



COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

Homes for Ukraine:

Welcoming, supporting
and integrating tens of
thousands of refugees



About County Spotlight

At the County Councils Network (CCN) one of our core objectives as a national representative body is to share the innovative work our councils are doing on a daily basis to provide vital frontline services, support local economies, and create thriving communities.

This regular publication seeks to shine the spotlight on the most recent best practice and innovative solutions being put forward by our member councils across a range of different policy areas. Alongside this, it provides an update on the national policy landscape and commentary from our lead members and strategic partners.

To find out more about future themes, or to recommend a case study, please contact ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk.

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CCN View

The crisis in Ukraine has been heartbreaking - not only the scenes of death and destruction we have seen on an almost a daily basis, but in the sheer amount of people displaced because of Russia's invasion.

Local government has a proud track record of being welcoming and inclusive to new arrivals. Over the last decade, councils have helped integrate thousands of refugees, most notably from Syria and Afghanistan, but Ukraine presented arguably the biggest challenge in terms of the numbers involved.

Much of the focus of the Homes for Ukraine programme has rightly been on the public's enthusiasm for the scheme, with the numbers registering to become hosts phenomenal - particularly in county areas. But alongside the generosity of residents, local government has been the lynchpin in enabling refugees to come to England.

Many of us had to redesign services overnight or at short notice to ensure checks can be effectively carried out for hosts. The work doesn't stop there, with councils then working with local partners to help integrate the new arrivals.



Considering the success of the programme, colleagues across local government responded to the call with aplomb. As this special *County Spotlight* shows, County Councils Network member councils have gone above and beyond their role, helping to integrate new arrivals and support continued hosting arrangements.

We also need to recognise there have been challenges with the programme. With hosting arrangements coming to an end, there has been a marked increase in homelessness from refugees and national and local government needs to get on top of this issue quickly. But 12 months on from Homes for Ukraine launching, the programme has been another feather in local government's cap in showing how we can respond in times of crisis.

We are rightly proud of our county communities, and we will continue to do all we can to foster that enthusiasm and spirit for making the world - and our corner of it - a better place.

Cllr Barry Lewis
CCN Vice-Chair

It has been over a year since scenes many of us thought unimaginable became commonplace on our TV screens as Russia invaded Ukraine.

While the war against Russian aggression itself has seen remarkable bravery from Ukrainians, the effect the invasion has had on the country has been monumental. Millions have felt they have had little option but to flee for safety.

The UK government announced the Homes for Ukraine Programme on the 14th of March 2022 – less than a month after the invasion. Under this programme, individuals and organisations with spare rooms in the properties they own could sponsor and host a refugee or refugee family for a minimum of six months.

In just 24 hours after the programme opened, there were over 120,000 registrations of interest in housing Ukrainian refugees. Since then, 85,837 refugees have arrived in England.

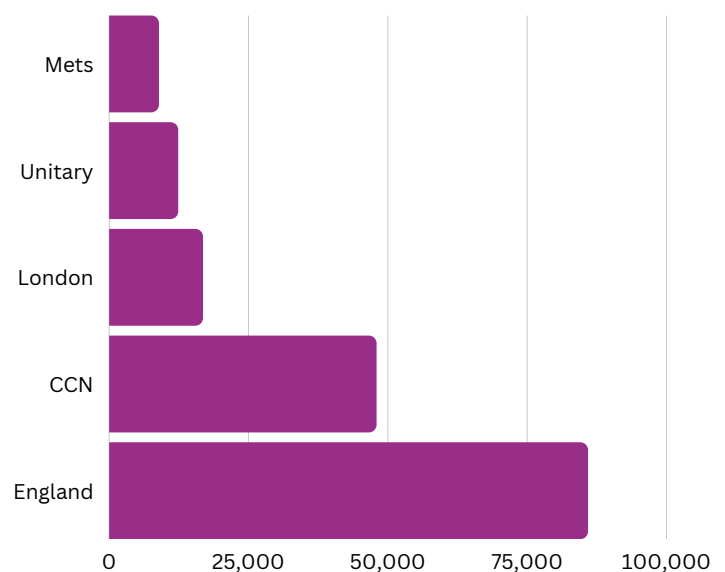
County councils and unitary councils were earmarked as the lead authorities for the programme, with these authorities coordinating local efforts and the government's monthly payments of £350 to sponsors going directly to those upper-tier councils for distribution.

Alongside putting in place arrival support and services, councils are required to carry out housing and safeguarding checks to ensure

accommodation is of a suitable standard and that guests arriving in England are safe. In two-tier areas, ensuring this was effectively delivered was a collaborative effort between counties and districts.

Bearing in mind how quickly the scheme was launched by the government, local authorities had to redesign their services quickly to ensure that hosts could be properly assessed and to ensure the sheer demand from both hosts and refugees could be met.

This was particularly acute in county areas – of the 85,837 sponsored refugees that have settled in England since March 2022, some 56% have been in county areas, meaning that CCN's member councils and their partners have arguably done the heaviest lifting in the Homes for Ukraine programme, as the chart below shows.



[1] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-launches>

[2] Financial Times, March 2022: <https://www.ft.com/content/c2a2a7e6-9d46-4178-ae25-3fa978250161>

[3] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme data by local authority, March 7 2023:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-visa-data-by-country-upper-and-lower-tier-local-authority#full-publication-update-history>

CCN analysis of government data reveals that out of the 25 areas that have accommodated the most sponsored refugees, all bar one is a CCN member.

Breaking the data down by region, as the table below does, the South East has seen the largest number of arrivals at 19,998, followed by London with 16,757 and the South West with 11,060.

Within these regions, CCN member councils have seen the largest percentage of arrivals, with the counties in the East of England seeing 90% of sponsored arrivals out of all council areas, the South East accommodating 83% of arrivals, and counties in the South West hosted 69% of Ukrainian refugees to that region.

Region	Number	% in counties
South East	19,998	83%
London	16,757	N/A
South West	11,060	69%
East	10,184	90%
North West	7,067	39%
East Midlands	6,546	75%
West Midlands	6,318	67%
Yorkshire & Humber	5,476	30%
North East	2,431	43%

Since that announcement and the first influx of refugees over the spring and summer of 2022, CCN member councils' efforts have turned to supporting hosts to continue to sponsor Ukrainian refugees as the cost-of-living crisis worsened.

With household bills rising, some sponsors were concerned whether they would be able to continue to host in their property. In circumstances where that happened, and the council was unable to rematch the Ukrainian individual or family, then there was a risk of them becoming homeless.

To try and avert this, CCN member councils begun to increase payments to host families from last autumn using their own funding. They led the way here – with many offering increased payments several weeks before the government announced in December it was increasing the host payment from £350 to £500 for guests who have been in the country for 12 months – and increasing payments from a year to two years.⁴

Since then, many local authorities have topped up this monthly payment. In some areas this has had a clear effect – with a district in one county area reporting that 75% of hosts had signed up to sponsor guests for two years.

[4] Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-over-650m-support-package-for-ukrainians-sees-increased-thank-you-payments-for-longer-term-hosts>

Despite this good work and close collaboration between local and national government, as well as charity and third sector groups, the programme has also faced challenges, which are arguably most acute in county areas.

The December extension of 'thank you' payments also witnessed a reduction in the amount of funding for upper-tier councils received in core tariff payments to support the delivery of wrap around public services; from £10,500 per Ukrainian to £5,900. This was in light of 'wider pressures' on public finances and in recognition that some refugees have returned to Ukraine.

CCN continues to be concerned that if numbers of refugees rise, councils will not have enough funding to successfully integrate these individuals and families as effectively as before. Alongside this, there is no confirmation that councils will be able to roll over any unspent funds beyond its end of 2023/24 cut-off date.

Some councils have raised concerns that they have set up Homes for Ukraine teams and have recruited specialist support in language, business, and wellbeing using the tariff, with the funding for this support needing to be funded via a core budget if the tariff cannot be rolled over.

Increasingly, there also has been a rise in Ukrainians presenting to their local housing authority as homeless where their sponsorship arrangement has ended and they cannot find private accommodation or a rematch.

CCN member councils have said it is becoming harder to rematch families as more hosts give up their arrangements. Many have offered households extra funding on top of the government's monthly payments to incentivise households to continue to host and have evolved their services, so they have dedicated rematch teams and wider resettlement teams.

The government has also announced a £500m Local Authority Housing Support Fund⁵ for councils to buy housing stock for Ukrainian refugees. CCN's unitary councils have begun accessing this fund, but it is not an overnight fix with private sector sales taking time to go through.

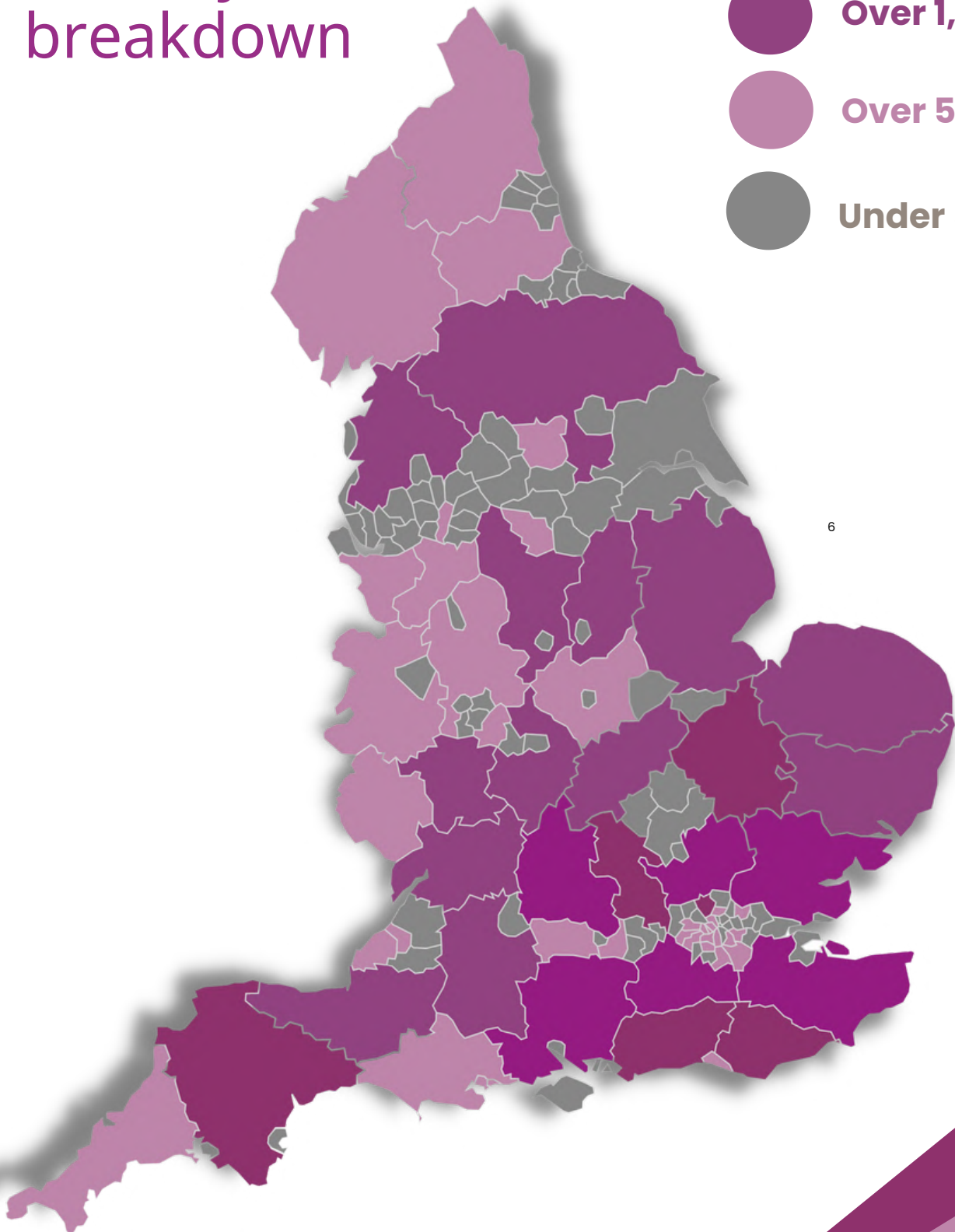
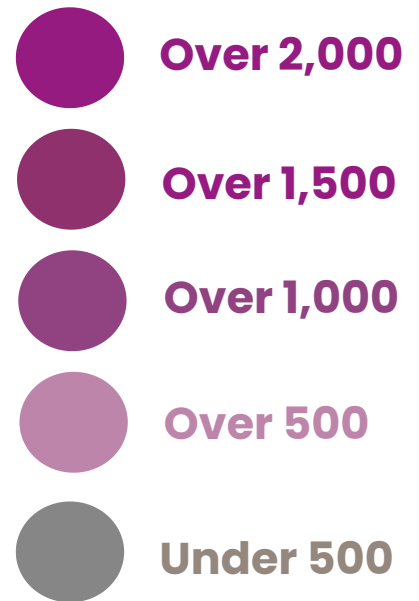
Despite the efforts of county, unitary and district authorities, there were 4,925 households homeless as of the end of January – a rapid rise of 40% from the end of November 2022.⁶ The government announced in December a £150m homelessness fund for refugees, but as of March there has been little detail on when and how this will be distributed. CCN has joined the LGA's call for the government to publish more information.

Although challenges remain with ensuring the long-term resettlement of families, this *County Spotlight* showcases CCN member authorities at their very best – working flat out to make the programme a success and innovating in ensuring the new arrivals are welcome and integrated into county communities.

[5] Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-over-650m-support-package-for-ukrainians-sees-increased-thank-you-payments-for-longer-term-hosts>

[6] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Homelessness management information – Ukrainian nationals: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-management-information-ukrainian-nationals-england>

Sponsored arrivals in England: Area-by-area breakdown



Theme 1: Helping to host refugees

Since the start of March, England has seen over 85,000 Ukrainian refugees arrive as part of the Homes for Ukraine programme, where households 'sponsor' a visa for individuals or families, and take them into their home. This has been no small undertaking - and with counties seeing over half of all sponsored arrivals - the pressure has been more acute for those areas.

The government initially announced sponsors would receive £350 a month, which was raised to £500 a month in December for guests who have stayed in the UK for over a year.

But before this uplift was done, this publication shows how proactive CCN's members were; recognising the cost-of-living crisis and the potential for bills to increase over winter, many county authorities began uplifting payments in the autumn or offering households 'thank you' payments. These not only thanked sponsors for their efforts, but sought to incentivise them to keep their arrangements in place for longer than the initial six month period. Considering the conflict in Ukraine continues, demand for sponsors will still remain throughout 2023.

CCN's members have also been alert in responding to challenges: recognising that some hosts may be unable to continue their arrangement after six months, they have set up dedicated resettlement teams where they 'rematch' refugees and sponsors. Others have worked with the private sector to incentivise landlords to accommodate refugees.

From incentivising hosts to setting up rematching teams, CCN's member councils have effectively responded to new challenges.



Dorset Council

£1,000 'thank you' payment to host households

Households across Dorset who signed up to be hosts to Ukrainian refugees received an additional £1,000 payment during this winter – which is thought to be one of the most generous schemes of its kind in England.

Dorset Council said that its extra payment was in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis, with households across the country seeing sharp increases in utility bills. Those who have long term hosting arrangements also benefit from Dorset Council topping payments up to £600 per month after six months.

The council has also begun working to help find refugees housing where their host arrangements have come to an end. The authority's housing team provides full assessments, whilst the council has engaged with the private sector and landlords.

[Read more here](#)

Staffordshire County Council

Over 300 refugees supported by resettlement team

Staffordshire County Council has set up a dedicated resettlement team to help Ukrainian refugees whose hosting arrangements have come to an end. As of February, over 950 Ukrainians have made Staffordshire their home, with over 600 still being accommodated by hosts.

Over 350 have moved away from the hosting arrangement but remain eligible for support - 159 guests have been re-matched into new host arrangements or temporary accommodation. In total, 136 guests have found independent accommodation.

The council's cabinet have agreed to set up a dedicated team within the council that works on the Homes for Ukraine programme as well as broader resettlement. The council said it will work collaboratively on resettlement options, including working with district and borough councils.

[Read more here](#)

Kent County Council

Extra host payments as cost-of-living bites

In recognition of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, Kent County Council offered extra payments to over 1,500 host households in Kent.

The council took the decision in October – before the government increased monthly payments – after fears many local hosts wouldn't be able to afford to extend their current six-month agreements during winter. The increased payments totalled £50 extra month per refugee, up to a maximum of £650 extra. This was on top of the government's monthly payments which were £350 at the time, but have since risen to £500.

Kent is also offering households who have hosted a refugee for six months £500 in recognition of their efforts and to incentivise them to continue. As of March, 1,324 people were matched with 1,441 hosts – more than any other county. Kent sees two to three new arrivals each day.

[Read more here](#)



Buckinghamshire Council

Rematching over 200 Ukrainian refugees

Buckinghamshire Council launched its 'rematching sponsor' campaign in November, which aims to encourage more households to sign up to host Ukrainian refugees once their original sponsorship had ended.

It was launched in recognition that some sponsorship arrangements for the county's 1,400 refugees were coming to an end and to prevent homelessness. The unitary council says that rematching is vital as it offers guests the opportunity to stay within the county they had made their home since their arrival, which is important for young refugees in school and adults who are working. So far, the council have rematched over 200 Ukrainians to more than 100 households.

The council also offers emergency and temporary sponsors to refugees, who are those to unable commit to the six-month minimum but who would like to help.

[Read more here](#)

Hampshire County Council

Increasing payments to incentivise hosts

Hampshire has seen the third highest number of Ukrainian refugees in England, and the council was determined to ensure that hosts and arrivals had a happy Christmas with an additional one-off payment.

Hampshire County Council made available £250 for host households and £200 per Ukrainian guest in December to support them over the holiday period. The council will use its grant from government to increase 'thank you' payments to all host households in Hampshire to £500 per month from March, regardless of how long their guests have been in the UK, which goes beyond the government's own scheme.

With over 1,300 Ukrainian families settling in Hampshire, the council's library service won an award in recognition of them being safe and supportive places for Ukrainians and other refugees.

[Read more here](#)



Suffolk County Council

A 'thank you' Christmas payment to hosts

Suffolk County Council gave households hosting Ukrainian refugees an extra Christmas present – a one-off payment of £300 as a 'thank you'.

The payment was made to households in the county who hosted refugee individuals and families for the second two weeks of December.

Announcing the new payments in November, the council paid tribute to the 575 households who have played host to Ukrainian refugees since Homes for Ukraine was launched in March 2023, hailing their 'outstanding efforts' to help settle over 1,000 guests into the county.

The one off payment was in addition to the monthly government payment to host families, which in December increased from £350 to £500 when guests have been in the UK for 12 months.

[Read more here](#)

Theme 2: Integrating families

Once Ukrainian refugees have arrived in England, CCN's member councils have responsibility for supporting them to rebuild their lives and integrate in their areas, working closely with local partners.

The government's core tariff is distributed directly to upper-tier councils, but efforts to integrate are a collaborative effort. Councils have a long and proud track record of supporting refugees, with Syrian and Afghan refugee resettlements two of the biggest programmes in the last decade.

They have put this experience to good use with helping to resettle Ukrainian refugees, with some CCN members offering free public transport or parking permits, others supporting charities and the third sector to put on language social classes for new arrivals, and others opening up their holiday playschemes to help young children prepare for school.

In other examples we see CCN's members using their prior experience and deploying their youth service to meet as many new families as possible to discuss their needs and how they can be supported.

Recognising that there is a growing challenge with Ukrainian homelessness, CCN's unitary members have begun ambitious programmes of buying housing stock to home refugees.

Using their prior experience of refugee resettlement schemes, CCN's member councils are putting in place comprehensive support packages to help new arrivals integrate and rebuild their lives



Essex County Council

Youth service supports over 800 refugee children

Essex Youth Service has been working hard to ensure young refugees, arriving in the county from countries like Ukraine and Afghanistan, are provided with a helping hand once they arrive.

The service, run by Essex County Council, has been visiting families and their hosts to complete assessments on the educational and social needs of the children and young people, ensuring visitors are given the information and resources to support them to settle into their new communities. Young people are also encouraged to re-engage with learning.

As of the beginning of February, the service had supported 807 children and young people and their families. The service has set up youth clubs across Essex to give young people from Ukraine, as well as other refugees, an opportunity to come together, share experiences and enjoy themselves.

[Read more here](#)

Surrey County Council

Free bus pass for Ukrainian refugees

To help new Ukrainian refugees integrate into Surrey, the county council offered guests a bus pass which gives them free travel.

Surrey County Council worked with eight bus operators in the county to offer the scheme to Ukrainian guests on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Users are simply able to show their pass to the driver or tap on the ticket machine when boarding the bus from their chosen route, to enable them to travel whilst they settle into their new lives.

Last month the scheme was extended to make passes valid for six months instead of the original three-month period. Over 3,100 Ukrainian guests have made Surrey their home – the second-highest area in England. The council has also topped up monthly 'thank you' payments to total £600 to March 2024 to support and incentivise hosts.

[Read more here](#)

Wiltshire Council

Buying homes for refugees at risk of homelessness

Wiltshire Council is one of the first local authorities to pioneer a new approach to avoiding refugees becoming homeless and is ready to buy up housing for individuals to stay in once their hosting arrangements have come to an end.

Wiltshire Council will be looking to purchase properties using its wholly owned company Stone Circle to assist some Ukrainian families. The unitary authority is leveraging government funds available for this endeavour.

Out of the 1,345 Ukrainians who have settled in Wiltshire, 125 families have moved into private rented accommodation, whilst the council's Homes for Ukraine team have secured 53 rematches with new hosts.

[Read more here](#)

North Northamptonshire Council

Buying up to 30 properties for refugees

North Northamptonshire Council is to buy up to 30 properties in 2023, using them as temporary accommodation for both Ukrainian and Afghan refugees to stop them from becoming homeless.

The council will spend £3.7m in addition to a government grant of £3.2m on the project to buy homes in Rushden, Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough for refugees so they are close to local amenities. They will be a mixture of tenures.

The council has undertaken this project because it has experienced challenges, like many local authorities, in supporting refugees to move out of temporary hotel stays or into the private sector once six-month hosting arrangements came to an end.

[Read more here](#)

Cambridgeshire County Council

Over 150 families attend holiday playschemes

Almost 150 Ukrainian families attended holiday playschemes in Cambridgeshire, arranged by the county council, to provide support to those struggling financially and to improve their language skills.

The Cambridgeshire Holidays, Activities and Food (HAF) Programme operates during the summer and Christmas holidays, providing activities for young people and a meal. To date, the programme saw 144 families take part last summer and 36 over Christmas.

One Ukrainian child, D, was helped to attend playscheme for 64 hours – which enabled her mum to keep working. D's English language rapidly improved during the summer playscheme ahead of starting the Autumn term at school, and she even helped another child speak English over the period as she got more confident.

[Read more here](#)

North Yorkshire County Council

Language classes and social sessions for refugees

Two Yorkshire charities covering the Harrogate district have been working in partnership with North Yorkshire County Council to deliver support to Ukrainian guests.

Chain Lane Community Centre and Harrogate District of Sanctuary have been awarded funding via the council's Homes for Ukraine tariff and are using it to organise regular drop in and social sessions for both guests and sponsors. They have arranged conversational language classes, day trips, family fun days and are able to provide referrals to wider support if needed.

Working together the charities have developed a website and designed a survey to gain feedback around the current offer; this will also aim to establish how guests would like to see their local support develop. During the weekly drop in North Yorkshire County Council's Employability Advisors and a dedicated Citizens Advice worker provide outreach support.



Host's View

Experiences of housing a refugee family

Cllr Kevin Bentley is the leader of Essex County Council and took in a Ukrainian family last year. Below, he shares his experience of hosting two refugees.

Like many of those reading this I take a very simple view of life, that if people ask for genuine help you give it, in the best way you can. It is this philosophy that ensured that my wife and I, without hesitation, were determined to help people in the Ukraine who were facing trauma, the loss of their home or who feared for their lives.

We immediately offered our home to look after those feeling persecution when the call came from the Prime Minister.

There are, of course, many millions across the world that face daily fears and sacrifices and it is difficult to know how to help other than giving to charities and funding experts to work in these areas. But the Homes for Ukraine scheme was tangible for those like myself and my wife, where we could make a real difference to someone's life in a direct way.

We have two delightful people staying with us and now, almost a year on, they are very much part of our family life and part of our community.

We are surrounded by people who have either offered their homes or have given in many other ways and have welcomed those from the Ukraine that are staying with us.

Clearly our guests, and others, desperately want to return to their home and carry on with their lives, as any of us would.

They are in daily contact with their family members who were not able to leave, but for them they are safe and will be part of the rebuilding of their great country. Many in the UK will have similar stories and will know forever that they were able to help and ensure Ukraine goes forward in strength as a rightful independent nation of proud people.

Cllr Kevin Bentley
Leader of Essex
County Council

Theme 3:

Voices from Ukraine and beyond

Svitlana and Karolina's story

County Durham

For Svitlana Oliinyk and her daughter Karolina, it has been a long and arduous road to the sanctuary of a County Durham household.

Soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Svitlana, 27, took the painful decision to leave with her three-year-old daughter from Odessa, which faced airstrikes on the very first day of the offensive.

Reflecting on her situation, Svitlana said: *"It is not good. I miss my husband and my family. My sister is in Kyiv and a bomb fell near her apartment."*

Through the Homes for Ukraine programme Svitlana found a sponsor for her and her daughter to stay with, and the pair arrived in April. However, the arrangement broke down, leading to Svitlana and Karolina having to seek temporary accommodation in West Rainton with assistance from Durham County Council.

The unitary council has people who have signed up as 'rematch' sponsors and as Margaret was signed up and living near where Svitlana and Karolina were staying, a meeting was arranged.



The trio hit it off instantly and arrangements were made for Svitlana and Karolina to move in days later. Svitlana found employment at a local restaurant.

Speaking in December – nine months after the invasion – she felt it was too dangerous to return home and hopes to find a sponsor for her sister in the local area.

Explaining why she is a host, Margaret said: *"I have a granddaughter and a great granddaughter in York and I would hope somebody would help them in the same situation."*

“ I miss my husband and my family. My sister is in Kyiv and a bomb fell near her apartment. ”

Iryna and Kate's story

Cheshire East

When the invasion of Ukraine began, Kherson was one of the first areas to come under siege, with Russia capturing the city until its November liberation. Thousands of victims of the Russian shelling fled the city.

Iryna and her daughter Kate were just two of the countless number of people who had to leave their hometown, and linked up with their host family Clare and Dominic Booth in Alderley Edge some weeks later.

Since relocating to Cheshire East Kate, 10, has a place at a primary school and is learning English fast and helps translate for her mum who is taking language lessons.

Cheshire East Council's deputy leader Cllr Craig Browne helped to acquire a school uniform and PE kit through parish council funding.

Speaking last summer, Kate said: *"I miss home, our house, so many bombs because Ukraine army doesn't want it occupied. Here we are not in any danger. People in England are so kind and friendly everywhere."*



On hearing the two had settled in the borough, the council and its environmental services company Ansa arranged for two bikes, which were left at one of the authority's household waste recycling centres to be refurbished by council staff and donated to the family, so that they can get about more.

Their host, Clare, said: *"We saw the pictures on television and felt we had to do something to help. They seemed so relieved to be here. They have been through such a traumatic time. They are a great asset to the family. My daughter Alice has a new friend."*

“ Here we are not in any danger. People in England are so kind and friendly everywhere. ”

Anna and Timur's story

East Sussex

Anna and Timur had a happy, successful life before the invasion, running a chain of heating equipment shops and looking forward to the simple pleasures in life – replanting their garden. However, everything changed last February.

The family realised they had to leave their home in Kharkov after waking to the sound of explosions. They travelled to central Ukraine but decided to leave a month later following an explosion at a nearby oil refinery.

Speaking last summer and looking back at their decision, Anna said: *"It is impossible to live a normal life when you have air raid alerts several times a day and have to stay in a bomb shelter all the time."*

After registering for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, East Sussex hosts Sarah and her husband Reuben found Anna through social media and the family arrived after driving 2,000 miles across Europe.

Anna continued: *"At first it was very strange not to hear air raid alerts, to see normal life and not be afraid when going to sleep. Sarah and Reuben have been so kind and we happy that we can live here in peace."*



Although Anna and Timur want to return to Ukraine one day, they have set up a tack cleaning business and are planning to start a catering business selling Ukrainian food.

Sarah's grandmother fled Germany as a refugee and Sarah wanted to do something in recognition of that help. She said: *"We are really humbled by how positive and hard working Anna and Timur are, after all they have been through. We are so pleased that we can help in our small way."*

“ At first it was very strange not to hear air raid alerts, to see normal life.

Anastasiia and Yarrick's story

East Sussex

Anastasiia and her husband Yarrick ran a very successful Aikido school in Lviv in Ukraine – but felt they had no option to leave.

She and her family travelled by bus for 24 hours to cross the border into Poland with just a backpack each, sitting between the seats because the bus was so full of people fleeing the invasion.

Speaking last July, Anastasiia described the impact the ordeal has had on her: *“Every morning I wake up and think ‘is it a dream?’”*

She said that her students still write to her and ask when she is coming back.

Anastasiia and Yarrick have been living with television presenter and East Sussex resident Natasha Kaplinsky, who helped to establish a community group which has found homes locally for a large number of Ukrainians.

“Every morning I wake up think ‘is it a dream?’”



Natasha said: *“I come from a family of refugees. My father was a political refugee from South Africa and our family fled Europe in the Second World War, so taking in a family was just something I had to do.”*

“I am very privileged to have the space and there was no question in my mind that I needed to do whatever I could to help.”

Oksana's story

Devon

Oksana hid in her cellar with her family as missiles rained above her home in the beautiful seventh-century city of Cherniv.

Just 80 miles from the Russian border – closer than Exeter is to Bristol – the city was one of the first to be targeted by the advancing columns of Russian tanks and soldiers, scenes that shocked the world.

But despite the onslaught in the first few weeks of the war she admits she didn't want to leave – and hid in her cellar with her family as missiles rained above. But as things steadily became worse, Oksana fled.

"We packed the bare necessities and, frightened to death, we managed to escape to Western Ukraine to get away from missile attacks" she said.

They returned to her home later in Autumn, but the situation became untenable with severe shortages of water, food, and electricity.

In November Oksana, an Associate Professor in Foreign Languages, made the difficult decision to leave her husband and family and apply to come to England under the Homes



for Ukraine scheme after a former colleague from Devon got in touch. The process took just two weeks.

She added: *"Anyone fleeing Ukraine are refugees; but that I, and my compatriots, are considered guests and residents of the UK gives me a sense of true identity in Devon. And I am grateful for that."*

Now Oksana is putting her language skills to good use and she says she is 'very grateful' to Devon County Council who has offered her a role supporting fellow Ukrainians.

“ ...frightened to death, we managed to escape to Western Ukraine to get away from missile attacks.

Hasan's story

Warwickshire

Hasan was looking forward to a positive future and completing his degree when the Syrian Civil War erupted in 2011.

He and his family grew up in Aleppo and was studying for a degree in Drama and English when the war began. Even in these circumstances, he completed his degree a year later but Aleppo was overtaken, with his family trapped for three days.

They escaped to their hometown in the north of the country, but when ISIS reached that area, they relocated to Iraq and after living there for five years, they were nominated by the UN to resettle in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire.

Hasan, along with his parents and three siblings, arrived in Warwickshire in March 2019.

He said: *"In my own country I was scared of the safety of my family, but when I came to Warwickshire, I was just so happy. It was a different feeling, coming to a new country that you know respects people as human beings, and you have human rights. It's an amazing feeling arriving somewhere knowing that you're finally going to safe and happy."*



After getting settled, he became a Family Support Worker at Warwickshire County Council this June to work with other families who are resettling in Warwickshire.

He added: *"I hope that because I know what they are going through, when these families arrive in Warwickshire, I can motivate them as they can see where I have now got to. All you need is some determination and not to give up hope."*

“It's an amazing feeling arriving somewhere knowing that you're finally going to be safe and happy.”

Yevheniia, Sofiia and Vika's story

Warwickshire

Whilst waiting for her visa to come to the UK, Yevheniia and her two daughters Sofiia and Vika were hiding in a bomb shelter in Khahrkiv for an entire month.

She made the tough decision to leave her husband when the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme went live, and met her sponsor in Warwickshire, Sonja, through a friend. Sonja helped with the application.

Looking back at her experience last April, Yevheniia said: *"We decided with my husband, the best solution for myself and our girls was to leave my country and be safe. We were hiding in a bomb shelter for one month. That was the hardest part for my children and myself."*

With her sponsor's help, she managed to find a job at a local care home and places for her daughters at local schools.

She added: *"My oldest daughter Sofiia is in the sixth form studying A levels and the youngest Vika is in secondary school. They are making friends and settling in very well. I am proud and happy that my children have a normal life and can dream about their future."*



Her sponsor Sonja is delighted with Warwickshire County Council's support.

She said: *"The team has been brilliant, and everything has been smooth sailing from the first home checks to the current day. I think the fact that they have checked the welfare of the Ukrainian guests, and that they can contact the team directly if needed, is superb."*

“ We were hiding in a bomb shelter for one month. That was the hardest part for my children and myself. ”

CCCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is a network of 23 county councils and 13 unitary authorities that serve county areas.

The network is a cross party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the Local Government Association and to the government.

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COUNTY SPOTLIGHT