

**Apologies Ministers Swann, Murphy, Minister [McIlveen]** - Minister McIlveen was logged in to the meeting, but didn't speak.

## 1 Ukraine

Denis McMahon spoke to the paper circulated. Highlighted 6500 volunteered under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – 1500 confirmed interest. 1500 people have applied to come to NI – 1000 have been matched to homes and have had visas issued. Challenge remains around numbers coming across the border – 850 people have come to the assistance centres. Close engagement with local government and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. Continue to press UK for funding for unaccompanied minors. 14 children have arrived in NI unaccompanied. Challenge around payments for sponsors. Will write to MLAs to provide an update. Sponsors need to undergo a number of checks to ensure homes/sponsors are safe and suitable before payments may be made. Hope to make payments within the next five weeks, subject to appropriate checks. £200 payments have been made as people have been arriving through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to ensure a person centred approach.

Ian Snowden – sponsor payments – hopeful that these can be made within next two weeks. Ian also provide an update on home checks and follow up home visits and advised payments will follow once complete.

Minister Poots – why so few homes checked, over 400 homes opened to house families but not getting payments? Ian advised it takes time to check and people contracted to do this at rate of 80 per week with two visits for each. Many have been undertaken. Often only find out about people living here after they have arrived. Access NI checks sometimes carried out after arrival. Same day turnaround check for Access NI on same day, enhanced in 2-3 days.

Minister O'Dowd – payments to all refugees arriving here or just Ukrainian arrivals – Denis McMahon outlined differences between Homes for Ukraine/Family scheme - £200 for Ukrainian families arriving. Gareth Johnston outlined indicative figures in relation to general numbers of all refugees arriving here – around 200 per week – with difference arrangements in play according to circumstances. Ian confirmed that we are seeking to put improved support system in place.

Minister O'Dowd would appreciate regular updates on all refugees/asylum seekers arriving here in general. **[ACTION: Denis/Gareth – provide revised media lines & more detailed brief at next session]**

Minister Long sought clarity around NI ability to vary the existing schemes/arrangements given the UK scheme; and Right to Work issue – currently not legally permitted to work in NI presents issues in terms of destitution, dignity, and vulnerability in terms of exploitation. – Gareth Johnston – two different groups – asylum seekers without decision on status. They will be given a modest amount from Home Office – around £7-8 per week with accommodation and all meals provided. Extra support for children of asylum seekers – some limited flex in terms of varying support arrangements as this is a Home Office scheme but some devolved ability in wraparound support. Exploitation – in touch with DOJ officials and useful input to highlight minimum wage etc. and engagement with food industry.

## 2. Covid Inquiry

Jayne Brady updated on stand up of structures in terms of supporting the inquiry – no NI Executive decision on NI Inquiry – Scotland will hold their own inquiry. Karen Pearson updated on most recent TOR from Number 10; interest in children and young people, mental health impacts, 4-nation decision making, impacts on minority groups, closure of places of worship, enforcement and decisions taken by alternative means such as WhatsApp. HOCS will write shortly to take views before responding to Number 10. Will need to invest time on records and witness preparation. This will

impact on other output. Hugh Widdis – all department will be separately represented. On scale, the UK are putting in 11 different legal teams with QC heading each.

Minister Long – clarity on legal support – Hugh advised that NI exercise functions separately as legal entities.

**Minister Poots left at 8.30**

### 3. Party engagements

Jayne Brady advised on engagement to date and key themes on budget/PFG/legislative programme. Working with party colleagues to identify likely strategic themes. Will meet again next week to discuss further issues such as increased employability, green sustainable future, economic scarring essential services health service pressures, etc. – working on a cross-departmental basis.

Minister Long – asked that rehabilitation of offenders are included in consideration of marginalised groups. **[Action: DOJ/DfE/DFC]**

### 4. AOB

None

NR

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