Revised common lines on Ukraine,
humanitarian sponsorship scheme announcement and the Bill.

Ultra key messages:

- The government's new scheme 'Homes for Ukraine' would mean Ukrainians seeking safety will still need to go through a complex visa application process – in contrast to the approach of other countries across Europe. This is not the approach the UN refugee convention sets out.
- At the same time the government is pressing ahead with its Nationality and Borders Bill which would mean refugees arriving here from Ukraine and other countries other than by pre-agreed routes could be criminalised, held in reception centres or sent back to where they travelled from.
- With the Bill soon to return to the House of Commons, MPs must vote to end the proposal to punish refugees just because of how they arrive here, regardless of what they are fleeing from. And they must agree the Conservative-led Lords amendment for the UK to commit to resettle at least 10,000 refugees from around the world a year.

Key messages:

- We know communities want to play a direct part in welcoming Ukrainian refugees – and the new scheme announced is a positive step
    - BUT Ukrainians seeking safety will still need to go through a complex visa application process – in contrast to the approach of other countries across Europe.
    - Instead people should be given immediate protection and recognised as refugees as set under the UN convention without being asked to apply for visas.
- At the same time, and despite the clear groundswell of support for refugees from the British public, the government is pressing ahead with its Nationality and Borders Bill
    - which has been condemned by the UN and would drive a coach and horses through the UK's obligations to protect refugees such as those fleeing Ukraine.
    - If passed into law, refugees arriving here from Ukraine and other countries other than by pre-agreed routes could be further traumatised by being criminalised, held in reception centres or sent back to where they travelled from.
- With the Bill returning to the House of Commons imminently, MPs must vote to
    - end the proposal to punish refugees just because of how they arrive here, regardless of what they are fleeing from.
    - And they must agree the Conservative-led Lords amendment for the UK to commit to resettle at least 10,000 refugees from around the world a year.

More detailed information and points

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since WWII. The UN says over 2.5 million people have now fled in terror from Ukraine, and many more are set to follow as the conflict intensifies. Most are going to neighbouring countries, but growing numbers will move wider across Europe.

- The British public wants the government to do much more to welcome Ukrainian refugees and respond to the scale and urgency of this crisis – in contrast to its chaotic, woeful response so far and to the action of other countries. This needs action across a range of fronts.

- We welcome the government saying there will be a humanitarian sponsorship route to enable communities to play a direct part in welcoming Ukrainian refugees to their communities.

- But for it to work it must be a marked improvement on the slow, bureaucratic approach that has too often faced communities trying their best to host and welcome refugees in the past. If it is to play a meaningful part in the UK's overall response it must learn from past mistakes. It must be designed in close cooperation with civil society and other players like local authorities, social workers and housing providers. It must be backed up with proper resources and planning. Little of the detail of this is in place, with promises in newspaper headlines running way ahead of a well-thought-out scheme ready to go. We stand ready to help, but government must listen in order to get it right.

- Furthermore, while such a scheme can play a role if done well, it cannot be used to deflect attention from the other pressing action needed to help refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan and other countries. Relying on the good-hearted British public who want to help via sponsorship is no justification for heartless behaviour by the government in other areas.

- It must put immediate measures in place to ensure Ukrainian families are not left waiting in the cold because of bureaucratic demands for visas, and instead reach the UK safely and easily, and then be able to claim refugee protection if they choose. People from Ukraine are still not being recognised as refugees and being asked to apply for visas when they just need to be guaranteed protection, as they should under the UN refugee convention. This scheme does not do away with the requirement on Ukrainians seeking safety from having to go through a complex, lengthy visa application process – in contrast to the approach of other countries across Europe.

- On top of this the Government seems determined to press ahead with its Nationality and Borders Bill which, in its current form, would drive a coach and horses through the UK's obligations to protect refugees such as those fleeing Ukraine and has been condemned by the UN. Due to return to the House of Commons soon, if passed into law, refugees arriving here from Ukraine and other countries other than by pre-agreed routes could be criminalised, held in out-of-town reception centres or sent back to where they had travelled from or to an offshore processing centre in a country with which they have no connection.

- In particular, Clause 11 of the Bill would allow the government to treat refugees differently based on how they arrive here rather than their need for protection which flies in the face of both the spirit and the letter of the UN Refugee Convention. In the words of former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon it would, "threaten the integrity of the global asylum system."

- Were Clause 11 on the statute book today, Ukrainian, Afghan, Syrian refugees and others seeking safety from war and persecution in the UK would be left with no choice but to take dangerous routes. They would see their rights on family reunion and access to welfare restricted and would be left with an insecure future in the UK. Of all the measures set out by the bill, Clause 11 is the most unlawful, inhumane and unjustifiable and should be dropped from the Bill by the government – as the House of Lords recently voted to do.

- The Bill also fails also to offer much-needed safe routes for refugees to come to the UK. Instead of hurried attempts to put together bespoke schemes from scratch every time an international crisis like Afghanistan or Ukraine hits, we need a clear, planned commitment to

enable us to plan, respond and show we are ready to act to meet our share of our international responsibilities.

- One straightforward to do this would be for the government to accept a Conservative-led amendment to the Bill from the House of Lords tabled by former immigration minister Lord Kirkhope. The amendment calls for a commitment to a global resettlement target of at least 10,000 places a year. This would allow the government to prepare for the next likely phase of the Ukraine crisis. It would also solve the underlying problem that too few refugees are resettled in the UK year on year. Learning from the mistakes from Afghanistan, where we had no scheme in place, no forward planning for local authorities and inadequate political will to make a success of it, we need to lay the groundwork immediately by making this commitment. This proposal would address a fundamental gap in the bill and has been widely supported across the political spectrum. It could be agreed by the government today.

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