post on the Council's establishment, initially for a period of twelve months, with the costs being met through the Council's Delivery Plan Reserve in the immediate term, and with officers asked to establish if such costs can be claimed back from Government funding to local authorities supporting the national refugee programme in the coming months.

Reason for
Recommendation:

To provide a timely response and support to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees into North Norfolk as part of the UK's Homes for Ukraine programme.

Cabinet member(s):
Cllr Tim Adams, Leader of
the Council

Ward(s) affected:
All

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The conflict situation in Ukraine has developed rapidly over the past month, with the humanitarian impact of many hundreds of thousands of people leaving the country, largely travelling west into Europe, being of a huge scale over the past three weeks – the largest migration of people in Europe since the Second World War with over 3 million people understood to have left Ukraine in the past three weeks.
- 1.2 In response to this pressing situation, the UK Government announced on the 14th March that an uncapped number of Ukrainian nationals would be granted permission to come to the UK, initially for a period of up to three years, under a national Homes for Ukraine programme. In the first 48 hours following the announcement of the programme where UK households are being asked if they have space to accommodate Ukrainian refugees in their homes, initially for six months, over 125,000 people had registered offers of accommodation on the Government website.
- 1.3 Whilst the exact details of the programme are still being worked through, Government has stated that it will be looking to local authorities to assist in the successful delivery of support for Ukrainian refugees through undertaking assessment of property offers and supporting refugees settle in their areas and access health, education, language and other public support, as well as for those who are able, to access employment. Initially it is believed that many of the refugees will be women, children and older people – with most men aged 18 – 60 remaining in Ukraine to support defence of the country and provision of critical public services and infrastructure.
- 1.4 At the present time it is not understood how many Ukrainian refugees might come to North Norfolk but we believe this might potentially be several hundred such that we should make some dedicated provision of a support resource, with Ukrainian / Russian language skills as well as English to provide assistance to refugees and providers of accommodation access public services and secure longer-term accommodation. We believe that this can be best achieved locally through the recruitment of a Community Support Officer post within the Council's People Services service grouping.
- 1.5 Estimated costs of an initial twelve-month appointment would be circa £50,000 and it would be hoped that this expenditure could be met through Government support for local authorities providing a response to the refugee crisis. However, we believe we need to put in place this support now and are therefore proposing that we meet this cost from the Council's Delivery Plan Reserve alongside the authority continuing to work with the County Council, other local authorities, third sector organisations and some local businesses all of whom are responding positively to the Government's call to support the Ukrainian community in this time of desperate need.

2.0. Risks and Implications for Council:-

- 2.1 The proposal made above for the authority to recruit a Ukrainian Community Support Officer is considered to be a measured and appropriate response to what is a rapidly developing situation. Whilst management capacity can be redirected to participate in county level partnership discussions and programmes, the authority lacks any dedicated and specialist resource, including a resource with the necessary language skills and cultural understanding to provide support to refugees coming to North Norfolk in terms of providing even basic assistance to settle here such as accessing health, education, benefits, housing and employment advice. The proposal therefore seeks to provide a dedicated resource within the Council's People Services service grouping to extend a warm welcome to North Norfolk of this displaced and vulnerable community so they can be supported in rebuilding their lives at what is a time of considerable uncertainty for them often having left partners, husbands and fathers, and perhaps elderly relatives, in Ukraine. As the numbers of Ukrainian refugees coming to North Norfolk is understood it would also be hoped that the Community Support Officer could promote the establishment of local networks which would link Ukrainian families settling in different parts of the District and indeed Norfolk together, reducing their sense of isolation and allowing them to retain some of their cultural links and identity at a time when they will also be making new friendships and connections in settling in the UK.

3. Financial Implications:

- 3.1 Estimated costs of an initial twelve-month appointment would be up to £60,000. Initially it would be proposed to meet these costs from the Council's Delivery Plan Reserve but officers would be asked to establish whether these costs could be claimed from Government through the support it has pledged to local authorities providing a response to the refugee crisis.

4. Legal issues

- 4.1 There are no specific legal issues raised by this report at this time.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 In response to what is a rapidly developing humanitarian situation where large numbers of Ukrainian refugees are expected to be accommodated in the UK in the coming weeks, the Council proposes to establish a post of a Ukrainian Community Support Officer to provide support and assistance to refugees coming to North Norfolk and to their hosts providing refuge and accommodation in terms of providing advice on accessing health care, education, housing, benefits and employment – making their settlement in North Norfolk as positive an experience as possible at what is otherwise a desperate and worrying time in their lives. The costs to the Council are considered minimal given the positive benefits and outcomes which it would be expected would be realised through such a post.

10. Recommendation:

Cabinet is therefore recommended to:-

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the immediate term, and with officers asked to establish if such costs can be claimed back from Government funding to local authorities supporting the national refugee programme in the coming months.