

18 March 2022



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon

Since our last update, global events have dominated the news cycle with the tragic events in Ukraine having a profound impact far beyond its borders. We have all been horrified to read of the casualties of war and the desperate circumstances of those whose homes are now a conflict zone.

West Berkshire stands firmly with the Ukrainian people and is ready to play its part to support those fleeing the country. We know that many local people have already signed up for the recently announced [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme, which will see them welcome Ukrainians into their homes for a minimum of six months.

Local authorities will have an important role to play in the scheme, and council services across the country including social care, health, education, and revenues teams will be working to fulfil this over the coming weeks. We debated a motion at yesterday evening's Council meeting about the form our support here in West Berkshire should take. Members unanimously agreed that we will do all we can to support our guests and those hosting them. Our response during this difficult time will therefore ensure we have a dedicated Ukraine Support Hub that will provide help for those coming in to the UK and to those who will host a family. The Hub can be contacted on 01635 503579 or on ukraine@westberks.gov.uk.

We know that many local people who cannot take part in the scheme may wish to help in other ways. [Greenham Trust](#) has set up an appeal on The Good Exchange to provide local funding to support those families arriving. As part of this, both Greenham Trust and West Berkshire Council have committed to each contributing £25,000 in match funding, ensuring public, corporate and trust/foundation donations to this appeal are matched £1 for £1 for the first £50,000 raised. You can donate funds here: <https://app.thegoodexchange.com/project/19509/greenham-trust/help-welcome-ukrainians-to-west-berkshire>

As Council Tax bills hit doormats across the district this week, we are very conscious that the increasing cost of living is making budgeting increasingly difficult. Surging demand for energy has meant energy prices have increased, with the price of gas alone quadrupling and petrol rising to over £1.70 per litre on local forecourts.

Whilst the problem is global, the effect is being felt by many of us in West Berkshire. Lynne's [recent blog](#) about the Levelling Up White Paper touched on this issue and it's clear there is still more to do to address deprivation across the country, including the South East.

The £150 [council tax rebate](#) for those living in Band A-D properties will be administered shortly and we also offer [Council Tax Reduction](#) schemes to those experiencing hardship. We know that although this will be of assistance, for some residents more may be required. Further advice can be found [here](#) on other financial support available and we would encourage residents to get in touch with us if they are in need of help.

Elsewhere in the Council, colleagues in the Transport Team have been busily working on the delivery of an Enhanced Partnership Plan with local bus operators. The plan will be considered at Executive shortly and is a statutory requirement of the Government's National Bus Strategy Bus Back Better, which aims to dramatically improve bus usage. The Enhanced Partnership Plan goes hand in hand with our [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) that we recently delivered in collaboration with local bus operators. Both of these are part of our ambitious plans for our bus services, which have suffered during Covid, and will be used to bid for government funding which is likely to be available in the new financial year. They have also been delivered in a very tight timescale set by the government and we are proud of the dedication of our teams in securing these improvements for residents.

As we begin to welcome new arrivals to West Berkshire, we know that as always you will all be looking after each other and the community and putting kindness at the forefront of your minds. We finish, as always, by wishing you and your families well for the fortnight ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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