

Homes for Ukraine

The system is in full swing across Oxfordshire to support the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme. While we still have limited government guidance in some areas, in particular around grant payments, all partners across the county are working together to find solutions and put guests at the heart of any action required. The accommodation and safeguarding checks are progressing well, with the backlog of home checks almost completed, and with no significant concerns raised this week.

As previously mentioned, the £200 payments to our guests to help them with immediate costs while they settle in are being made by whoever makes the first physical contact with them as part of these checks. This week, we have worked to agree that moving forward we will usually issue this payment as a pre-loaded card rather than cash, which can be used online, in shops or at a cashpoint, just like a normal debit card. We are offering our guests a choice, so if they would prefer to receive this payment as cash, they are invited to let us know.

OCC have been working with Asylum Welcome to develop a proposal to expand the community liaison officer resource available in each district and the city. The purpose would be for this resource to coordinate, advise and refer guests to the support that is available to them, including across housing, education and health. This has now been agreed and recruitment to these posts has begun. OCC have continued to process school place applications and are also recruiting an additional admissions officer to manage demand and avoid administrative delays.

You may have seen that the Department for Work and Pensions has laid emergency regulations so those arriving in the UK from Ukraine, as a result of the Russian invasion, can access Universal Credit and jobs support immediately. Families can therefore claim for free school meals in the usual way under the usual eligibility criteria, which requires providing a national insurance number. To reassure councillors, in Oxfordshire, we are asking all schools to provide free school meals where appropriate and not wait to receive a national insurance number. We will continue to put the needs of children first.

A reminder, you can direct general Ukraine queries to:

- **Website:** www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ukraine
- **Oxfordshire Ukraine helpline:** +44 1865 966444 / 01865 966 444 (opening hours: 8.45am - 5pm, Monday to Friday. Closed weekends and bank holidays).
- **Email:** ukraineresponse@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Gifts for Ukrainian children and donated 4x4 from the County Fire Service

Thanks to the kindness and generosity of our fire and rescue colleagues, hundreds of teddies are on their way to Fire Aid to be given to Ukrainian children escaping the horrors of war in their country. The donations were collected by our teams at Didcot, Wheatley, Thame, Slade, Rewley Road, Faringdon, Burford, Bicester, Banbury, Kidlington, Deddington and Chipping Norton. We've also donated a decommissioned 4 x 4 vehicle that is currently on its way to support people in Ukraine. While it's still road-worthy, we've replaced the vehicle with a newer model and it's no longer needed by our fire and rescue service. Normally we auction used vehicles when they're replaced but this time we've donated it to support such an important cause.

New County council policy on Tree Planting

A change in approach will help increase the number of trees in Oxfordshire after a new policy was approved. It will put the emphasis on a 'presumption in favour of trees' because of the host of benefits they provide to the climate, the environment and the places where people live.

We want to move away from simply maintaining and managing the trees on our land to actively encouraging and enabling more trees to be planted in both rural and urban settings. This can help tackle climate change and increase resilience to it, as well as improving people's quality of life – both now and in the future.

One requirement of the policy is to plant two new trees for every tree that has to be removed from county council land. It also promises to explore new tree planting opportunities and extra investment to carry it out, stricter guidelines for those wanting to remove existing trees and implement proactive care to prolong the lives of established trees.

The main climate benefits of trees, due to their ability to mitigate extremes of heat, cold, wind, rain, and drought, include:

- removing and storing carbon from the air
- reducing urban temperatures through canopy cover
- preventing flooding by reducing the pressure on drainage systems
- wind speed reduction
- cutting air pollution
- enhancing biodiversity
- supporting sustainable agriculture.

Their presence has also been shown to contribute directly to improved wellbeing and mental health, enhance street design and even reduce crime. Research has shown that public open space with trees tends to be used more than space without trees and this increases casual surveillance – deterring criminal activity.

The new policy will not compromise the council's ability to deal with trees which pose a danger to the public or to property.

The scope, scale, and business case for direct investment into a tree planting programme will be considered as the next step for key consideration as part of the 2023/24 annual budget setting process. Money to fund tree planting would also be sought from numerous national grants, sponsorship, carbon offsetting by businesses and developer contributions.

Climate Action Study and online tool

We're working with our council partners across Oxfordshire to develop an online tool to help people take action against climate change in their own lives. The suggestions provided will be tailored to the lifestyle of individuals to make sure they're relevant (for example, only suggesting ideas to reduce car journeys for those people who have a car) with the aim to reduce residents' carbon emissions. As one of our strategic priorities, we'd be very grateful if you could please share the survey and help us gather as broad a range of responses as possible. The survey can be found here:

https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/climate-change/survey_tools/survey14869