

Agenda item 7

For information – An update on the Welcome Hub

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Summary

Frome Town Council has been a key partner in the Welcome to All, Somerset-wide initiative to support displaced people in our community. This fully funded initiative enables us to deliver a wide-ranging programme of support, activity and events with positive impact for our displaced community and their wider networks. This report offers a summary of key outcomes.

Background

Frome Welcome Hub opened on 10 October 2022. It was one of six hubs across Somerset run by Frome Town Council in partnership with Somerset Council and Charis Refugees until July 2025. Since July 2025, Frome Town Council has been proud to be a key partner in *Welcome to All*, a Somerset-wide initiative launched in 2025 to support displaced people.

The Welcome Hub works in partnership with the local displaced community to assess what is working well and what needs developing, in order to shape a service that positively engages with those already living in the area, whilst also supporting those who newly arrive.

The Welcome Hub links in with local existing services and opportunities, is a point of contact for refugees and asylum seekers, signposts to regional and national services for practical support and offers cultural and social opportunities. The Hub works with local organisations and volunteers to enable English language learning opportunities for displaced people.

Since 2022, the Hub has supported 232 displaced people. Of these, 88 have moved to other regions of the UK, relocated to other countries, or returned to their home country. We are currently supporting 144 people, including 87 adults and 57 children aged 1–18. 83% of the displaced people we support are from Ukraine. Overall, 77% are employed, and the employment rate among Ukrainians is 83%.

Partnership working

The key partners the Hub closely works with are:

- **Fair Frome:** Many of our clients were issued food bank and furniture bank referrals, registered with the Community Pantry, received support with purchasing school uniforms, were given knitted blankets, and children received Christmas presents.
- **Frome Welcomes Refugees Group:** Volunteers have provided support to families from Syria and Eritrea, and in 2022 they also supported families from Ukraine and their sponsors. The Frome Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group has been assisting refugees using funds raised by Frome Town Council and Frome Rotary. These funds are used for a

range of needs, including support with moving to new accommodation for the first time, school uniforms and shoes, English-learning materials, travel to medical appointments, unexpected hardships, and occasional special events, particularly for children.

- **DonateIT:** Donated SIM cards and 11 refurbished laptops, phone.
- **Terrestrial:** Organised a Fireside Gathering and Midsummer Makers arts and crafts workshops; hosted a Refugee Week party in 2025; and took active participants from the Midsummer Makers workshops to Stonehenge.
- **Purple Elephant, Caravan Arts, Super Roots:** Provided children's activities.
- **Prodigal Bikes:** Donated 24 refurbished bikes, with FWRAG funding helmets and puncture kits.
- **School in a Bag:** Donated school backpacks.
- **Rotary Club:** Donated Christmas presents in 2022 and tickets to Christmas Musical and Pantomime in 2023.
- **Emma Rice Company:** Donated tickets to their shows in Frome and Bath in 2023 – 2025.
- **New Old Friends Theatre Company:** Donated tickets to their Crimes Against Christmas show in 2025.

Events

People within the displaced community participated in events such as:

- Planting trees, weeding and mulching at the Old Showfield in 2022 – 2024
- Community Woodland Planting in 2026
- Multicultural Festival 2022 – 2025
- Christmas Lights Switch on in 2023
- Frome Kindness Festival in 2024 – 2026
- Community Flag Project in 2023
- Frome Carnival in 2023 and 2025
- Window Wanderland in 2024

The Welcome Hub organized trips to Cheddar Gorge, the Montacute House, Wells Cathedral and Bishop's Palace and Gardens; the Bowood House, Stourhead.

The feedback from these trips was very positive and shows a distinct and direct positive impact on mental health and general wellbeing. The trips also provide a supported opportunity to socialise, immerse oneself in local history and culture, being outside in nature and experiencing a sense of community and connection.

"Thank you so much for our recent trip. It is a very beautiful place. I think it is a marvellous opportunity to get to know better the country we live now due to very sad circumstances. These trips allow us to socialise more and improve our mood and well-being."

"We treasure every moment, every chance to get to know the country that took us in, filling our lives with light, even through pain".

The feedback exemplifies the power that such activities have to distract guests from their personal and national circumstances and therefore offer some respite.

ESOL provision

Since 2022, 42 displaced people have been supported by 22 ESOL volunteers. There are currently 7 volunteers providing face-to-face classes to 9 students.

The national and local reports have shown that poor English language skills are a key barrier to employment, integration and more generally, community cohesion. Informal classes with the ESOL volunteers help people improve their speaking skills and gain confidence.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

There are weekly arts and crafts sessions facilitated by the wellbeing practitioner from Mind in Somerset. We can also refer our clients to partner organisations in the Welcome to All Programme, such as D'LOUMMMIES CIC, SASP, Mind in Somerset, and TFSW. Free six-week wellbeing courses and two one-day retreats were offered to Hub visitors by Land Food Medicine.

Feedback from the participants of the wellbeing course:

“I am so grateful to you for this beautiful day. I really enjoyed the grounding procedure you did. It allowed me to take my mind off my daily routine and remember me and how important it is to love and care for myself.”

"A huge thank you for the wonderfully organized day of relaxation. I received plenty of positive emotions from interacting with wonderful people and engaging in interesting activities. Many thanks to the English ladies for their attention, friendliness, and the wonderful organization of the entire event.”

Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)

Monthly one-hour LEAG meetings have been held since January 2026. The purpose of the meetings is to help shape better services and influence positive change in the community. Participants share their thoughts on what works well, gaps in services, and the challenges displaced people encounter.

Next Steps

We will continue to support our clients and provide the best service in order for them to feel more confident and independent.

Many of their enquiries/tasks are complex and we spend much time on navigating/learning/researching different systems in order for us to support these clients efficiently.

The ultimate aim is for members of the displaced community to feel integrated and welcome in the town and we will continue to work with partners and the wider community to facilitate events and spread awareness. Events are being planned for Refugee Week in June 2026 including film screenings and a quiz night.

We are working with Frome Welcomes Refugees to explore an application to become a Council of Sanctuary. A full report will come to a future Council meeting.

Key considerations for the Council	None
Consultation and feedback	Lived Experience working group advises on delivery
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	This programme helps to deliver on Aim 1 in the Council Plan in the following ways: We connect people with local services and available support. We advocate for our town and its needs, and try to ensure all voices are heard, particularly those which might otherwise be overlooked.
Financial and Risk Implications	Externally funded contract.
Legal / HR Implications	None
Equalities Implications	Improves service delivery for protected characteristic race and ethnicity.
Community Safety Implications	None
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	None
Health and Safety Implications	None
Health and Wellbeing Implications	There are positive implications of this programme for the health and wellbeing of people in the displaced community
Constitutional Requirements	None
Background papers	None
Report sign off (if appropriate)	Hannah Stopford & Peter Wheelhouse 29/04/26