

# **Still no long-term housing plans for Ukrainians on cruise ship**

**No plans have been made to move displaced Ukrainians living on a cruise ship in Edinburgh into proper housing, as the council warns a failure to arrange long-term accommodation for refugees could leave many homeless.**

More than 1,600 people are still living aboard the MS Victoria which docked in Leith last June as part of the Scottish Government's response to support those who fled the Russian invasion.

However there are growing concerns for the welfare of its inhabitants, with the British Red Cross voicing concerns this month about refugees staying in "windowless" cabins for months on end "in limbo".

A freedom of information request by the LDRS found that among the issues reported to the council by those living on MS Victoria were lack of living space, poor internet bandwidth and concerns about onward accommodation.

Ukrainians had also complained about "Russian speaking crew on-board".

Humanitarian charity British Red Cross said earlier this month

the situation has left many “still living in limbo” and unable to properly settle in Scotland.

It raised concerns about people continuing to live in cabins, many of them windowless, with the ships stationed in “isolated” docks.

The ship had its contract extended by the Government at the end of last year and it is yet to be confirmed if it will continue housing Ukrainians beyond June.

But it remains the most likely option, after a council report said there is “not currently a long term national accommodation strategy”.

The report, which was presented to the policy and sustainability committee on Tuesday (March 21) said if long term settled accommodation options are not identified in the city this would present a “substantial risk” to the council’s homelessness services.

It was previously reported by the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that [22 Ukrainian refugee households](#) have presented to Edinburgh Council as homeless in the last year.

The report added: “In discussions with the Scottish Government the council have been clear that, until a long-term national accommodation strategy is confirmed, the Scottish Government must continue to provide and fund short term accommodation options within the city and nationally.

“This accommodation would include continuation of hotels, apartments, and the possible extension of the MS Victoria.”

British Red Cross director for Scotland Rob Murray said: “We’re worried there’s a real risk of families becoming homeless or spending long periods of time in inappropriate accommodation.

“This is creating stress and uncertainty for people already

dealing with the emotional impact of the conflict.

“The Scottish Government has provided a vital response for people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Now it must build on this by helping Ukrainians into safe, suitable and affordable accommodation in Scotland, where they can start to rebuild their lives.

“It’s important that all governments reflect on lessons from the past year to improve schemes for Ukrainians still settling in Scotland and ensure future safe routes meet people’s needs on arrival.”

A Scottish Government spokesperson said any further extension to the contract for MS Victoria would need to be confirmed to the parliament.

They said: “The Scottish Government is working intensively with local authorities to match people into longer-term accommodation and the priority is to ensure safe and sustainable longer-term accommodation can be provided, including making full use of existing and new volunteer hosts.”

Meanwhile a cruise ship docked in Glasgow which is also housing Ukrainian refugees is due to leave the city at the end of this month.

Members of Glasgow’s Integration Joint Board, which runs health and social care services, were told this week that only 57 Ukrainians remained on MS Ambition with plans now in place to re-home all of them.

Edinburgh City Council was approached for comment.

*by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter*

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