



COSLA briefing for the Constitution, Europe External affairs and culture committee 21 April 2022

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to meet with the Constitution, Europe External affairs and culture committee as it considers the response to the Ukraine situation in Scotland. The briefing provides an overview of our work to support Scottish Government and local authorities in providing refuge and integration of Ukrainians with Scottish communities

About COSLA and the Migration Population and Diversity Team

COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland. We work on councils' behalf to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with governments and other key partners on policy, funding and legislation.

COSLA's Migration, Population and Diversity Team has responsibility for work across Local Government relating to support for people seeking asylum, refugee integration and current resettlement programmes in addition to the UK Immigration system, EEA migration, population and demographic change. We also provide oversight of equality and human rights issues for COSLA.

Overview of Ukrainian visa schemes and local authority roles

There are currently three visa schemes for Ukrainians fleeing the war operating in Scotland

Family Visa Scheme – visa allows family members to travel to the UK. UK Government has the expectation that these people will live with their family. Local government has no role in the delivery of the scheme unless the family present as homeless or need additional support.

UK Government Homes for Ukraine Scheme (H4U) – Ukrainian families and hosts based in the UK privately match. Local authorities will undertake property checks and enhanced disclosures on the hosting placement, provide the Ukrainians with £200 per person on arrival and the monthly £350 payments to hosts, as well as providing integration support for the families.

Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme (SSS Scheme) – this scheme is a sub-scheme of the H4U scheme whereby the Scottish Government can act as the sponsor for the Ukrainian family. In this scheme local authorities are able to put forward social housing as well as utilise the offers of hosting. Local authorities will need to undertake checks on hosting offers before arrivals, as well as support the integration of the Ukrainians, payment of £200 to the Ukrainians and payment of the £350 to the hosts. LAs are also key to the delivery of the welcome hubs and associated accommodation for people who are arriving through the SSS Scheme

As with previous resettlement programmes local government will also provide ongoing integration support, enabling Ukrainian families to access the services they need to settle in their communities. This includes registration with DWP, registration with health services including GPs, school enrolments, connections to local community groups and social activities as well provision of ESOL classes and support with employability opportunities

COSLAs role in the response to the Ukraine Crisis

COSLA officers have been working with both the Scottish and UK Governments, Local Government and other partners to ensure that Scottish LAs are able to participate in both the SSS and H4U schemes. This is a fast-changing picture and there are many issues to be resolved to ensure the safety and integration of those seeking refuge in Scotland.

There have been a significant number of visas issued to hosts based in Scotland under the H4U scheme. COSLA has been working with local authorities as they understand and develop the processes required to undertake Enhanced Disclosure checks and property checks on hosting families. There are a number of issues that are still being worked through at both a Scottish and UK level. These include:

COSLA has been working with partners, including DLUHC to try and secure answers and resolution to the issues, as well as ensure the scheme is fit for purpose and can be operational within each local authority area.

Visa approvals for the SSS Scheme have been slower in being processed by the Home Office but we are expecting this to change imminently. Scottish Government has set up a large number of working groups that report into a gold, silver and bronze command oversight structure, COSLA is represented throughout the structure ensuring the views of Local Government are accounted for and reflected in any decision making. The working groups are addressing issues such as the use of Welcome Hubs and related accommodation for arrivals, issues for children and families, safeguarding, trafficking concerns, matching processes and housing options.

COSLA is also working with Scottish Government to establish a centralised matching system which has drawn on our experience of undertaking matching for other resettlement schemes.

COSLA is providing ongoing support to local authorities participating in the Ukrainian schemes including regular liaison and consultations with SOLACE, as well as weekly meetings with resettlement leads and welcome hub leads. A number of additional issues still remain unresolved at this time