



## STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

<http://lsp.stroud.gov.uk>

Meeting held on Friday 10 June 2022

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill

Theme: Support for Ukraine

### Present:

Carole Stubbs (Chair)	Job Centre Plus, Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire District	Helen Horscroft	Volunteer, Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswolds
Russell Warner (Vice Chair)	Gloucestershire Area Lead, Federation of Small Businesses	Kerrin Cocks	Strategic Support Officer, GAPTC
Barbara Piranty	Chief Executive, GRCC	Max Comfort	Director, Stroud Commonwealth
Cate James- Hodges	Leader, Stroud District Youth Council	Paul Cruise	Stroud Inspector, Gloucestershire Police
Cllr Catherine Braun	Deputy Leader of Council	Rachael Lythgoe	Corporate Communications Officer, Stroud District Council
Chris Pockett	Head of Communications, Renishaw	Cllr Stephen Davies	Leader of the Opposition, Stroud District Council and Gloucestershire
Georgia Spooner	2030 Community Action Officer, Stroud District Council		

### Apologies and absent:

Alison Robinson	Chief Executive Officer, GAPTC	Kevin Hamblin	Group Chief Executive Principal, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College
Alison Truphet	Executive Director, New Ventures Trust	Martin Hughes	CEO, Lilian Faithfull Care
Anna Herbert	Chief Executive Officer, OPENhouse	Mary Hutton	Accountable Officer, NHS Glos Clinical Learning Group
Beth Whittaker	Stroud Businesswomen's Network	Matt Fellows	CEO, Age UK Gloucestershire
David Owen	CE, Gfirst Local Enterprise partnership	Rebecca Fawkes	Local Risk Manager Stroud and the Cotswolds, Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue
David Tate	Director, Silverwood UK	Dr Roma Walker	Stroud League of Friends

Cllr Doina Cornell	Leader of Council	Sarah Scott	Commissioning Director Adults, Gloucestershire County Council
Eilis Cope	Director, Cope Sales and Marketing Ltd	Simon Bernstein	Chief Executive, Longfield
Elizabeth Hall	CE, Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswolds	Siobhan Baillie MP	MP for Stroud
Fred Barker	Director, Transition Stroud	Steve Miles	Senior Youth Officer, Stroud District Council
Geoffrey Beckerleg	Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Stroud	Dr Stuart Wilson	Head Teacher, Marling
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP	MP for The Cotswolds	Sue Bailey	Sue Bailey Consulting
Helen Edwards	Deputy Director of Locality and Primary Care Workforce Development, Gloucestershire CCG	Cllr Symon Ackroyd	Mayor of Dursley
Kathy O'Leary	Chief Executive, Stroud District Council	William Frazer	Group Secretary Gloucestershire, National Farmers' Union
Kelly Richardson	Marketing and Fundraising Manager, Lilian Faithfull Care	Will Mansell	The Grace Network and Stroud District Furniture Bank

### Guests and Support Officers

Adele Owen	Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers	Sarah Fotheringham	Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Maria Hickman	Housing Renewal Manager, Stroud District Council	Hannah Barton	LSP Co-ordinator, Stroud District Council

#### 1. Welcome, introductions, apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone, a number of apologies had been received and noted. Due to the high number of apologies received, there was some discussion regarding face-to-face meetings, as this was the first one to be held in person since before the pandemic. Although everyone in attendance agreed they like face-to-face meetings, it was recognised that it is important to ask the attendees who did not attend.

#### 2. Homes for Ukraine scheme accommodation checks – Maria Hickman, Housing Renewal Manager, Stroud District Council (presentation circulated)

Maria gave a presentation on Stroud District Council's (SDC's) role in the Homes for Ukraine scheme accommodation checks. To date, 297 visa applications have been made in the district, which equates to 114 property check referrals received. 102 of these properties have been visited to date.

Maria outlined the process for carrying out the checks, which is described in more detail in the attached presentation. There are five different checks each host must go through, and SDC is responsible for two of these: does the accommodation exist, and is it safe, secure and appropriate? Only once all these checks are complete can the host receive the £350 payment.

The checks must be carried out by a qualified inspector, of which there are four at SDC. The inspectors are supported by a business support team, and SDC's Revenues and Benefits team are responsible for processing the £350 payment once the checks are complete. Currently SDC are conducting 10 checks per week on average, and these are mostly being carried out on weekends and evenings as they must be conducted as quickly as possible, on top of an already high workload.

There are specific housing health and safety hazards that must be checked by the inspectors, including confirming there are bathrooms with locks, gas central heating and smoke detectors on each floor. Most properties checked have been high quality and are suitable for Ukrainian guests, but there have been some hazards to assess that are not usually encountered by the inspectors such as swimming pools.

The checks are necessary to protect guests arriving from Ukraine and to confirm there are no safeguarding red flags. Although rare, there have been some such incidents reported outside the district. When the scheme began there was a perception that the checks were slowing the process down, but this perception appears to have improved.

There have been some other challenges including guidelines on the government website containing incorrect information. Children over the age of 10 must not share a room with someone of the opposite sex, but the government website mistakenly indicates this is acceptable up to the age of 18.

There is concern moving forwards that relationships between guests and hosts could break down or the arrangements will not continue for longer than six months. Originally hosts signed up to offer accommodation for a minimum of six months, but there is not currently a plan for what happens following this. Unlike refugees from other countries, Ukrainian refugees have statutory homelessness rights in the UK and local authorities have a statutory duty in this regard. These rights will last for three years. There are no empty Council houses in the district and the demand for private rented houses is already very high, therefore this is likely to be an issue. It may be expected that once the war is over guests will return to Ukraine, however it is recognised that many do not have a home to go back to.

A question was asked regarding if and how learning is being shared with other countries that are hosting Ukrainian refugees. Adele from GARAS noted that at the start of the war some host countries were only offering a 90-day visa, which may be part of the reason why the UK's offer has been more popular.

Cllr Davies has been through the Homes for Ukraine scheme property checks and found it to be very practical.

Max Comfort offered a desk or two at The Exchange for any Ukrainian refugees who would like to continue their business from the district.

### **3. Update on Gloucestershire's response to the Ukrainian arrivals and other refugees arriving in other schemes – Adele Owen and Sarah Fotheringham, GARAS**

GARAS has been around for 22 years and has a wealth of experience in resettling refugees. The Stroud district has been very involved in the settlement of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan in the past. These have been managed programmes involving a complete support package. The scheme to resettle refugees from Ukraine is very different.

Refugees are extremely resilient, but they come with experiences of the place they have fled from. They have lost their home, status in society, language, familiarity, and often family members physically and/or emotionally. Often this means refugees are not emotionally ready to start working, and it should be reinforced that this is okay and to take their time.

Some refugees have come from highly skilled jobs, and it can be hard for them to accept a job that could be considered as deskilling. There are opportunities to obtain comparability certificates to practice the same professions here as they have in Ukraine, but this is not always a clear process. There are also some professions such as electricians that require additional training as electricity works differently in the UK. Many refugees have good levels of English, but they are not as high as they had thought before arriving in the UK, so expectations around this must also be managed. GARAS can provide support with writing CVs and advice on obtaining comparability certificates.

In general, the difference between expectation and reality is a huge challenge. The bureaucracy in the UK can come as a big surprise and navigating things like the NHS, the benefits system and the public transport system can be challenging. It is a huge transition for refugees even before considering the emotional trauma and possible PTSD they may have.

The Stroud district has played a significant role in resettling refugees from Ukraine, but rural locations in the district come with their own challenges. Typically, there is limited to no public transport and most refugees are unlikely to have a car.

In terms of housing, it has recently been confirmed that the £350 payment for hosts will continue for a year instead of six months as previously agreed. Although this a positive step, it is also a big change for some hosts to come to terms with. It is also still unclear what will happen after the initial 12 months, and whether guests will look to move into affordable housing.

GARAS has employed three people through this scheme. Often they spend a lot of time working with people at crisis point, but they want to go beyond this and help others not at this point.

A question was asked regarding what Town and Parish Councils can do to help support Ukrainian refugees, beyond raising funds and making donations. If they have any space such as office space or meeting rooms, GARAS suggested these could be offered as Hubs for guests to meet. This is particularly important in rural areas. Support for hosts would also be useful and it should be recognised they also need

space and an opportunity to meet others. Both guests and hosts need some kind of social outlet and communities can come together to facilitate this. Nailsworth recently organised a clothing collection for refugees and those in attendance relished the opportunity to meet other people from Ukraine. If anyone is aware of any similar Hubs or events where Ukrainian refugees can meet each other, please send this information through to Adele at GARAS.

It was noted that Ukraine has recently been added to the list of countries that can change their driving license to a UK one without taking a driving test.

Concerns around mental health were discussed, as most refugees are experiencing trauma and grief and there is already a strain on the system, particularly following the pandemic. GARAS noted this is already being discussed at different levels and it is important to consider the full gamut of support that can be provided. People with PTSD can take a long time to be ready to work with, and time needs to be given for them to be able to recover. Support could include anything from yoga and physical activity to community Hubs and social prescribing. GARAS offer therapists trained in working with PTSD, but this service is already stretched so they are looking at what else they can do. Other ideas they are looking at include a Mental Health First Aid 'lite' course for hosts so they can recognise ill mental health in their guests. Schools also already provide some support, and this should be utilised where possible. PTSD can affect people of any age.

At the extreme end of the scale, GPs have received information on how to spot evidence of war crimes. It is important to note that hosts should not take this on as their role, and instead use appropriate methods of reporting such as through GPs or the police.

It was noted that British culture is one of the most difficult cultures to understand, which can make adjusting even more of a challenge.

Russell from the FSB highlighted that businesses at all levels are struggling to find good employees, therefore there should be lots of opportunities for refugees if there is a way to match employers with refugees. The County Council have the [GEM Project](#) (Going the Extra Mile) which is designed to help those furthest from being in work. The LEP are also doing something in this area. GARAS noted that some employers are reluctant to expect the paperwork that comes with a refugee as they don't have Biometric Residence Permits, so the normal system of checking their right to work can't be used.

A question was asked regarding how young people's voices can be heard. GARAS have a dedicated worker in this field but not necessarily regarding Ukraine. They noted that getting into education in Gloucestershire if you are a refugee aged over 15 is difficult as they don't have recognisable qualifications. However, Archway is an exemplar of accepting unaccompanied young people.

Discussion was had around the feeling of a two-tier system for Ukrainian refugees and refugees from everywhere else. How can we spread the learning from this crisis to refugees from other places, particularly when up to 100 refugees are due to be flown to Rwanda next week? It is hoped there will be a lot of learning from this crisis, and

people's eyes may be opened to the challenges some people face every day. It is also important to recognise the UK's own past as a place of movement.

Cllr Davies spoke about his own experience of hosting a refugee family and the generosity they have received from the local community including offers of children's bikes. The child of this family attending the local school has been important for helping the family integrate.

GARAS noted they still need donations for items like bikes, laptops and mobile phones.

#### **4. Employment support for Ukrainians in the district – Carole Stubbs, Department of Work and Pensions**

Carole gave an update on the support that is being provided for Ukrainian refugees looking for employment in the district. Some refugees are already attending Job Centres requesting support to find employment and/or claim benefits. Employment advisors are being mindful of safeguarding concerns and the DWP are also training some more interpreters for those who do not speak English.

It was highlighted that if refugees are job-ready and they have an interview the Job Centre can help them buy items such as bikes to travel to work, laptops, and phones. There is also an agreement that if someone wants to work in care, the Job Centre will buy them an electric bike. There are lots of offers of support including from Barnados who have a Hub to support Ukrainian families.

For those who would like to claim benefits, the expectation is they will attend the Job Centre weekly for the first 13 weeks even if they only speak basic English. At the moment there are no exceptions for Ukrainian refugees. The Job Centre can help pay transport costs to attend the weekly meetings. Although the language around these meetings can sound strict and demanding, the process is much more informal.

#### **5. Partners' Updates**

##### **Paul Cruise, Stroud Inspector, Gloucestershire Police**

- Struggling with resources. There are new officers coming through training but lots resigning as well.
- Response officers are having to investigate crimes whilst also being on response, which is leading to disappointment amongst members of the public not getting the response they would expect.
- It is hoped the new team of officers will be able to get out into the community to target the prolific offenders that cause 80-90% of crimes.
- They are also struggling as a result of other services with limited capacity e.g., staying with patients from road traffic collisions due to no available ambulances, people ringing the police in a mental health crisis as no other services have capacity.
- Trying their best and hoping to get back to partnership working soon.

**Georgia Spooner, 2030 Community Action Officer, Stroud District Council:**

- Working across whole of Gloucestershire on a retrofit centre to support private homeowners on retrofitting their homes and moving them onto green energy.
- Working with the 2030 Community Engagement Board to help move the whole community towards climate action.

**Chris Pockett, Head of Communications, Renishaw:**

- Last night, 2.5 months after their applications, three Ukrainian families arrived in Wotton-under-Edge who will be staying in apartments owned by Renishaw.
- They have stopped all trade with Russia and since the last LSP meeting have closed all Russian operations including both offices. This has meant making some redundancies, although they are trying to resolve this as best they can and have been able to relocate some staff from Russia. This is an unfortunate but practical consequence of the war.
- They are also trying hard to stop alternative routes for Renishaw's products into Russia.
- Last November Renishaw declared they would be carbon neutral by 2050 but since then have been attempting to measure their scope 3 emissions as best they can. This is the most complex aspect of emissions measurement and should be finished by March/April 2023. Following this they hope to revise their target date for carbon neutrality.
- Recently set a target of 2028 for scope 1 and 2 emissions and they are confident this will be achieved.

**Russell Warner, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Gloucestershire Area:**

- Businesses are still struggling to recruit staff.
- If there are any who would like support finding staff, their details can be passed to Carole at the DWP.

**Stroud District Council:**

- Strategy and Resources Committee approved the outline bid for the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) on 9 June. This will be submitted to government by 6 July 2022.
  - The bid includes gateway spaces, cultural landmarks and connections.
  - Gateway spaces:
    - Transforming Wallbridge space by canal
    - Sub Rooms town square
    - Creating 12 new start-up incubator units
    - Purchase of brownfield land
  - Cultural landmarks: improving access including putting in ramps.
  - Connections:
    - Improving pedestrian and cycle routes around Wallbridge
    - Improvements to the end of the Nailsworth to Stroud cycle route
    - Improvements for cyclists and pedestrians around Stroud town centre
    - Realtime passenger information at Stroud railway station and Merrywalks bus station
- Opening up the car park at Brunel Mall
  - There is no specific deadline for response, but SDC will hear back in the Autumn. The government minister is visiting Stroud for a tour.

- Working on a bid for the Shared Prosperity Fund which must be submitted by 1 August. These funds can't be spent on skills until the third year and does not have to be spent on infrastructure so could be used for community-level projects. There is an appetite to use it to help with the cost-of-living crisis.

**Rachael Lythgoe, Corporate Communications Officer, Stroud District Council:**

- Promoting high streets through SoGlos blogs. The first two are:
  - [8 charming towns and villages to explore in the Stroud district](#)
  - [15 hidden gems to shop at in the Stroud district](#)
- A review of play areas owned by SDC is currently underway. You can provide your feedback [here](#).
- A [press release](#) regarding the Levelling Up Fund bid has been released today.
- There is a [glass exhibition](#) at the Museum in the Park which ends at 4.30pm on Sunday 12 June.
- The [Canal towpath from Ocean](#) (near St Cyr's Church) to Bond's Mill is open during June but will need to close later in the summer to allow further restoration works.

**Max Comfort, Stroud Commonwealth:**

- The roof at the Exchange has been fixed.
- Most of the time they are full and use of meeting rooms is going up. They have had financial support from SDC to keep them going.
- Their clients have stayed with them through the pandemic and been very loyal.
- Involved in a new 'communiversity' with the theme of farming and food. This enables the sharing of experiences and learning and can also showcase what is happening in Stroud.

**Barbara Piranty, GRCC:**

- GRCC will be celebrating their centenary in 2023. As part of this they are hoping to reintroduce awards for village and community of the year. This opportunity will be pushed out via various communication channels to allow villages and communities to participate and hopefully win some money.
- Looking at holding some events to draw different groups together around certain topics such as budgeting, volunteering, and mental health. These can be light-touch solutions.
- GRCC's social prescribers are picking up Ukrainian refugees via GPs. They continue to do a lot of work around loneliness and isolation.
- Continuing to work with the GEM Project around training and opportunities.
- GRCC employ a specialist who works across the county on climate change and adverse weather. In the next couple of months, they will be relaunching their emergency planning toolkit.
- Refreshing CARS (Community Approaches to Road Safety) toolkit.
- Also refreshing the approach to how we look at the need for affordable housing across the county. This is ongoing and gathering pace.
- Considering food and fuel prices and how people will cope. Looking at how food and farming partnerships can better connect.

**Helen Horscroft, Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswolds:**

- Extending the opening hours of the Stroud office. They are not open to drop-in appointments yet but clients can drop in documents to be attached to their case.
- The Stroud office is being staffed Monday-Thursday and they are looking to staff Friday too.
- There are some outreaches opening:
  - Dursley open Mondays
  - Stonehouse open Thursday afternoons
  - Paganhill Community Hub is new and there will be an advisor there twice a month, and sometimes social prescribers too.
- The impact of Ukrainian refugees in the district has been slow but is now filtering through. They have had seven linked enquiries so far from hosts and guests.
- Hosts have been asking questions around higher education and school places, and there has also been a query around guests in independent accommodation without a tenancy agreement. Queries from guests have mostly been around foodbanks. They have had support from Barnados for translation services and food vouchers.
- They have noted they get through more cases when working from home, but it is recognised they also need to be in the office too.

**Kerrin Cocks, GAPTC:**

- Broadening their member offer to beyond providing training and legislative advice.
- Providing support for Town and Parish Councils on topics like climate change. Town and Parish Councils have asked what they do next once they declare a climate emergency, particularly if they don't have buildings and facilities.
- Working on a big piece of work to raise the profile of the first tier of government and will be supporting members with elections next year, including aiming for a more diverse representation of Councillors.

**Cate James-Hodges, Leader, Stroud District Youth Council:**

- Stroud District Youth Council recently held democratic elections and Cate was elected as the Leader and Brandon Watkins was elected as the new SDYC Chair. There were no nominations for Vice Chair.
- In the next couple of weeks they will vote on topic-specific members.
- SDYC's work adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and at the end of their cyclical year SDYC unanimously voted to include the following statement in their manifesto: 'SDYC believes that children and young people cannot be adequately safeguarded, unless they know their rights and are able to exercise all their rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).'

It was suggested that the theme for the next meeting should be food and fuel poverty.

Please send any requests for future agenda items or suggestions for future meeting themes to Hannah Barton, [hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk)

**Next meeting**

Friday 9 September – online via Teams

**2022 meeting dates**

Friday 2 December

The meetings are 9:00am for a 9:15am start, with meeting end by 11:30am.