

Ukraine 2 Felixstowe Briefing 16th June 2022

Felixstowe Town Hall 7pm.

In attendance:

On behalf of Ukraine2Felixstowe:

Kim Balshaw (KB) (Executive Chairman U2F)

Tolik Vahnkenko (Ukrainian Guest)

Michelle Smith (U2F Committee Representative)

Rev. Chris Hood (U2F Committee Representative)

Barbara Adams (Felixstowe Host)

Jerry Adams (Felixstowe Host)

Dee Balshaw (Felixstowe Host)

Debbie Bartlett (Felixstowe Host)

Alaco Doyle (Felixstowe Host)

Felixstowe Town Council:

Cllr Sharon Harkin

Cllr Seamus Bennett

Cllr Margaret Morris

Cllr Mick Richardson

Ash Tadjrishi (Town Clerk)

Notes:

Following introductions, KB gave a presentation to all in attendance.

KB briefly outlined the history of refugees and the recent situation in the Ukraine following the Russian invasion.

Attendees were advised that Poland continued to be the main initial destination for fleeing refugees, followed by other neighbouring countries and then other western European countries. The UK required visas to be approved prior to arrival and a number of refugees were waiting to enter the UK

KB explained that Ukraine2Felixstowe's motivations were due to:

- Emotional reactions – a need to do something, to show solidarity
- Christian calling
- Spread the burden fairly
- Cohesion of western democracies – form of economic warfare
- Breathing space – make safe/clear/rebuild/reoccupy

KG stated that Ukraine2Felixstowe now had a Constitution with the following objectives:

- Find and match most vulnerable Ukrainians
- Encourage and support UK sponsors/hosts
- Assist Ukrainian refugees/guests
- Facilitate supportive community interactions
- Access relief funds
- Harness and focus collective power

The overall aim was to assist people on a journey from *refugee* to *guest* to *independence* (or from *sponsor* to *host* to *independence*). The process was outlined as:

- Prospective hosts and guests consider their commitment
- Find sponsors in Felixstowe and most needy refugees
- Match sponsors / hosts with refugees / guests (via U2F or independently)
- Apply for visa (with assistance of Russian/English speakers)
- Wait for visa to be approved ...
- Travel to UK (various free routes)
- Arrive in Felixstowe
- Register (UK mobile, bank, Universal Credit, National Insurance, schools, etc.)
- Consolidate (find work, fitness & sports, etc.)
- Decide (at some unknown point in the future, whether and when to return to the Ukraine)

Issues:

- Facebook vs 'screened' matches
- Domestic friction – use of shared facilities, creating separated space and/or time for hosts & guests.
- Support the community
- Process familiarity and IT literacy
- Support – reactive or proactive?

Contingency Planning

- Trauma & bereavement
- Financial stress
- 'Irreconcilable differences' between guests and hosts
- How long?
- What next?

KB referred to the range of external stakeholders which the Group were engaging with and the challenges around tackling the misconceptions about refugees.

In closing, KB stated that, whilst it was a joy to host Ukrainian families, there were many issues under the surface that were going to emerge over time.

In response to questions from Councillors in attendance, KB advised that, as known to U2F, there were currently 72 Ukrainians in Felixstowe living with 21 hosts. There were another 16 Ukrainians in the pipeline to arrive with 7 hosts, plus 6 sponsors awaiting matching. KB estimated that the additional numbers yet unknown to U2F would be at least 10% in all categories.

Addressing the question of assessing risks, KB confirmed that U2F's work was additional to the government's (central and local) processes for registering and assessing sponsors.

Cllr SH encouraged U2F to liaise with the specialist group set up by Suffolk County Council to coordinate services.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Council would be able to consider the U2F request for an Outside Body Representative at its meeting on Wednesday 22nd June. KB would advise of the anticipated commitment.

Before closing the meeting, Cllr SH thanked all the attendees and encouraged KB to offer the presentation to other local groups and residents to help raise awareness of the local situation.