



## **COSLA Update for the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee**

**16<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

### **Introduction**

This update follows on from our submission to the Committee session held on 21 April 2022. This briefing provides an update of our ongoing partnership work between Local Government and Scottish Government in supporting Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs) who arrive in Scotland under the Scottish Super Sponsor (SSS) scheme.

### **Partnership Agreement between COSLA and Scottish Government**

COSLA and Scottish Government have been in discussions concerning a draft Partnership Agreement that sets out the role of, and partnership between, Local Government and Scottish Government in supporting UDPs who arrive in Scotland under the SSS scheme.

COSLA Leaders have agreed the Partnership Agreement and noted that it will be subject to revision and refinement over the months ahead. The Partnership Agreement sets out key principles associated with the SSS scheme and the delivery of the national matching service for UDPs.

### **Welcome Hubs and Matching**

COSLA has been working closely with councils and with Scottish Government over the last three months to develop a humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine and, in particular, to support UDPs who are seeking to come to Scotland to escape the conflict. While COSLA and councils are building on the approach taken to supporting refugees over a number of years, the speed and scale of the Ukraine work, and the differential approach being taken to supporting people under both the Homes for Ukraine and the SSS scheme, means that a variety of operational and strategic decisions have had to be made at pace.

Welcome Hubs (WH) have now been established for arrivals into Edinburgh, Glasgow, Glasgow Airport (Renfrewshire) and Cairnryan (Dumfries and Galloway) and 'spoke' hotels have been established in other local authority areas; individual councils are supporting people into settled accommodation and undertaking property and disclosure checks to ensure that appropriate hosting arrangements are in place for all those who arrive under the sponsorship schemes; and COSLA staff are undertaking matching of people to properties – building on what has worked under other schemes.

### **Key points and challenges**

#### ***Arrivals***

Scotland has never experienced the scale and speed of arrivals of displaced people, as we are seeing under the Ukraine Schemes. According to UKG visa data 8,183 Super Sponsor Scheme applications and 3,691 visas under Homes for Ukraine (HfU) have been granted in

Scotland. According to UKG data, to date, there are 4,271 arrivals under the SSS and HfU schemes. This raises questions about the number of UDPs in hotel accommodation, if there are enough properties/hosts available as more applications are granted, the pressures on services as more applications are granted (e.g., on education and health), and, in general, if we need to open a discussion about the implications of granting more Super Sponsor Scheme applications.

Scottish Local Government is also dealing with other asylum and humanitarian schemes, such as:

- Asylum dispersal in Glasgow: c. 5650 people
- Asylum contingency hotels: c. 375 people (across 7 LAs)
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) under 18: c. 175
- UASC care leavers: c. 300
- Resettled Refugees: c. 3,800
- Afghan schemes (settled in accommodation): c. 520
- Afghan schemes (hotels): c. 275 (across 3 LAs)

### ***Matching Service***

COSLA hosts the national matching service which has drawn on our experience of undertaking matching for other resettlement schemes. Please note that some councils are conducting their own direct matches of people to properties in their areas where it is appropriate for them to do so. We are also noting a number of UDPs and hosts carrying out 'private' matches outwith the processes that have been established – this raises safeguarding concerns.

The matching service relies on receiving adequate numbers of case files from WHs and properties (social housing offers and public Expressions of Interest (EOI)) approved by LAs. LAs are required to undertake property and disclosure checks for every EOI, this includes Homes for Ukraine and Scottish Super Sponsor. Checks take time, particularly in rural areas where hosts are widely dispersed.

This is a person-centred matching service, and we recognise the importance of good quality matching which will encourage resettlement and discourage host/UDP breakdown, but we also acknowledge the challenges that this approach can bring. Good quality matching takes time and this needs to be balanced against the number of UDP arriving at hotels.

The matching team carry out a match between UDP and properties/hosts which is a relatively quick process. However, beyond this the matching service is nuanced and there are many issues and challenges that can lengthen the time to get people out of hotels and into appropriate accommodation. It must be acknowledged there are many elements to the matching process. A particularly important part of the process is the human element (UDP and host's views and choices) which we have very little control over.

Some examples of the challenges facing the matching service are:

- EOI issues (we are seeing an increasing number of private matches; length of time hosts take to respond to LAs about property/disclosure checks; property unavailable due to hosts on holiday; incorrect information from hosts; or more nuanced requirements from hosts when LAs contacts them with a match).
- Complex cases (e.g. UDPs have significant medical needs and require to be near medical treatment).

- Large families and no available properties.
- Property requirement near job, college, university.
- UDP refusals (people who do not feel comfortable moving to another part of Scotland)
- Pets (this was not an issue with social housing but now that we are working with EOs it has become a challenge, whether that is housing UDPs with pets or UDPs who do not wish to live with pets).
- Transport – receiving councils do not have the capacity to arrange transport for all of the host matches that will be taking place, nor is this a model in place in other parts of the UK. This will cause further delays in the matching process, as we match more UDPs with hosts.

## **Conclusion**

COSLA has provided an update on the partnership work between COSLA, Scottish Local Government and Scottish Government, and raised some of the key challenges that we are facing in terms of the scale and speed of arrivals and the challenges of matching UDPs to properties.