



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Homes for Ukraine

Fourteenth Report of Session 2023–24

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 5 February 2024*

The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

The Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) and the Home Office successfully set up the Homes for Ukraine scheme at pace, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, to provide much needed support for those seeking refuge from the war. By January 2024, people from across the UK had welcomed 141,200 Ukrainians into their own homes. However, as the conflict continues into its third year, key risks to the scheme's future are emerging.

The Government has not yet made some urgent decisions on the future of the scheme, such as whether it will extend the three-year visas granted to Ukrainian guests arriving in the UK. We are very concerned that as a result of their current visas being due to expire within a year, the first guests who arrived in the UK in March 2022 are facing too much uncertainty and finding it more difficult to secure private rented accommodation or a job. DLUHC is also yet to set out a timetable for what it will do when its contract with Palantir for the scheme's main data platform expires in September 2024. We are also concerned to hear of the growing number of Ukrainians at risk of homelessness in the UK, as hosting arrangements end or have broken down.

After a slow start, the Home Office's visa processing times under the scheme improved in the early months but are now too long again. This delay, combined with the need to have enough sponsors to meet demand, presents challenges which could get worse if the conflict in Ukraine escalates and there is a surge in applications to come to the UK.

The Government has spent over £2 billion on the scheme so far and announced in November 2023 that it was extending payments for sponsors for another year and providing a further £120 million funding to prevent homelessness. However, DLUHC made these decisions without a proper understanding of how effective funding has been in supporting Ukrainians at the local level. DLUHC has not yet evaluated the scheme to learn lessons for future resettlement schemes or to demonstrate its value for money. Despite recognising the need for such an evaluation, DLUHC has not said when it plans to do this.

Introduction

The UK government launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme on 14 March 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The scheme enables people in the UK to sponsor and host Ukrainian nationals who are seeking refuge from the war. Individuals are granted three-year visas to stay in the UK, with full access to public services, benefits, and other support. By January 2024, 141,200 Ukrainians had come to stay in the UK.

The scheme is jointly run by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Home Office. The Home Office primarily leads on operational matters relating to the processing of visas and checks on the suitability of the sponsor. DLUHC leads on all aspects of the scheme from the point of arrival of Ukrainians into the UK, working closely with local authorities and devolved governments.

Just under 74,000 sponsors had applied to host Ukrainians under the scheme by September 2023 and DLUHC continues to provide funding for new arrivals, about 400 people a week. Any adult in the UK can act as a sponsor providing they pass eligibility checks conducted by the Home Office and local authorities. Sponsors must commit to hosting for a minimum of six months and can claim thank you payments from government worth £350 a month for the first year and then £500 a month for years two and three. The local authority where the sponsor is based receives a one-off tariff payment of £10,500 per arrival (reduced to £5,900 for all arrivals since 31 December 2022) to help with support and integration needs.

By the end of September 2023, the government had provided £2.1 billion in funding for the scheme. The government announced in the Autumn Statement in November 2023 that it will extend thank you payments for another year and provide a further £120 million funding to the devolved administrations and local authorities in England to invest in homelessness prevention.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **The lack of a government decision on whether to extend visas granted as part of the scheme is causing needless uncertainty for those Ukrainians who arrived in the UK first.** Visas for guests from Ukraine are provided for up to three years, meaning that the visas of those guests that arrived first under the scheme will expire in March 2025. These Ukrainians are therefore facing significant uncertainty about their future and local authorities have reported that some individuals are being turned down by employers and educational establishments due to the time remaining on their visas. Between April and May 2023, 19% of Ukrainians on the scheme did not know where they intended to live, mainly because of a lack of clarity about their visa options. The longer Ukrainians live in the UK, the more they become settled, including children in education. The government is still to make a decision on whether or not to extend existing visas and on potential options for permanent settlement. The Ukrainian Government would like to see their citizens return when it is safe to do so.

Recommendation 1: *The Home Office and DLUHC should, as part of their Treasury Minute response, set out when they will make a decision about whether scheme visas will be extended and whether there will be options for permanent settlement. They should make these decisions well ahead of the first visas expiring in March 2025.*

2. **We are concerned that the risk of homelessness among Ukrainians in the UK is likely to increase as more sponsorships end or break down.** There is no obligation for UK sponsors to host Ukrainian guests for the whole time they are in the UK, with the UK government only asking them to commit to hosting for a minimum of six months. The government has extended thank you payments into a third year to encourage them to continue their sponsorship. However, there is a risk that a Ukrainian's relationship with their sponsor can break down. DLUHC's initial planning assumption was that 50% of sponsorships could break down, but it does not have complete data on how many relationships have done so. By the end of August 2023, local authorities had reported that 4,890 Ukrainian households in England who were in the UK on Homes for Ukraine visas had been homeless or come within 56 days of being homeless. Since the start of 2023, at any one time, between 600 and 800 Ukrainian households have been living in temporary accommodation in England, although DLUHC does not know how many of these households are part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Around 30% of English local authorities do not regularly provide homelessness data to DLUHC on those Ukrainians who are in the UK under the scheme. DLUHC has announced a total of £270 million of funding to support local authorities to invest in homelessness prevention, including to support Ukrainian households that no longer have a scheme sponsor.

Recommendation 2: *DLUHC should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out what action it will take to:*

- *increase the number of local authorities that regularly provide homelessness data returns; and*

- *secure an adequate supply of sponsors for the scheme in the future in a cost-effective way.*

3. **The Home Office’s failure to meet its targets for processing visas is leaving some Ukrainians facing an unacceptably long wait for decisions to be made on their applications.** Initially visa turnaround times for the scheme were longer than the Home Office wanted. In March 2022, of the 26,000 applications received, 18% were processed within five working days and 21% took more than 15 working days. To speed up the process, the Home Office introduced measures such as: deferring the collection of biometrics; increasing the number of people from the Home Office and other government departments working on the scheme from around 165 staff in March 2022, to over 1,000 by June 2022 working across all the Ukraine schemes; and rolling out new digital systems to increase flexibility of working and productivity. These measures helped improve visa turnaround times in April and May 2022. However, despite the changes the Home Office implemented, visa turnaround times have taken longer since June 2022. Almost two-thirds (63%) of visa applications were taking more than the 15 working day target to be processed in July 2023, compared to 19% in June 2022. The Home Office asserts that it is building its capacity to process visas in case there is a surge in applications for this scheme as well as to respond to other areas of high demand in the Home Office, such as asylum processing.

Recommendation 3a: *The Home Office should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out what action it will take to meet its targets in future, and what plans it has in place to respond should there be a future surge in applications.*

b) *The Home Office should publish quarterly updates on visa processing times for the remainder of the Scheme.*

4. **DLUHC is making decisions about future funding of the scheme without a proper understanding of how effective funding has been in supporting those taking part in the scheme to date.** Local authorities initially received funding of £10,500 per arrival. Since 31 December 2022, DLUHC has reduced this to £5,900 for each arrival. DLUHC considers that local authorities’ costs decreased once the scheme had been set up. Although DLUHC has mandated local authorities to provide data on the use of its funding for 2023–24, the Department still relies on voluntary reporting on how many people on the scheme are currently experiencing homelessness to inform future funding decisions. Despite the lack of complete data, DLUHC increased funding to prevent homelessness in the 2023 Autumn Statement as it considers it understands the housing pressures local authorities are facing. Similarly, the government announced an extension of thank you payments for a third year in the 2023 Autumn Statement, but could not estimate how many sponsor relationships would have broken down if thank you payments had not been extended. DLUHC asserts that to set up the scheme at pace and respond to emerging issues, it needed to balance getting a full picture of how the scheme operates against over-burdening local authorities.

Recommendation 4: *DLUHC should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, explain:*

- *what evidence it used as the basis for its decision to continue funding thank you payments and the additional homelessness prevention funding announced at the autumn statement; and*
 - *how it will ensure that it has a robust evidence base going forward so that any future funding is targeted towards the most effective interventions and where there is most need.*
5. **The scheme was set up at speed and has helped 141,200 Ukrainians come to the UK, but DLUHC does not know fully what aspects of the scheme have or have not worked and whether overall the scheme has been value for money.** DLUHC has gathered some, largely qualitative, information on how well the scheme is working, but it has not yet set a timeframe for a full formal evaluation. DLUHC originally planned to complete an evaluation by autumn 2023, but it paused work on this in spring 2023. DLUHC acknowledges there is a need for lessons to be learned for future resettlement schemes but does not at the moment consider that Homes for Ukraine should automatically be used as a blueprint for other similar events. DLUHC asserts that the scheme represents value for money as the cost of accommodation is likely to be lower within the Homes for Ukraine scheme than for other resettlement schemes. However, it does not have clear evidence of the overall value for money of the scheme once other elements of scheme funding have been factored in.

Recommendation 5: As part of its Treasury Minute response, DLUHC should set out what plans it has to evaluate the scheme, both while it is still ongoing and at the end of the scheme. These evaluations should include:

- *how lessons learned from the scheme, and best practice examples, could be used for potential future resettlement schemes; and*
 - *a consideration of the overall value for money of the scheme.*
6. **DLUHC has not yet assessed what it will do when its current contract with Palantir to provide the scheme's main data system ends in September 2024.** In order to set the scheme up quickly, in March 2022, DLUHC accepted an offer from Palantir, a company on the public sector framework agreement for digital services, to provide six months of free support to create its main data system to manage and monitor scheme data. Following the free six-month trial period, DLUHC signed a 12-month contract with Palantir worth £4.5 million, excluding VAT, without any competitive process. In September 2023, it extended the contract with Palantir for a further 12-months, valued at £5.5 million, excluding VAT. The Government's Chief Commercial Officer wrote to Palantir noting his concern about the practice of offering services to public sector customers for a zero or nominal cost to gain a commercial foothold, contrary to the principles of public procurement which usually require open competition. DLUHC is conscious of some of the criticism of the way that this contract was set up at the very beginning, and is working on a timetable to extend or re-tender the contract. However, we are nonetheless concerned that DLUHC may find it challenging to run a fully competitive procurement process before the current contract ends in September 2024.

Recommendation 6: DLUHC should, as part of its Treasury Minute response, set out its assessment of its commercial options once the current Palantir contract

expires. If this includes extending the contract with Palantir, DLUHC should explain how this is justified under current procurement regulations. In particular, how such a decision would be consistent with the Government Chief Commercial Officer's concerns about departments accepting IT companies' offers to provide free trial periods to gain a commercial foothold.

1 Homes for Ukraine Visas

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Home Office about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.¹

2. The UK government launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme on 14 March 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The scheme enables people in the UK to act as sponsors for Ukrainian nationals and their families seeking refuge from the war, with individuals being granted three-year visas to stay in the UK, with full access to public services, benefits, and other support. Any adult is able to act as a sponsor providing they pass eligibility checks conducted by the Home Office and local authorities. A total of 73,759 people had applied to sponsor a Ukrainian guest under the scheme, by 12 September 2023. Sponsors are expected to commit to hosting for a minimum of six months and can claim thank you payments from government for providing suitable accommodation for Ukrainians to live in.² By January 2024, 141,200 Ukrainians had come to stay in the UK as part of the scheme. Around 400 Ukrainians are also continuing to arrive in the UK each week.³

3. The scheme is jointly run by DLUHC and the Home Office. The Home Office primarily leads on operational matters relating to the processing of visas and checks on the suitability of the sponsor. DLUHC leads on all aspects of the scheme from the point of arrival of Ukrainians into the UK, working closely with local authorities and devolved governments.⁴

Decisions about visas

4. The first Ukrainians arrived in the UK under the scheme in March 2022 and their visas are due to expire in March 2025.⁵ We received written evidence from the Local Government Association, which told us that there was uncertainty for Ukrainian families and young people about how they will be able to progress with their education and sit exams. It also told us that some landlords were only offering 24-month tenancies, which prevented Ukrainians with two years or less left on their visas from accessing accommodation.⁶ The NAO's report also found local authorities had some cases of individuals being turned down by employers due to the length of their visas.⁷

5. According to the Office for National Statistics, between April and May 2023, 52% of Ukrainians in the UK said that they would like to continue to live in the UK, even when they feel it was safe to return to Ukraine. Of those who did not know where they intended to live (19%), the most common reason was wanting greater clarity on visa options for staying in the UK. Meanwhile, other Ukrainians in the UK may not be able to return to Ukraine when their visas expire as their homes have been destroyed in the war.⁸

1 C&AG's Report, [Homes for Ukraine](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1863, 17 October 2023,

2 C&AG's Report, paras 1, 1.7

3 Q 14; Home Office, [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\) visa data](#), (accessed 16 January 2024)

4 C&AG's Report, para 2

5 C&AG's Report, paras 1 and 4.2

6 [Written Evidence HFU0004](#) Local Government Association, paragraph 5.3

7 C&AG's Report para 4.4.

8 Q 14; C&AG's Report para 4.4

6. We asked the Departments what proportion of those who had come to the UK as part of the scheme they expected would remain in the UK indefinitely. The Home Office recognised the uncertainty about the situation in Ukraine and that the longer the war continued, the more people put roots down, especially for those with children in education. However, it told us that Ministers had not yet decided what its policy response should be as the scheme was purposefully set up as a three-year visa scheme, not a full resettlement scheme. It explained that it had been in close contact with the Ukrainian Government at the beginning of the scheme, who had made it clear that the scheme needed to encourage and enable people to return to Ukraine after the war as Ukrainian citizens would need to return after the war to help rebuild the country.⁹

7. We raised our concerns about the challenges facing Ukrainians whose visas are coming to an end. We also asked the Home Office when it thought it would make a decision so it could provide reassurance to those taking part in the scheme, especially those who do not have a home to go back to because it had been destroyed. The Home Office could not give us a date for when it would make a decision on extending visas. However, it did tell us that it was working with its Ministers and DLUHC, among others, on options both for extension of the current scheme and development of the scheme beyond 2025. The Home Office assured us that it would make any decisions well in advance of people's visas ending.¹⁰

Processing of visas

8. The Home Office is responsible for processing the visas of those applying to be part of the scheme. By January 2024 the Home Office had received 219,800 visa applications and issued 178,600 visas to people.¹¹ The NAO found that at the start of the scheme, the Home Office had not set out target turnaround times for processing visas, as it simply wanted to process them as quickly as possible. In March 2022, the first month that applications were open, of the 26,000 applications received, just 18% were processed within five working days and 21% took more than 15 working days.¹²

9. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, those applying for any type of UK visa had to attend a visa application centre to give their biometrics before they came to the UK. The Home Office told us that for obvious reasons it had had to shut its visa application centre in Lviv, Ukraine. It explained that after the start of the war it had very quickly set up a new visa application centre over the border in Warsaw, as it was aware that large numbers of people were already moving there. However, it then realised that this was adding unnecessary steps and delay to the visa application process, so it took further action to try and speed up the application process for Ukrainians wanting to apply to come to the UK. Firstly, on 10 March 2022, the Home Secretary announced that attendance at a visa application centre would no longer be required for Ukrainians with valid international passports. Instead, Ukrainians could apply online, uploading a scan of their passport, and give their biometrics after they had arrived in the UK. Then, on 18 May 2022, the Home Office implemented another new digital route which allowed applicants to provide biometric information online rather than when they arrived in the UK.¹³

9 Qq 15, 16 and 24

10 Qq 14–16, 19–20

11 Home Office, [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme \(Homes for Ukraine\) visa data](#), (accessed 16 January 2024)

12 C&AG's Report paras 2.7–2.8

13 Q 10; C&AG's Report para 2.9

10. The Home Office also increased the number of people working on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. From a minimum of 165 staff working on the scheme in March 2022, this number grew to over 1,000 by June 2022 working across all Ukraine schemes. This included 554 officials from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). By April and May 2022, 95% and 87% of cases were processed within 15 working days respectively. By July 2023, the Home Office had processed 77% of the more than 182,000 visa applications it had received within 15 working days. However, the turnaround times have largely taken longer since June 2022. The number of applications which took, or will take, more than 15 working days to process increased from 19% of applications submitted in June 2022 to 63% in July 2023.¹⁴

11. The NAO reported that the Home Office believed several issues contributed to slower turnaround times. These included: technical changes to the application process; an influx of applications when the Scottish Government announced it would be pausing the super sponsorship scheme; and the impact of staff being moved back to other roles. The Home Office also deferred some cases, which caused delays. The Home Office told us that deferring cases was often because it was awaiting policy decisions such as on how to treat sponsor applications from Ukrainians living in the UK. If deferred cases are excluded, of 135,539 applications received by July 2023, 90% were processed within 15 working days.¹⁵

12. We were concerned about the impact of processing the volume of visa applications received as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme would have on other visa routes. We therefore asked the Home Office what it was doing to ensure an adequate standard of service across other areas. The Home Office told us that it had brought in additional resources into the Home Office and grown its caseworking teams across the Department, and that it was training people in different ways so they could work flexibly across the organisation.¹⁶

13. We asked what would happen if there was a sudden surge in applications under the scheme and whether the Home Office would have sufficient capacity to support such a surge whilst maintaining standards of service in other areas of its work. The Home Office explained that there were a number of reasons why it could support such a surge. These included having the resources it needed, the flexibility to deploy people to different pressures in the organisation as they emerged, and through automating and transforming its systems, which had increased productivity. The Home Office also told us that it was seeking to standardise all of its visa processing and more of its asylum processing, which would reduce the time taken to train somebody to work across any of its processes.¹⁷

14 C&AG's Report paras 2.9–2.10

15 Q 9; C&AG's Report para 2.11

16 Qq 73–75

17 Qq 74–75

2 Support and sponsorship within the scheme

14. Total central government funding for the scheme was £2.1 billion by the end of September 2023. DLUHC provided £1.9 billion of the funding, of which most (£1.1 billion) had gone to local authorities to support each Ukrainian on the scheme in their first year in the UK. DLUHC set this funding initially at £10,500 per Ukrainian, and then reduced it to £5,900 for all arrivals after 31 December 2022.¹⁸ We asked DLUHC why it had reduced the amounts per person paid to local authorities. DLUHC explained that one reason was that local authorities had incurred a lot of costs in setting up the scheme, for example in setting up new systems and getting the right staff in place. DLUHC's assumption was that these set-up costs had decreased as the scheme had gone on. Although local authorities taking part in the scheme have received funding from DLUHC since March 2022, DLUHC only made it mandatory for them to report back on how they had spent the money from 2023–24. We questioned the usefulness of the spend data DLUHC had collected from local authorities, given it was often qualitative and provided voluntarily.¹⁹ DLUHC stressed that from the start it had needed to balance the demand for data against placing a burden on local authorities.²⁰

Preventing homelessness

15. In December 2022, DLUHC announced £650 million of funding for local authorities through a Local Authority Housing Fund, of which £500 million was to acquire housing stock, and £150 million for homelessness prevention more widely. This funding aimed to assist reducing homelessness for people within the local authority, including those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Local authorities must spend any money allocated under these schemes before the end of March 2024 and can use it to fund a wide range of actions to support Ukrainians into sustainable accommodation, including to support them to access the private rented sector, for employment support, to pay for temporary accommodation, and to encourage hosts to continue to house their guests.²¹ In November 2023, the government announced that it was providing a further £120 million of funding to invest in to invest in homelessness prevention, including to support Ukrainian households who could no longer remain in sponsorship.²²

16. The NAO found that DLUHC did not accurately know how many people on the scheme were likely to become homeless soon or had already experienced homelessness, as 30% of English local authorities regularly failed to provide homelessness data on the scheme to DLUHC.²³ We therefore asked DLHUC why it did not have a full and accurate picture of the situation. DLHUC recognised that “not all local authorities provide this data and not all of them provide it consistently” but told us that the vast majority submitted “at least some data”. It asserted that it did not have any reason to suggest that those who were not providing data were outliers, or that the overall position on homelessness was more

18 C&AG's Report para 3.2

19 Qq 38–42

20 Qq 25 and 32

21 C&AG's Report para 4.16

22 HM Government, [Autumn Statement 2023](#), CP977, November 2023

23 Q 47; C&AG's Report para 4.12

serious in those places than in areas that were reporting it.²⁴ DLUHC told us that the last data return had been submitted by more than 70% of local authorities and considered that the data it did receive was representative and sufficient to track trends so that it could respond accordingly with policy interventions.²⁵

17. DLUHC told us that it would like to avoid any of those taking part in the scheme from experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness, but noted that the current levels were “relatively low”.²⁶ The NAO found that between 24 February 2022 and 31 August 2023, 4,890 households in England on Homes for Ukraine visas had at some point been homeless or had come within 56 days of being homeless. The NAO found that the data held by DLUHC did not show for how long people on the scheme were at risk of homelessness or experienced homelessness, nor how many people on the scheme were currently affected. The data did, however, show that since the start of 2023, at any one time, roughly 600 to 800 Ukrainian households (whether on Homes for Ukraine visas or resident in the UK through a different path) had been living in temporary accommodation in England. An ONS survey in spring 2023, of people on the scheme who arrived before 15 June 2022, suggested that 4% of people in this group were living in temporary or emergency accommodation provided by the council or did not have anywhere to live.²⁷

18. DLUHC told us that 790 Ukrainian households taking part in the scheme were currently in temporary accommodation, and 8% were either experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness at any particular time.²⁸ We asked DLUHC how it would respond in the event of an increase in the levels of homelessness or risk of homelessness for those taking part in the scheme, particularly given the severe pressures on levels of homelessness in the general population. It told us that it was conscious of the housing pressures being faced by local authorities and had recognised this by providing extra funding to prevent homelessness. It explained that in many cases homelessness had been prevented or subsequently dealt with by local authorities using the homelessness prevention money.²⁹

Thank you payments for sponsors

19. Any adult in the UK can act as a sponsor providing they pass eligibility checks conducted by the Home Office and local authorities. Sponsors are expected to offer accommodation for at least six months, although many relationships have lasted longer and some have ended before then. By end of March 2023, DLUHC had spent £100 million on thank you payments made to sponsors to recognise their role in providing accommodation to Ukrainians.³⁰ In November 2023, the government extended ‘thank you’ payments of £500 a month into a third year for sponsors so that Ukrainians could stay with them for the full three year period of their visas.³¹

24 Q 32

25 Qq 46–48

26 Qq 32–34

27 C&AG’s Report para 4.12

28 Q 32

29 Q 33–34

30 C&AG’s Report 3.6

31 Qq 12, 20, 57; HM Government, [Autumn Statement 2023](#), November 2023, para 4.107, 5.199

20. DLUHC's initial planning assumption had been that 50% of sponsorships could breakdown, leading to homelessness.³² We asked DLUHC what impact the decision to extend thank you payments would have on sustaining sponsor-host relationships and what analysis it had done to inform its decision to extend payments for another year. DLUHC explained that it had taken the decision based on the number of thank you payments paid out and the number of people still in sponsorship and on the findings of surveys by the Office for National Statistics on the importance of thank you payments. It also told us that thank you payments had an psychological impact in terms of recognising the contribution that people were making. DLUHC acknowledged, however, that thank you payments would not address all the challenges and barriers faced by hosts, such as language barriers or simply not wanting to share their home any longer.³³ We asked whether it had been possible to quantify the number of sponsor-host relationships that were at risk of breaking down if the thank you payments had not been continued. DLUHC admitted that it had been difficult to quantify that exactly, because it depended on individual circumstances, but it considered it had a good sense of the impact.³⁴

32 C&AG's Report para 4.11

33 Qq 57–58

34 Q 59

3 Learning lessons and future challenges

Collating and sharing data

21. At the start of the scheme, DLUHC identified a need to share data between itself, the Home Office and local authorities, including data on the subsequent movement of Ukrainians after their arrival into the UK. DLUHC chose to accept an offer from a company called Palantir to use its data system on a pro-bono basis for the first six months, with Palantir waiving an estimated fee of £3.25 million. In September 2022, following the end of the six-month free trial period, DLUHC directly awarded a 12-month contract to Palantir worth £4.5 million, excluding VAT.³⁵

22. In February 2023, the Government’s Chief Commercial Officer wrote to Palantir noting his concern about the practice of offering services to public sector customers for a zero or nominal cost to gain a commercial foothold, contrary to the principles of public procurement which usually require open competition. The Chief Commercial Officer’s advice was copied to senior digital and procurement officials in government alongside confirmation that free trial contracts should be avoided by government customers and only used in exceptional circumstances. Given a number of challenges, including those of migrating to a new system, in September 2023, DLUHC extended the contract with Palantir for a further 12 months, valued at £5.5 million, excluding VAT, i.e. £10 million for a 30 month provision.³⁶

23. The current contract with Palantir is due to end in September 2024. We therefore asked DLUHC what its plans were after 2024. DLUHC told us it would look “very closely” at next steps and would take a decision at the “appropriate moment”.³⁷ We challenged the Department on when an appropriate moment would be given the end of the current contract was less than a year away. It told us that it was “constantly looking at what data and digital solution we need to run the programme and to enable the data flows” between the organisations involved, and that it would continue to do so when considering its requirements for the future.³⁸ It noted that it could extend the Palantir contract one more time for one more year. DLUHC acknowledged the criticism it had received about how the contract had been set up at the beginning, and that it did not want to end up in a situation where it had no options, but that it was waiting for policy decisions to be made by Ministers.³⁹ We therefore asked DLUHC about whether DLUHC would have enough time to run a procurement exercise if it needed to and what was its point of no return. DLUHC said that it did not know precisely when this was, but that it was working closely with commercial colleagues to work out an appropriate timetable.⁴⁰

24. Following our evidence session, the Department wrote to us to confirm that it was “reviewing carefully the ongoing requirements to enabled data flows”. It explained that this included considering alternative data platforms so that it could run a procurement exercise if it was to decide that the best option would be to procure a new service ahead of September 2024. It told us that while procurement timelines are clear, it could not provide

35 Qq 50; C&AG’s Report para 17, 3.10–3.13

36 Q 59; C&AG’s Report para 3.12

37 Q 50

38 Q 51

39 Qq 52–54

40 Qq 55–56

a specific date by which the decision on whether to launch a procurement needed to have been made in order to not put itself at a commercial disadvantage. It also clarified that the timeline for the delivery of the future data needs will depend on the option chosen by government.⁴¹

Evaluating the success of the scheme

25. The NAO found that in early 2023, DLUHC had conducted an exercise to identify the lessons that could be learned from the scheme’s sponsorship model. That exercise included recommendations to government on the running of the current scheme, and on the design of any future emergency sponsorship schemes. DLUHC was also developing a ‘playbook,’ drawing primarily on the lessons from Homes for Ukraine, to aid officials in future to design any future emergency sponsorship schemes.⁴²

26. We asked DLUHC whether it would be commissioning a fuller evaluation of the scheme. DLUHC had originally planned a process-focused evaluation, which it intended to complete by autumn 2023, but it paused work on this in spring 2023. DLUHC told us that it did not have a timeframe for an evaluation. While it accepted that it was right to learn lessons, and that it had been “looking at a lot of insights as we have gone along”, it told us that in the meantime it could not be assumed that the Homes for Ukraine scheme was a response to an unusual set of circumstances and not necessarily a blueprint that could easily be applied elsewhere.⁴³

27. We asked DLUHC about the value for money of the scheme. DLUHC told us that it thought the cost of scheme was much lower than for other resettlement schemes. It explained that the cost per night of the accommodation was lower as sponsors provided the accommodation.⁴⁴ Thank you payments equated to costs of £6 per person per night (£8 once increased to £500 after 12 months) compared with £98 per person per night for Afghans being hosted in hotels. This calculation, however, did not factor in additional funding that was available under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, for example, £150 million of funding given to local authorities for homelessness prevention.⁴⁵ DLUHC also considered that, although hard-to-quantify, the support offered by sponsors to individuals, would otherwise have fallen on the public purse to help people into appropriate education or training or work opportunities. The Home Office noted that it was difficult to measure the value for money of a humanitarian scheme, because it was about saving people’s lives, but told us that it had spent just over £50 million on resourcing the scheme.⁴⁶

41 [Letter to Committee of Public Accounts from Permanent Secretary, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 7 December 2023](#)

42 C&AG’s Report para 4.21

43 Qq 78–79; C&AG’s Report paras 4.22

44 Qq 76–77

45 C&AG’s Report para 3.7

46 Qq 76–77

Formal minutes

Monday 5 February 2024

Members present

Dame Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Paula Barker

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr Jonathan Djanogly

Mrs Flick Drummond

Mr Mark Francois

Peter Grant

Ms Marie Rimmer

Declaration of interests

The following declarations of interest relating to the inquiry were made:

23 November 2023

Mr Jonathan Djanogly declared the following interest: That he was a former host under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Homes for Ukraine

Draft Report (*Homes for Ukraine*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 27 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 7 February at 1.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 23 November 2023

Sarah Healey, Permanent Secretary, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; **Emma Payne**, Director, Homes for Ukraine Scheme, SRO of the programme, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; **Abi Tierney**, Director-General, Customer Services Group, Home Office; **Simon Ridley**, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office

[Q1-80](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

HFU numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Buckinghamshire Council ([HFU0016](#))
- 2 Chartered Institute of Housing ([HFU0002](#))
- 3 Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity, COMPAS, University of Oxford ([HFU0012](#))
- 4 Hampshire County Council ([HFU0001](#))
- 5 Jones, Professor Sara (University of Birmingham); and Kuznetsova, Dr Irina (University of Birmingham) ([HFU0005](#))
- 6 Kandiah, Dr Krish (Sanctuary Foundation) ([HFU0006](#))
- 7 Local Government Association ([HFU0004](#))
- 8 London Councils ([HFU0009](#))
- 9 Migration Yorkshire ([HFU0011](#))
- 10 More in Common ([HFU0013](#))
- 11 NACCOM ([HFU0008](#))
- 12 Nottingham Trent University ([HFU0014](#))
- 13 Office for National Statistics ([HFU0007](#))
- 14 Opora ([HFU0015](#))
- 15 South Cambridgeshire District Council ([HFU0003](#))
- 16 The District Councils' Network (DCN) ([HFU0017](#))
- 17 Wales Strategic Migration Partnership ([HFU0010](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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1st	The New Hospital Programme	HC 77
2nd	The condition of school buildings	HC 78
3rd	Revising health assessments for disability benefits	HC 79
4th	The Department for Work & Pensions Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23	HC 290
5th	Government's programme of waste reforms	HC 333
6th	Competition in public procurement	HC 385
7th	Resilience to flooding	HC 71
8th	Improving Defence Inventory Management	HC 66
9th	Whole of Government Accounts 2020–21	HC 65
10th	HS2 and Euston	HC 67
11th	Reducing the harm from illegal drugs	HC 72
12th	Cross-government working	HC 75
13th	Preparedness for online safety	HC 73

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10th	Restoration and Renewal of Parliament	HC 49
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15th	The Police Uplift Programme	HC 261
16th	Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 29
17th	Government's contracts with Randox Laboratories Ltd	HC 28
18th	Government actions to combat waste crime	HC 33
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20th	Whole of Government Accounts 2019–20	HC 31
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22nd	Tackling local air quality breaches	HC 37
23rd	Measuring and reporting public sector greenhouse gas emissions	HC 39
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25th	Regulation of energy suppliers	HC 41
26th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2021–22 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 44
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28th	Improving the Accounting Officer Assessment process	HC 43
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30th	Developing workforce skills for a strong economy	HC 685
31st	Managing central government property	HC 48
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33rd	HMRC performance in 2021–22	HC 686
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35th	Introducing Integrated Care Systems	HC 47
36th	The Defence digital strategy	HC 727
37th	Support for vulnerable adolescents	HC 730
38th	Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 729
39th	Excess Votes 2021–22	HC 1132
40th	COVID employment support schemes	HC 810
41st	Driving licence backlogs at the DVLA	HC 735
42nd	The Restart Scheme for long-term unemployed people	HC 733
43rd	Progress combatting fraud	HC 40
44th	The Digital Services Tax	HC 732
45th	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22	HC 1254

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49th	Managing tax compliance following the pandemic	HC 739
50th	Government Shared Services	HC 734
51st	Tackling Defra’s ageing digital services	HC 737
52nd	Restoration & Renewal of the Palace of Westminster – 2023 Recall	HC 1021
53rd	The performance of UK Security Vetting	HC 994
54th	Alcohol treatment services	HC 1001
55th	Education recovery in schools in England	HC 998
56th	Supporting investment into the UK	HC 996
57th	AEA Technology Pension Case	HC 1005
58th	Energy bills support	HC 1074
59th	Decarbonising the power sector	HC 1003
60th	Timeliness of local auditor reporting	HC 995
61st	Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme	HC 1002
62nd	Department of Health and Social Care 2021–22 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 997
63rd	HS2 Euston	HC 1004
64th	The Emergency Services Network	HC 1006
65th	Progress in improving NHS mental health services	HC 1000
66th	PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic	HC 1590
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74th	Bulb Energy	HC 1232
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77th	Supported housing	HC 1330
78th	Resettlement support for prison leavers	HC 1329
79th	Support for innovation to deliver net zero	HC 1331

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35th	The pharmacy early payment and salary advance schemes in the NHS	HC 745
36th	EU Exit: UK Border post transition	HC 746
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47th	Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20	HC 994
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49th	Regulation of private renting	HC 996
50th	Bounce Back Loans Scheme: Follow-up	HC 951
51st	Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system	HC 997
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42nd	COVID-19: Government procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment	HC 928
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45th	Managing flood risk	HC 931
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48th	Digital Services at the Border	HC 936
49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
50th	Defence Equipment Plan 2020–2030	HC 693
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