

Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment v3 - Head of service review

Reference: ECIA578843874

Submitted: 22 January 2024 08:46 AM

Executive summary

Title of policy / decision: Year 3 payments and winter payments for 2023 for sponsors on the Homes for Ukraine scheme

Policy / decision type: Cabinet Member Action (CMA)

Overview of policy / decision: The Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme relies on members of the public (sponsors) to offer accommodation in their homes to Ukrainians, who have fled the war, to live as guests in the Sponsor's home. Initially, these Sponsors were asked to host for a minimum of 6 months, this was extended to 12 months, then 2 years and has now been extended again to 3 years.

Some sponsors are now reaching the 24-month milestone and a range of factors mean some hosts may consider ceasing sponsorship. Whilst others are happy to continue sponsoring guests, a survey in 2022 found some suggested additional financial support from Local Authorities would be helpful.

For sponsors unable to continue hosting, Guests are expected to find alternative accommodation through rematching to another sponsor or in private accommodation. If they are unable to, the Essex Local Housing Authorities assist, although this causes pressure due to a lack of suitable homes; current waiting lists for any social rented properties and challenges for people to rent from private landlords. The recommendations will help secure Sponsors in future months and mitigate the risk of homelessness.

Since sponsors have received guests, the cost-of-living crisis has emerged along with higher inflation, increased energy bills and other pressures. Although the £350 'thank you' payment sponsors could request was not intended to cover utility bills for example, ECC recognised the financial pressure some sponsors could be experiencing and in November 2022 decided to increase the 'thank you' payment for sponsors who had been hosting guests for longer than 6 months, by £200 per month up to 12 months from guest arrival. There was also a one off

£500 cost-of-living payment for anyone hosting a guest in December 2022. In February 2023, this decision was extended to include payments up to 24 months from guest arrival.

The aim of this request is:

To acknowledge the contribution of those sponsors hosting for longer than 24 months, by continuing to offer a £200 per month increase for up to 24 months from guest arrival. The sponsors have gone above and beyond expectations in most cases. They have helped guests navigate complex application processes, transported them to places, helped guests settle in the local community and in some cases find employment

To assist sponsors who are not entitled to the £200 additional payment above because they have been hosting for less than 6 months, with a one-off £200 Winter Payment where they have confirmed guests for part or all of December 2023.

For the guests, they have had stability, a place to call home and a warm welcome to Essex during a very difficult

time for them.

The decision paper sets out the detail of the recommendation.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: The recommendation hopes to:

- Help Sponsors to continue hosting for longer, thereby reducing pressure on Housing districts through homelessness routes
- Secure stable accommodation for guests, helping them to thrive in our communities
- Support the 'move on' pathway for guests by giving them time to find alternative accommodation either in the private sector or by another rematch if required
- Help Ukrainians to become independent in Essex, via employment, housing and being a part of their communities. This is achieved by strong support from Sponsors and communities

Executive Director responsible for policy / decision: Tom Walker (Economy, Investment and Public Health)

Cabinet Member responsible for policy / decision: Cllr Louise McKinlay (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Communities and Business Engagement)

Is this a new policy / decision or a change to an existing one?: Change to an existing policy / decision

How will the impact of the policy / decision be monitored and evaluated?: The success of the recommendations will be monitored using reporting to analyse data.

It is unrealistic to think the increase in payments will encourage all sponsors to continue as we hear about some families who have personal reasons for ceasing sponsorship. We can influence some sponsors to continue, and we should see this impact in the data of how long Sponsors are hosting for.

Essex currently has 272 sponsor households who have had guests for over 12 months, the majority of these sponsors started hosting in April/May/June 2022, and will be coming up to the 2 year anniversary of their guest/s arrival in the next few months.

Will this policy / decision impact on:

Service users: Yes

Employees: No

Wider community or groups of people: Yes

What strategic priorities will this policy / decision support?: Strong, Inclusive and Sustainable Economy, High Quality Environment, Health, Independence and Wellbeing for All Ages, A good place for Children and Families to Grow

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Economy?: Good jobs, Infrastructure, Levelling up the economy

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Environment: Transport and built environment

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Health: Healthy lifestyles, Promoting independence, Levelling up health

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Families: Education outcomes, Family resilience and stability, Safety, Outcomes for vulnerable children, Levelling up outcomes for families

What geographical areas of Essex will the policy / decision affect?: All Essex

Digital accessibility

Is the new or revised policy linked to a digital service (website, system or application)?: No

Equalities - Groups with protected characteristics

Age

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Disability - learning disability

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Disability - mental health issues

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Disability - sensory impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Sex

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Gender reassignment

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Marriage / civil partnership

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Pregnancy / maternity

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Race

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Religion / belief

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Sexual orientation

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: The data to show which sponsors or guests have protected characteristics is not known. However, as the cohort potentially includes over 2200 guests and over 1000 sponsors, who have signed up for the scheme, it is reasonable to assume the group will include people with protected characteristics.

The changes to payments being recommended, to continue to increase payments by £200 a month and to pay a Winter Payment for those on a lower rate of payment, will have a positive, albeit low impact. They could include:

- Guests remaining in a community where they feel settled and have access to support they require
- Not having to resettle into different environments or change support networks due to a change in sponsor
- As a County we will have committed sponsors who will actively support all guests, including those with protected characteristics, in a range of ways. These could be accessing specific services related to their needs, to ensuring the guest feels safe and part of communities with strong support networks

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?: We have not identified any negative impact of the recommendation being proposed.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Levelling up - Priority areas & cohorts

Children and adults with SEND, learning disabilities or mental health conditions (taking an all-age approach)

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Children on Free School Meals

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Working families

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Young adults (16-25 who have not been in education, training or employment for around 6-12 months)

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Residents of Harlow

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Jaywick and Clacton

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Harwich

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Basildon (Town) housing estates

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Canvey Island

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Colchester (Town) - Housing Estates

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Rural North of the Braintree District

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: As detailed earlier, we do not have information to inform if there are guests or sponsors who are SEND, learning disabilities or have mental health conditions. We do know there are children who will be eligible for free school meals and some of our sponsors will be working families.

The impact of continuing to increase the payment by £200 a month, or providing a Winter Payment to those on the lower rate of payment, will be low to these groups and as outlined earlier in this document, the impact could be:

- Remaining in a community where they feel settled and have access to support they require
- Not having to resettlement into different environments or change support networks
- As a County we will have committed sponsors who will actively support all guests, including those with protected characteristics, in a range of ways

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?: The recommended continued increased payment option of £200 per month, is the same flat rate amount per sponsor. This is in line with the original Govt. policy of a flat rate of Thank you payment to Sponsors whether they host one or more guests.

Linking the increased payment to number of guests was considered however there is no information on the:

- The number of guests who are financially contributing to their hosts costs by paying for their own food as an example
- The financial circumstances of each Sponsor and their families

Officers considered a range of options and thought through the impacts of each. It is difficult to mitigate the negative impact on a financial basis. Other forms of support is being considered by ECC, and the districts to support in other ways, including via the voluntary and community sector.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Equalities - Inclusion health groups and other priority groups

Refugees / asylum seekers

Nature of impact: None

Homeless / rough sleepers

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People who experience drug and alcohol dependence

Nature of impact: None

Offenders / ex-offenders

Nature of impact: None

Victims of modern slavery

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Carers

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Looked after children / care leavers

Nature of impact: None

The armed forces community (serving personnel and their families, veterans, reservists and cadets)

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People who are unemployed / economically inactive

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People on low income

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Sex workers

Nature of impact: None

Ethnic minorities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities

Nature of impact: None

People with multiple complex needs or multi-morbidities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: For these groups, we hope to mitigate the risk of some of the Guests presenting as homeless to our housing authority partners who have the statutory prevention duties. If we do not have enough sponsors, or the existing sponsor cohort significantly reduce, the risk increases.

In the sponsor group, there are people who meet the groups described and therefore are impacted by the cost of living increases. Specifically, energy bills, which will be higher as a result of having more people living in their homes. Continuing to increase payment by £200 per month, after 24 months will also lessen the impact of increased costs to the sponsor. Also, paying a Winter Payment to those sponsors on the lower rate of payment for hosting during part or all of December 2023 will assist these sponsors with higher costs of hosting during December.

Ukrainian guests could also be included in these groups. Under their immigration status Ukrainians have entitlement to in and out of work welfare benefits up to statutory limits. The increased payment to sponsors may also reduce pressure from some sponsors for guests to contribute to bills if they are not in a position to do so currently.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?: We have not identified any negative impact of the recommendation being proposed.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Equalities - Geographical Groups

People living in areas of high deprivation

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People living in rural or isolated areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People living in coastal areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

People living in urban areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: The additional money offered is to support all sponsors, without taking into account the type of area they live in, but it is likely that with such a high number of sponsor households, some will fall into the above categories. The money is directed to the sponsor for them to use how they wish and therefore there is a low impact to the groups mentioned.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?: We have not identified any negative impact of the recommendation being proposed.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Families

Family formation (e.g. to become or live as a couple, the ability to live with or apart from children)

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Families going through key transitions e.g. becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities, onset of a long-term health condition

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Families before, during and after couple separation

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: Family impact can be viewed from a Ukrainian guest perspective. The majority of families may have left their partner / husband / father in Ukraine as they have been called to fight for Ukraine. The Ukrainians are in some cases separated from close family, such as grandparents and siblings. All the above points related to enabling guests to have a stable home link to this area strongly. If Ukrainian guests have a stable home and can feel part of communities, the impacts outlined earlier could see a low positive impact.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?: The recommendation to continue providing additional payments and providing a Winter Payment to those sponsors on the lower rate of payment, is designed to support families at a time when cost of living increases are causing pressure to some families.

There are a range of ways ECC is looking to support Sponsors and their Ukrainian guests beyond financial options. These include support through community groups or support to 'move on' to the next step of their journey. This is likely to include employment opportunities, returning to Ukraine or having family settle locally. If the impacts were viewed from a Sponsor perspective, this could have a negative impact on the sponsors and guests, if for example, a Sponsor decided to separate from their partner. These factors are out of the control of Essex County Council. If financial pressures are a root cause of family unsettlement, the recommendation may steady the host arrangement temporarily.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Crime & Disorder

Crime and disorder

Nature of impact: None

The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances

Nature of impact: None

Re-offending

Nature of impact: None

Serious violence

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact:

The data to show which sponsors or guests are impacted by the above categories is not known and is not collected via the government database used to administer the scheme.

(If negative impact assessed) What actions will be undertaken to mitigate negative impacts, including timescales:

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

We have not identified any negative impact of the recommendation being proposed.

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Climate

Does your decision / policy involve development or re-development of buildings or infrastructure?: No

Does your decision / policy take place in, or make use of, existing buildings or infrastructure?: No

Does your decision / policy involve elements connected to transport, travel or vehicles? This includes travel needs / requirements of both service users and staff (including staff you're planning to recruit): No

Are you undertaking a procurement exercise?: No

Does your decision / policy involve the purchase of goods or materials?: No

Will any waste be generated by this decision? This includes waste from construction, waste generated by service users / staff, and waste generated by replacing existing products / materials with new: No

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your ECIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more of the groups / areas identified?: No

Details of person completing the form

I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance: I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance

Date ECIA completed: 19/01/2024

Name of person completing the ECIA: Tina Price

Email address of person completing the ECIA: tina.price@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Economy, Investment and Public Health

Your service area: Wellbeing & Public Health

Your team: Wellbeing & Public Health

Are you submitting this ECIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?: No

Email address of Head of Service: maggie.pacini@essex.gov.uk