

# WLGA Inquiry Response



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## Supporting Ukrainians in Wales

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### **Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils**

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

#### **We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.**

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

**Our ultimate goal** is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

#### **We'll achieve our vision by**

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
  - Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
  - Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
  - Promoting sector-led improvement
  - Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
  - Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce
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## Purpose

1. This paper was produced following a request to WLGA by the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee as part of its inquiry into Supporting Ukrainians in Wales, which is subsequent to the Auditor General for Wales's report under the same name.<sup>1</sup> In line with the committee's enquiry, this response **highlights the lessons learned from the initial response, support provided to Local Authorities by Welsh Government, the role of Local Authorities within the administration of Welcome Centres and an overall view on the response and its implementation.** This report reflects the current position of Local Authorities in Wales.

## Lessons learned from the planning of the initial response, including estimates of the number of arrivals, accommodation options and likely costs of the response.

2. Following the outbreak of the war, all 22 Local Authorities (LAs) in Wales answered the call to become involved and support arrivals of people from Ukraine into Wales under the Homes for Ukraine (HFU) Scheme and the Welsh Government Super Sponsor (WGSS) Scheme. The Welsh Government (WG) decision to introduce the WGSS and support those Ukrainians which had not secured a sponsor was met with overall backing regardless of the added layer of complexity.
3. The establishment of emergency response by Welsh Governments and early engagement with the WLGA and LAs from the beginning of planning the WGSS scheme was key to ensuring adequate support being delivered to Ukrainians arriving in Wales. A multi-agency partnership was founded, meeting under the "Ukraine LA Response Group"<sup>2</sup>, to look at the delivery of HFU and WGSS Schemes as a 'Team Wales' approach – where all LAs, WLGA, WG, Health Boards and voluntary sector organisations join together to collaborate, solve challenges and share best practice in relation to the scheme delivery.
4. Initially, WG committed to sponsor 1,000 individuals from Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> However, the demand for support far exceeded the initial expectations with over 5,300 applications being submitted to the scheme<sup>4</sup> leading WG to suspend the scheme as of 10 June 2022.
5. The unprecedented scale of demand led WG and LAs to pivot and respond to the increased number of arrivals. WG were left with little option but to procure hotels and other Initial Accommodation sites, aside from Welcome Centres, as accommodation options became increasingly limited.

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<sup>1</sup> [Supporting Ukrainians in Wales \(audit.wales\)](https://audit.wales.gov.uk/reports-and-accounts/2022-23/Supporting-Ukrainians-in-Wales)

<sup>2</sup> 'The Welsh Government's discussions with the WLGA and Welsh local authorities on the operation of the Ukraine settlement schemes' [business.senedd.wales/documents/s126234/Paper 2.html?CT=2](https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s126234/Paper%202.html?CT=2)

<sup>3</sup> [Wales as a super sponsor | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/wales-as-a-super-sponsor)

<sup>4</sup> [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-visa-data-by-country-upper-and-lower-tier-local-authority)



6. The main lesson learned from the procurement of accommodation options available at the time was that the use of hotels is neither economical, nor good for the families residing in them, and certainly not in the long term. As Ukrainians settled in their Initial Accommodation, the subsequent move-on conversations from these settings became challenging to manage for both LAs and WG. This coupled, with the difficulties in the housing market and lack of affordable properties in Private Rented Sector, resulted in families staying beyond the planned 6-month period in Initial Accommodation sites.
7. The lack of affordable housing forced LAs into seeking creative solutions to ensure adequate move-on rates. 8 LAs have opted to support moves to longer term accommodation by offering rental top-ups to address the gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates and market prices. A combination of tariff provided by UK Government and Move-on Grant offered by WG were used to fund this.<sup>5</sup> However, the sustainability of such models moving forward is unclear as the tariff levels reduces.

**Support provided to Local Authorities by the Welsh Government on an ongoing basis, issues arisen and the impact on other areas of Local Authority accommodation support.**

8. During the inception of the Ukraine Schemes in Wales, there was a degree of uncertainty about the scale of need LAs were required to prepare for. The initial concerns were around the potential for a significant increase in homelessness presentations, whilst LAs already had to address other pressures on homelessness, for example continued cost of living crisis or other resettlement scheme pressures.
9. Regarding impact on other areas of LAs accommodation support, the introduction of the Ukraine Schemes in general has created additional competition for available affordable housing across Wales, with the additional tariff funding for HFU some LA Resettlement/Ukraine Teams were able to make the decision to offer additional financial support to ensure that Ukrainian households are successful in securing accommodation. This additional financial support may not be available to other households being assisted by LA Housing Options Teams.
10. Whilst the collective pressure on homelessness was escalating, increasing the housing demand, WG structured a holistic approach to try and address the competing challenges by working with WLGA, WSMP and LAs to address the need. This collaboration defined the Transitional Accommodation Capital Funding Programme (TACP) which aims to support and encourage the provision of longer-term accommodation for those in initial accommodation and temporary accommodation by LAs and registered social landlords. The TACP looks to alleviate the overall housing pressures and the designed flexibility allows the funding to be used for refugees and resettlement programmes.

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<sup>5</sup> Annex 1: Homes for Ukraine: PRS offers, tariff and support provided by Welsh Councils (para. 4-5) [committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/126482/pdf/](https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/126482/pdf/)



11. Operationally, the communication with WG officials in the “Ukraine Response Group” forums led by the WLGA cultivated strong relationships and ensured that best practice was shared in the meeting, and the learning applied across Wales. Furthermore, LAs were able to directly escalate issues to WG via email inboxes which were set-up additionally to the weekly forums. Where LAs held Welcome Centre or Initial Accommodation in their area, WG held regular meetings about the site, with the support increasing during the six-week closure period. During that time, WG officials would attend the sites to support LAs with managing expectations amongst Ukrainians and support with delivery of a high move-on rate.

### **The role of Local Authorities in the administration of Contact Centres/Welcome Centres.**

12. The LAs have played a key role in supporting WG with the administration of the Contact Centre (administered by Cardiff City Council) and management of Arrival Hubs, Welcome Centres and Initial Accommodation sites across Wales, both in the initial stages of the emergency response and over the duration of the WGSS Scheme.
13. The Contact Centre ran by Cardiff City Council played a pivotal role in the operational coordination of arrivals into Wales. The Contact Centre staff served as an interface between LAs and Ukrainians travelling to Wales and ensured that both LAs and Ukrainian citizens were provided with relevant advice and matched to suitable accommodation.
14. The six Arrival Hubs were tasked with ensuring that there was a continued flow of people into the Welcome Centres and initial accommodation sites. The relevant LAs were leading on the creation and management of the hubs and tasked with supporting people to travel to their onward accommodation sites across Wales.
15. The LAs which had the sites operational were tasked with providing the initial welcome and orientation to arriving Ukrainians, as well as issuing the £200 initial payment, mandated as part of the HFU Scheme. Furthermore, they were responsible for initial integration and set-up for life in Wales, by supporting Ukrainians with opening bank accounts, signing up for welfare benefits, registry with GP and English as Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.
16. Subsequently, all 22 LAs have supported Welcome Centres and Initial Accommodation sites in relation to move-on into longer term suitable accommodation. In collaboration with the WLGA and LAs, WG have created a ‘Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation’ guidance, which outlined the considerations which LAs had to take when rehousing Ukrainians.<sup>6</sup> This guidance was created to support the basis of a ‘population allocation’, agreed by all LAs and WG, which set out how Ukrainians in initial

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<sup>6</sup> [Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)



accommodation would be dispersed across Wales<sup>7</sup> to recognise the uneven distribution of sites across Wales and ensure that responsibility is shared equitably across LAs.

### **An overall view of the WLGA on the response and its implementation.**

17. Overall, the delivery of support to Ukrainians in Wales was good, despite some of the initial challenges. The involvement of WLGA and WSMP from the beginning as key stakeholders for the 'Team Wales' approach was welcomed and necessary for successful implementation. The response showcased that a collaborative approach to visa and resettlement schemes works, and the response to Ukraine crisis across Wales is an example to follow in other areas.
18. The WLGA believes the response went relatively smoothly, and it was a good operational way of working, with LAs coming together with WG, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Home Office, British Red Cross and Housing Justice Cymru, with different stakeholders joining relevant meetings to ensure a cohesive response across the sectors.
19. From a value for money perspective, it must be noted that the Ukraine response was an emergency response, where both WG and LAs had to make decisions quickly and adapt to an evolving landscape.
20. The mobilisation during the response served as a key moment where Wales made a choice to not prioritise one group of people in housing need over another, despite different terms and conditions of funding for refugee groups available from UK Government. LAs ensured that support across different refugee and visa schemes was equitable, as far as they were able within the specific requirements, and this is the way local government would wish to take in moving forward.
21. The use of hosts under the HFU scheme has showcased a goodwill of Welsh people and serves as a model that could be used for other cohorts. WLGA, WSMP and WG have managed to support LAs with issues around move-on and meeting specific needs in the best way possible whilst managing the response at a national level.
22. It should be noted however that the collective pressures on housing and homelessness provision continue to this day and the WLGA would encourage WG to continue its collaborative approach adopted during the Ukraine response with WLGA, LAs and other key stakeholders to address the wider burdens. The WLGA is keen to continue building a coherent system for all, with fairness and equity being at the centre of it whilst recognising individual, person-centred needs.

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<sup>7</sup> Annex A: Population Allocation [Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)