

TITLE	Ukraine
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 24 March 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform residents of the Council's response to the Ukraine crisis.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is recommended to:

- 1) condemn the violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine;
- 2) pledge its support of, and solidarity with, the people of Ukraine and will welcome those seeking sanctuary here;
- 3) note the immediate response of the Council and the longer term actions planned.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report sets out Wokingham Borough Council's condemnation of the multiple attacks and violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. The Council expresses its full support and solidarity to the Ukrainian people.

It is recognised that all formal groups on the council have very grave concerns about the situation in Ukraine.

Councils have a proud history of welcoming new arrivals, stepping forward to offer support so families and individuals can build new lives in the UK. As well as playing a unique role in welcoming new arrivals, councils have a huge range of expertise that could inform development and delivery of support for new arrivals from Ukraine across all routes to the UK.

The Local Government Association (of which Wokingham Borough Council is a member) wrote to Government on 9 March 2022 setting out the role of local government in supporting arrivals from Ukraine.

In the immediate short term, the Council has responded by:

- Stepping up its emergency planning response.
- Set up dedicated area of our website to signpost residents who would like to donate to the Ukrainian response.
- Reviewing contracts and investments including around energy supply and pension funds with Russian firms and individuals.
- Reviewing cyber security arrangements.

Mechanisms have been put in place to establish a medium-term response.

Analysis of Issues

Local Response

At the Executive on 7th March, the leader of Wokingham Council announced the Borough's commitment to welcome and support the victims of the war and ensure that arrangements are in place in Wokingham borough when arrivals do take place.

Wokingham currently has a Ukrainian population of 120, based on the 2021 Census, and as a Borough we must ensure that we are doing all that we can for this existing community. We also have a Russian community within the Borough with a population of 230, and a very small Belorussian community, who should not be penalised for the actions of Vladimir Putin. This is not an argument with the Russian people but with the Russian Government.

The immediate response by the Council was:

- Stepping up its emergency planning response;
- Setting up a dedicated area of our website to signpost residents who would like to donate to the Ukrainian response;
- Reviewing contracts and investments including around energy supply and pension funds with Russian firms and individuals to ensure no prohibited investments or contracts;
- Requesting that the pension scheme seeks to divest from Russian owned or controlled investments, whether direct or indirect as far as is practically possible; and
- Reviewing cyber security arrangements.

The next stage of preparation work is well underway and includes a Gold, Silver and Bronze emergency planning structure in place which is being supported by a corporate project management group together with Leader's briefings with other group leaders as appropriate. The preparation work, which is subject to change once formal Central Government guidance is issued, includes the following areas to date:

- Mobilising resources within the Council and working in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector. Working in a joined-up and aligned way as per the Council's approach during the pandemic. (For example, we have already made contact with the Ukrainian Community Centre in Reading and provided practical support by offering storage space for donations received from local communities. We will continue to engage with the Centre to ensure we can support their work as well as retain access to translation and interpretation facilities which will be critical as we move forward.)
- Preparing an effective communications strategy which will ensure that we send a consistent message to all stakeholders in the borough.
- Working on a range of practical challenges which include:
 - Integrating new arrivals into the local community.
 - Working with schools on school places and educational needs.
 - Ensuring accommodation needs are met.

- Addressing any safeguarding matters that may arise.
 - Working in partnership to ensure health needs are met.
 - Enabling employment and skills training pathways into employment.
 - Facilitating a compensation package (subject to Government guidance).
 - Developing a deeper understanding of current population from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia and their needs to ensure they are not adversely affected.
- Ensuring that we embrace the cultural diversity of any new arrivals. Working with local faith and community groups to welcome potential arrivals into the borough and make their stay as smooth as possible.
 - Working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities and the sub regional partnership to ensure that we maximise all opportunities to support any arrivals into the Borough.

This list is not exhaustive and the Council will do all that it can to address the many varied and complex issues that will arise as we move forward. All aspects of the response will change and be refined as we move forward and learn more.

Next Steps

The Next Steps include:

- Refining and developing the Council’s approach as new guidance is issued from central government.
- Ensuring the Council’s corporate governance is enabling an agile response.
- Maintaining regular contact and liaison with Home Office and SE partnership.
- Regular reporting and updates to CLT and group leaders.
- Continuing with and building further partnership opportunities with the voluntary and community sectors.
- Continuing engagement with health partners – refining the approach as we move forward.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	see Other Financial Implications		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	As above		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	As above		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

A £10.5k support package has been made available, but we don't yet know the full extent of the funding available. Any request for significant funding will go to The Executive, or urgent matters between meetings to Executive members, for consideration and would need full costings developed.

Cross-Council Implications

The implications for other council services will be better understood once the numbers of people likely to come to the borough are better known: this could have an impact on schools and adult social care as women and children and older people are more likely to be accommodated. This supports the council's strategic priorities of being a safe and strong borough and enriching lives, in particular.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Any response to the Ukraine conflict will be in line with obligations through the Public Sector Equality Duty and an equalities assessment will be completed for any aspects of the approach where it is helpful.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

There is no direct relationship between the Ukraine response and climate emergency objectives.

List of Background Papers

N/A

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